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RESEARCHING FREEMASONRY: WHERE ARE WE?

Over the last ten years or so, the number of scholarly conferences on Freemasonry has increased dramatically. Almost all of them were cautious enough to limit themselves to a particular aspect of this huge phenomenon. The current conference is probably the first one not to do so. The word “History” in its title seems to have had no other constraining intention than to communicate the wish of the organisers to restrict contributions to scholarly ones. My current presentation is surely not the only one on the program to relate but superficially to “history”. In other words, this is probably the largest, most daring, and most encompassing scholarly conference on the phenomenon of “Freemasonry” organised in the UK¹ so far. It therefore seemed to me only proper to start it with some reflections on where we stand in the—indeed historical—development of this phenomenon. I don’t mean: Freemasonry, but its scholarly research.

I shall [I] start with a short overview of its development, then [II] elaborate on the current situation and [III] finish with an attempted inventory of what still needs to be done. From this, I hope, it will become clear that we are standing only at the beginning of an immense task, one which no one living now can hope to see completed in his or her lifetime. In that respect, we are in a way comparable to those who left us the most impressive witnesses of stonemasons work, I mean the medieval cathedrals.

IA. Freemasons Researching Freemasonry

The First Attempts: The Manuscript Constitutions

The oldest documents generally considered to have a certain relationship with Freemasonry are the so-called manuscript constitutions.

¹ Outside the UK, such large scale scholarly conferences on Freemasonry were probably organised so far only in Spain by the Centro de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Española of the university of Zaragoza, where in 2003 the 10th such conference took place.

These usually comprise several parts of a radically different character, such as prayers, the texts of an oath, and above all, the so-called Old Charges. But they always start with the so-called “legendary” or “traditional” history of the Craft. None of us today would be tempted to take this “traditional history” as history in the modern sense of the word—it is a *legendary* history, no doubt. Indeed, I would regard it as rather unlikely that even their authors would have taken these “histories” as history *per se*. What must be clear to anyone studying Freemasonry is that the “legendary history of the Craft” has quite a different function within Freemasonry than a pure factual history might have. This function is much closer to that which Greek mythology had in ancient Greece, or the Biblical stories in medieval Christianity. And yet, we should not forget that Heinrich Schliemann found ancient Troy by taking Homer’s poems as containing at least a modicum of historical fact. Likewise, scholars of the Old and New Testament spend much time identifying the historical facts behind the Biblical stories. They don’t do this as a nice, leisurely pastime, but out of pure necessity: given the often extremely low number of more factual historical records, we need to analyse these legendary stories for their historical content in order to be able to devise an acceptable reconstruction of the past events in which we are interested. Therefore, these “traditional” histories of the Craft are, despite their legendary character, the first histories of Freemasonry that we have.

James Anderson: *Constitutions*, 1723, 1738

When the masonic *Constitutions* of 1723 were prepared for publication, the character of the “traditional history” was clearly altered, and when this work was subsequently revised for the second edition published in 1738, it was altered once again. Let’s refer to the author or authors of these two versions as “Anderson”, although it remains unclear to what extent James Anderson was personally involved in their writing. Evidently Anderson approached these “histories” in a new way. On the one hand, it is indisputable that the *Constitutions* were still “to be read at the admission of a new Brother”² and hence retained their function in masonic ritual, which required the continuation of their legendary character. On the other hand, in 1722 Anderson did not

² Anderson 1723, 1; Anderson 1738, 1. Cf. also 1723, 49.

just copy one existing example, but compiled a new version after having compared a number of different examples, and in the process added many, mainly theological, footnotes as well as chronological indications in the margin, all of which reflect the prevailing scholarship of the day. Also, as his “history” got closer to his own time, legend gradually gave way to true history. However, it is only in the second edition that Anderson introduces a much more detailed description of what had happened to the Craft in more recent times. Thus, whereas in the first edition, the period of 118 years from 1603 (the year in which “King James VI of Scotland succeeded to the Crown of England” as James I) until 1721³ is covered in only 8 pages (38-45), the second edition uses twice as many pages to describe the same era (97-112), while the remaining period of only 17 years until the then present 1738 takes no less than 28 pages (112-139). Indeed, from 1716 onwards, he in fact gives a kind of summary minutes of most Quarterly Communications (109-139).

From these facts alone, it should be clear that Anderson in 1738 not only had access to the minutes books of the Grand Lodge, which recorded the events of the meetings from 1723 onwards, but that he had also evidently studied the archives of the Order, which in 1722 had not yet been so abundantly available to him. It is, of course, regrettable that we no longer possess all the documents Anderson had access to, as many seem to have been lost. We should also realise, that Anderson had personally witnessed many of the events he described of the later years and had had the opportunity to question older members about events which had happened before he joined the London Grand Lodge. Therefore, part of what he tells us may never have been documented before he recorded it. It is all the more astonishing, then, that later generations of scholars have tended to regard Anderson’s reports as unreliable, just because they are presented as part of the “legendary” history of the Craft, and therefore should be discarded, although, somewhat ironically, these same scholars, have all accepted that the so-called “Premier Grand Lodge” was created in 1717, solely on Anderson’s assertion.

³ In this edition, the last recorded event is the laying of the foundation stone of the church of St. Martins in the Fields on March 19th, 1721.

The second half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century

During the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, a number of masons wrote works in which they attempted to describe the history and development of Freemasonry, if not in its entirety, then at least for the country they lived in or for the masonic Rite they practised. Among the best known are:

- William Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry* of 1772,
- William Hutchinson's *The Spirit of Masonry* of 1775,⁴
- George Smith's *The Use and Abuse of Freemasonry* of 1783,
- Claude-Antoine Thory's three books: *Histoire de la fondation du Grand Orient de France* of 1812; *Acta Latomorum, ou Chronologie de l'histoire de la franc-maçonnerie française et étrangère* of 1815; and *Précis historique de l'ordre de la franc-maçonnerie* of 1829, and
- George Oliver's three books *The Antiquities of Freemasonry* of 1823; *The History of Initiation* of 1840; and *Revelations of a Square* of 1855.

Although, of course, none of these conform to the standards of modern historiography, they are immensely valuable as sources of information, since these authors often had access to sources which are now lost to us, or had witnessed the events which they describe. Besides, without the efforts of these authors, no progress would have been possible.

The “Authentic School”

The indication “Authentic School” may have been emphasised by Quatuor Coronati Lodge members like Colin Dyer and John Hamill in 1986, the year of the centennial of that lodge of Research,⁵ but the stressing of the need for an “authentic” representation of masonic history is at least as old as the preface in John Yarker’s book *Arcane Schools* published in 1909,⁶ and what it refers to, began even significantly earlier. Already in the middle of the nineteenth century a number of German books were written, based on the research of large collections of original, ‘authentic’ documents. These include such standard works as:

⁴ On Hutchinson and Smith see Stokes 1967.

⁵ Dyer 1986, 5; Hamill 1986, 15, 17.

⁶ Yarker 1909. I thank Matthew Scanlan for pointing this out to me.

- Lenning's *Enzyklopädie der Freimaurerei* of 1822-28 and its successor, the *Allgemeines Handbuch der Freimaurerei* of 1863-67, reissued in a revised edition in 1900-1901,
- Georg Klob's *Die Freimaurerei in ihrer wahren Bedeutung* of 1846 and his *Geschichte der Freimaurerei in Frankreich* in two volumes of 1852-1853, and
- Christian Carl Friedrich Wilhelm, Freiherr von Nettelbladt's *Geschichte Freimaurerischer Systeme in England, Frankreich und Deutschland* of 1879.

Only with the creation of the first lodge of research, the Quatuor Coronati Lodge in London in 1884-86, did the “authentic school” become the standard in England, with Robert Freke Gould (1836-1915) as its champion, and his *The History of Freemasonry* of 1884-87 as its standard example.

Gould was possibly the first to formulate the theory about the origin of Freemasonry which we all know: at first there were simple, so called “operative”, stonemasons, who had their Craft and their lodges, but who did not “speculate” about their Craft or their working tools, i.e. they did not interpret them symbolically; then, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, more and more “gentlemen masons” became members of the lodges, who introduced, during a period of transition, the speculative element, out of which arose modern “speculative” Freemasonry. This theory would be regarded as fact for about a century.

Virtually all serious researchers of Freemasonry writing in the twentieth century worked within the “authentic school” and took this theory of the origin of modern Freemasonry for granted. Among them are such giants as:

- Wilhelm Begemann who published his *Vorgeschichte und Anfänge der Freimaurerei in England* in 1909-1910;
- Ferdinand Runkel who wrote his *Geschichte der Freimaurerei in Deutschland* in 1932;
- Douglas Knoop (Professor of Economics at the University of Sheffield) and Gwilym Peredur Jones (Lecturer in Economic History at the same university) who worked together for fifteen very fruitful years, from *The Mediaeval Mason* of 1933 to *The Genesis of Freemasonry* of 1947, and who may have been the first to get their

books about Freemasonry published with an academic publisher: Manchester University Press;

- Harry Carr, who wrote many important publications during the 1960's and 1970's; and
- Pierre Chevallier, who's work culminated in the three volumes of his *Histoire de la Franc-Maçonnerie Française* published in 1974-75.

It was only after the Second World War that new Lodges of Research started to be founded, such as:

- the Institut d'Études et de Recherches Maçonniques (IDERM) of the Grand Orient de France, founded in 1949,
- the Quatuor Coronati Loge Bayreuth of the Vereinigte Großlogen von Deutschland, founded in 1951,
- Villard de Honnecourt of the Grande Loge Nationale de France, founded in 1964,
- the Institut maçonnique de France, not attached to a particular Grand Lodge and publishing the most important periodical of all: *Renaissance Traditionnelle*, founded in 1970,
- the American Scottish Rite Research Society, publishing the yearbook *Heredom*, founded in 1991, and
- Ars Macionica of the Regular Grand Lodge of Belgium, publishing the yearbook *Acta Macionica*, founded in 1994.

Almost all of these authors and research lodges worked internally, that is, within Freemasonry itself, the only notable exception being the work of Knoop and Jones. That is not to say that the other researchers were low level dilettantes. Quite a sizeable number of them were in fact trained academics, though usually in disciplines other than the history of Freemasonry, which they practised as very serious amateurs. That was to change around 1980.

IB. 1979-1983: Freemasonry Becomes an Academic Subject

Around that time a number of academics started to include the research of Freemasonry in their university research programs:

- In 1979 Antoine Faivre was appointed at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Sorbonne, to the Chair of History of the esoteric and mystical currents in modern Europe. In 1986 he published the

first edition of his *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental*, which was translated into English in 1994 as *Access to Western Esotericism*.

- In 1981 Margaret Jacob, holder of the Chair of History at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) published *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*. With this publication, Freemasonry entered the Academe. Ten years later her *Living the Enlightenment. Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (1991) confirmed that Freemasonry was a subject, suitable for academic research.
- In the same year 1981 in which Jacob published her first academic book about Freemasonry, Helmut Reinalter was appointed at the University of Innsbruck to the Chair in modern history. Two years later he published the volume *Freimaurer und Geheimbünde im 18. Jahrhundert in Mitteleuropa*, [Freemasons and Secret Societies in 18th century Middle Europe] (1983) followed in 1989 with *Aufklärung und Geheimgesellschaften. Zur politischen Funktion und Sozialstruktur der Freimaurerlogen im 18. Jahrhundert*.
- In 1983 the “Centro de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Española” (CEHME) was founded under the direction of Prof. José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli, who had already published in 1976 his remarkable *Los Archivos secretos vaticanos y la Masonería – Motivos políticos de una condena pontificia* [The Secret Archives of the Vatican and Freemasonry; The Political Motives of a Papal Condemnation].
- Also in 1983, the Université Libre de Bruxelles created the Chaire Théodore Verhaegen, to which in principle every year a different scholar, who has distinguished himself in the scholarly study of Freemasonry, is appointed for one year.

It should be noted that although half of these academics who introduced Freemasonry into their academic research programs were freemasons themselves, the others were not. With this new upsurge of academic interest, the time grew ripe for a methodological critique of the established theory about the origins of modern Freemasonry.

IIA. 1986: The Paradigm Shift Becomes Manifest

In 1986 John Hamill published his *The Craft. A History of English Freemasonry* the first chapter of which is dedicated to “Theories of origin”. The less than 11 pages of this chapter illustrate the paradigm shift

which had by now taken place in the masonic historiography. Based no longer on the old extreme positivist paradigm of science, characteristic of the self proclaimed “authentic school”, but on modern academic methodological principles of historiography, Hamill attacked the “Gould thesis”. He wrote:

Whilst the approach of writers of the authentic school has the appearance of scientific research their methods were not what we would accept as scientific today. ... their work, in fact, gives the appearance of a search for evidence to fit a preconceived theory. Intent on proving a direct descent from operative to speculative masonry through a transitional phase, they assembled fragments of information from various parts of the British Isles which appeared to forge links in their chain of descent. In doing so they often took such evidence out of its context and made assumptions for which only tenuous substantiation existed. In particular they assumed a parity of conditions and activities in England, Ireland, and Scotland, and thus ignored the crucial social, cultural, political, legal, and religious circumstances in each country. ... So persuasive, however, so ably written, and so often published was their theory of an operative-transitional-speculative development that it has become dangerously near to being accepted as unquestionable fact. ... Despite [the] lack of substantiation the authentic school put together the Scottish and English gleanings and constructed the operative-transitional-speculative theory of the origins of Freemasonry, ignoring the differences and discrepancies between the two sets of evidence (17-19).

Hamill’s critique was harsh, fundamental and crucial. No serious scholar can adhere to the old theory any more since this publication. But Hamill did not provide an alternative. However, what soon became clear was that, apart from the labours of Knoop, Jones and Hamer, hardly any serious research into the existing archives in Britain had been done during the past century. After all, why *should* anyone bother? We *knew* already how Freemasonry had started, didn’t we? So, why should we be looking for further evidence? However, now that Hamill had proved that we did *not* know how modern

Freemasonry had been created, a new generation of mainly younger students—several of whom I had the privilege to be able to stimulate—accepted the challenge and started a systematic research of the archives, such as had been initiated by Pierre Chevallier in France two decades earlier. This research was not limited to England, but took place in a number of continental European countries as well, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and Sweden. As a result, not only was much material concerning the early development of Freemasonry found, but in addition, masses of previously unnoticed documents pertaining to parallel and later developments, which had previously been discarded as certainly based on forgeries and definitively legendary only, but which now turned out to be supported by a whole corpus of documentary evidence. There were times when I was contacted more than once a week by one or the other of these researchers, informing me of still another text that had just been discovered. As a result, many areas of the history and development of Freemasonry have been fundamentally rewritten since 1986. And this process will surely continue for a while yet, because of the sheer quantity of un-examined material that still lies undisturbed in numerous archives and libraries, including the large and well-known masonic ones.

Meanwhile, new academic activities in the field of the scholarly study of Freemasonry developed.

- In 1988 David Stevenson (Prof. of Scottish History at the University of St. Andrews) published his well known and important book: *The Origins of Freemasonry. Scotland's Century 1590-1710*.
- In 1993 Monika Neugebauer-Wölk was appointed at the Chair of Modern History of the University of Halle, where she initiated research groups on “Enlightenment & Esotericism”, the Strict Observance, and the Order of the Illuminati.
- And in 2000 both the “Centre for Research into Freemasonry” in Sheffield (with Prof. Andrew Prescott), and
- the Chair “Freemasonry as a cultural phenomenon” at the University of Leyden in the Netherlands (with Prof. Anton van de Sande) were created.

These activities and chairs have now firmly established Freemasonry as a field of academic study, even though there remains a constant need to defend it as such.

IIB. Results of the New Approach

At this point, it is only fair to give some examples of what all this research of the past two decades has brought us, although any attempt to formulate new theories must at this moment remain provisional, given the fact that we have examined or re-examined no more than a fraction of the available evidence.

A new Theory of Origins

Therefore, what I am going to suggest now is no more than a personal view of what the new theory about the origins of modern Freemasonry might look like.

Firstly, we now know that Freemasonry did not start in 1717 but significantly earlier, although we cannot say precisely when. We know that William Schaw, Master of Works of the King of Scotland, signed new statutes for the lodges which existed there in 1598, and these statutes clearly show that these lodges practised Freemasonry.⁷ Around the same time we find in London the “Acceptation” within the “London Company of Masons”, from which there is a continuous line to those lodges which met in 1716 and 1717. Therefore forms of what we now call Freemasonry must have existed before 1600.

Secondly, contrary to the popularly held view, many of the early freestone masons were anything but simple folk. On the contrary, many were extremely well-educated sculptors and what were then referred to as master builders, whom we would now call architects. A good example who has been the subject of some recent research, is Nicholas Stone (1587-1647).⁸ He finished learning the craft in Amsterdam under the famous Dutch Master Henrick de Keyser; he then returned to London and became a member of the “London Company of freemasons” as it was called at that time. He was appointed King’s Master Mason in 1632 and master of the London Company of Freemasons the following year. And only then, in 1638, he was made an accepted mason. When he died in 1647 he was a rich man with his own workshop. Even if in Scotland the masters of lodges were often

⁷ Stevenson 1988, Snoek 2002.

⁸ See for the following Scanlan 2004, 41-53.

illiterate, as Robert Cooper explained to me,⁹ this does not necessarily mean that they were uneducated; education does not need the skill of writing, and especially in communities with an oral tradition, such as was the masonic ritual one, techniques for memorising texts would be learned and trained.

Thirdly, Freemasonry was “speculative” (in the modern masonic sense of the word¹⁰)—i.e. it had symbolic aspects—right from the start.¹¹ What changed in the early eighteenth century was not that the speculative element was added, but that the operative aspect started to disappear. Indeed, it must have been precisely this speculative aspect of the Craft which attracted the gentlemen masons in the first place and motivated them to become members of masonic lodges. For instance as late as 1738, Hugo O’Kelly, an Irish-born Infantry Colonel and the master of a lodge in Lisbon, declared when interro-gated by the Inquisition, that in his lodge there were usually discussions about—among other things—architectural theory. He then added that there were usually two or three practising “Free Mason Mechanics” in the lodge so that the others might receive instruction in architectural theory from them, and these others O’Kelly termed “the Noble and Gentlemen Free Masons”. Matthew Scanlan con-cludes,

It therefore follows that if the ‘Free Mason Mechanics’ were the ones imparting theoretical knowledge about building in the lodges, they were the true speculative masons; the gentlemen or noble members were merely students of the art.¹²

Formulated differently: many of those who we used to call “operative masons”, were not merely operative at all, in fact they were often both operative and speculative, whereas those who we use to call

⁹ Personal communication Robert Cooper, 2005.

¹⁰ Scanlan points out that prior to the second half of the eighteenth century the term referred to the mathematical or theoretical aspects of building, not to the ceremonial and symbolic aspects of modern Freemasonry (Scanlan 2004, 27-29, 53-54).

¹¹ See for example Scanlan 2004, 49.

¹² Scanlan 2004, 31, based on Vatcher 1971, 88 and Benimeli 1982, 304/305.

“speculative masons” (the gentlemen masons), were speculative *only*. Therefore, since both groups were actually speculative, the use of that term for only one of these two groups is clearly misleading. Consequently, Scanlan contends that we should abandon the distinction altogether. I agree with this position and I also join with him in advocating that, from now on, we should rather refer to these two groups as “stone masons” and “gentlemen masons”.

As mentioned before, these new insights into the historical development of early Freemasonry developed on the basis of a paradigm shift in the methodology for researching Freemasonry. The extreme positivism¹³ of the “authentic school” has given way to a more modern scholarly approach, where it matters not only to find evidence, but also to construct theories which explain this evidence, and which point out what further evidence might be looked for. If then further evidence is found, which fits such a theory, it may corroborate it, while, if it contradicts it, it demands at least refinement of the theory, if not a whole new one. Indeed, this allows for a Popperian approach,¹⁴ in which one is challenged to actively search for evidence which falsifies a theory, and where the acceptability of a theory may be claimed until it has been proved incapable of accommodating new evidence. This new approach has also significant consequences for the interpretation of well-known texts. These have to be re-read and re-interpreted. Let me give two examples.

Anderson’s account of 1716/1717

In the second edition of his *Constitutions* published in 1738, Anderson claims that Sir Christopher Wren had been elected Grand Master in 1685,¹⁵ an office he supposedly held until 1695, and was “again chosen Grand Master, [in] A.D. 1698”.¹⁶ However, he “neglected the

¹³ I mean to refer with the term ‘positivism’ to the approach, advocated by the “Wiener Kreis” (Rudolf Carnap, Hans Hahn and Otto Neurath) in its *Wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung* from 1929.

¹⁴ Karl Raimund Popper published his *Logik der Forschung* already in 1934, but it became really influential only after its English translation *The logic of scientific discovery* appeared in 1959.

¹⁵ Anderson 1738, 106.

¹⁶ Anderson 1738, 107.

Office of Grand Master” “some few years after” 1708.¹⁷ And, still according to Anderson, in 1716 the lodges in London found “them-selves neglected by Sir Christopher Wren”.¹⁸ Now, the members of the “authentic school” have always discarded all this as nonsense. However, it is well known that Sir Christopher Wren became “Sur-veyor-General of the King’s Works” in 1669¹⁹ and recent research has shown that several contemporary sources also claim that he was “ac-cepted” or “adopted” as a Freemason on Monday 18 May 1691,²⁰ and that he was master of his London lodge for a second time from 1710 to 1716.²¹

Furthermore, it was not uncommon in the eighteenth century to use the term “Grand Master” in reference to the Master of a single lodge. Significantly, there is an example of this use in the minutes of the Lodge of Edinburgh St. Mary’s Chapel in 1731.²² It is therefore possible, that when Anderson in 1738 credited Wren as having been a “Grand Master”, it was an anachronism, and that he was actually projecting on him a title which he, Anderson, knew from Scotland, just as he introduced in his *Constitutions* of 1723 the Scottish terms for the then two degrees, viz. “Entered Apprentice” and “Fellow of the Craft or Master Mason”, rather than using such authentic English terms as “Accepted” or “Adopted Mason”. But whether the term “Grand Master” was English and existed a long time already, or that it had been imported from Scotland by Anderson, there can be little doubt that Wren had functioned in a way which in 1738 could not be better described than by calling him Grand Master.

Also, Anderson’s complaint that Wren neglected the lodges is not at all surprising, if we remember that in 1716 he was 84 years of age. Consequently, one can easily imagine that he was just too old to continue his work of organising the Quarterly Communications. Still, the lodges felt the need to assemble in order to discuss their problems, now that the rebuilding of London after the fire of 1666 was finished,

¹⁷ Anderson 1738, 108.

¹⁸ Anderson 1738, 109.

¹⁹ Scanlan 2003, 82.

²⁰ Scanlan 2003, 81.

²¹ Jardine 2002, 469/470, quoted in Scanlan 2003, 82.

²² Scanlan 2003, 83.

and that the craftsmen who had come to London for the rebuilding work were returning home again, thus leaving the London lodges deserted. Set against this background, Anderson's story of what happened in 1716 and 1717 makes eminent sense:

[Four London lodges] and some old Brothers met at the said Apple-Tree [Tavern], and having put into the Chair the oldest Master Mason (now the Master of a Lodge) they constituted themselves a Grand Lodge pro Tempore in Due Form, and forthwith revived the Quarterly Communication of the Officers of Lodges (call'd the Grand Lodge) resolv'd to hold the Annual Assembly and Feast, and then to chuse a Grand Master from among themselves ...²³

I think that we may well read this text as follows:

[Four London lodges] and some old Brothers met at the Apple-Tree [Tavern], and having put into the Chair the oldest Master Mason **[present]** (**[making him for that evening what we would]** now **[call]** the Master of a Lodge) they constituted themselves a Grand Lodge pro Tempore in Due Form, and forthwith revived the Quarterly Communication of the Officers of Lodges (**[which Quarterly Communications are also sometimes]** call'd the Grand Lodge) **[and]** resolv'd to hold the Annual Assembly and Feast, and then **[i.e. at that next Annual Assembly]** to chuse a **[new]** Grand Master from among themselves ...

In other words, I think that Anderson himself suggests here that he is only using terminology which was more commonly used in 1738, for customs which existed but were often termed differently in 1716. Indeed, Anderson uses the term “Grand Lodge” for all the meetings

²³ Anderson 1738, 109. NB! For practical reasons I adopt here the traditional interpretation of Anderson's text, according to which the event here described took place in 1716. In fact, Anderson does not give a date for the event but locates it “after the Rebellion was over A.D. 1716”, i.e. 4 February 1716, and before the “Assembly and Feast” on “St. John Baptist's Day ... A.D. 1717”, i.e. 24 June 1717 (109).

from 1717 to 1738 which he mentions and which are not an “Assembly and Feast”.²⁴ However, when we look into “The Minutes of the Grand Lodge of Freemasons of England” of 1723 to 1739,²⁵ we see that almost all the meetings in those 17 years are still called “Quarterly Communication”, while only three²⁶ are called “Grand Lodge”, although in these minutes themselves these meetings are at least four times referred to as “Grand Lodges”.²⁷ So, the use of the term “Grand Lodge” instead of “Quarterly Communication” may, even in 1738, still have been Anderson’s personal preference, rather than the general use.

But if Anderson basically suggests that the term “Grand Lodge” is no more than the name he prefers to use in 1738 for what in 1716 were more often called the Quarterly Communications, which in 1716, in Anderson’s words, were “revived”, then what happened on St. Johns Day in 1717—according to Anderson’s report, which is the only account of that event we have—was definitely *not* the foundation of a new organisation, but no more than the continuation of an old one. Surely, there can be little doubt that in the decade *following* this event, the Grand Lodge was reorganised into a form which had not existed in London before, mainly by developing itself into an organisation completely independent from the London Company of Masons and by considerably modifying and simplifying its ceremonial practice in order to adapt it to its new, less educated target group, the gentlemen masons.²⁸ But there was no significant discontinuity between the Quarterly Communications before and after 1716, apart from the gap caused by Wren’s inactivity. Therefore, to take 1717 as the year in which the “Premier Grand Lodge” was founded is purely arbitrary.

²⁴ Anderson 1738, 109-139.

²⁵ Songhurst 1913.

²⁶ Those of the 24th June 1723, the 17th March 1731, and the 13th April 1732.

²⁷ Songhurst 1913, 51, 122, 256, 268. At the same time, however, what used to be the “Annual Feast” now becomes referred to as the “Grand Annual Feast”.

²⁸ Snoek 2004a = Snoek 2004b.

Von Hund's initiation in Paris, 1743

As my second example of what happens if we re-read old texts from our new perspective, taking into consideration recently re-discovered evidence, I take the case of Karl Gotthelf, Reichsfreiherr von Hund und Altengrotkau, the founder of the “Strict Observance”. At the time that it was abolished (in 1782) this was supposedly the largest Grand Lodge in the world.

The traditional claims concerning Von Hund are that he was initiated in Frankfurt in 1741, and that he claimed himself to have been initiated in Paris in 1743 at the court of Charles Eduard Stuart by an anonymous knight, called “Eques a penna rubra” (“Knight of the red feather”), in the presence of Lord William Kilmarnock and Lord Clifford, into the Order of the Temple. This Order, so he was told, had survived in Scotland. After his initiation he had been appointed Grand Master of the VIIth Province of that Order, i.e. Germany, with the task to establish the Order there. The identity of the Knight of the red feather was officially unknown to him, but he had met him in person and was assured that this was the highest Grand Master of the whole Order, and he subsequently came to believe that this mysterious figure was in fact the eldest son of the Stuart Pretender, Charles Edward, better known to history as “Bonnie Prince Charlie”. The creation by Von Hund of the Order of the Strict Observance during the 1750s was the direct implementation of the task he had allegedly received. This, so far, is how the story surrounding the origins of the Strict Observance is normally recorded in publications with an “authentic school” background.²⁹

The rather short history of the Order, from the creation of its first lodge in 1751, through a period of rapid expansion in the wake of the Seven Years War (1754-1763), to its final abolition in 1782 was rather eventful. Time and again doubts were formulated about the story of Von Hund's initiation in Paris as well as about the existence of the Knight of the red feather. In 1772 Duke Ferdinand of Brunschwig was elected as *Magnus Superior Ordinis* in lower Germany, and three years later Von Hund lost all his influence in the Order. The following year (1776), he died, aged only 54. After six further eventful years,

²⁹ See for this account for example Lennhoff & Posner 1975 [1932] sub Hund.

the Order was officially abolished at the Convent of Wilhelmsbad in 1782.

Not only had Von Hund's contemporary members in Germany found his story difficult to believe, but scholars also did not hold him in very high esteem. Nor did they regard Von Hund the only one to be doubted. In 1782, at the Convent of Wilhelmsbad, Jean-Baptiste Willermoz declared that he had conferred a Knight Templar degree on members of his lodge in Lyon during the ten years that he was its master from 1752 onwards, a degree that he had personally received from his predecessor, and all this had absolutely nothing to do with Von Hund.³⁰ Moreover, in 1767 Baron Friedrich von Végesack wrote a letter in which he claimed he had been initiated in the Order of the Temple by one Count de la Tour du Pin in France in 1749.³¹ However, scholars of the “authentic school”, incorrectly taking absence of proof as proof of absence, concluded that, because there was a lack of documentary evidence demonstrating the existence of such an Order, the documents containing the claims by Willermoz and Végesack must have been forgeries or were simply the wild imaginings of their respective authors. However, history would prove these scholars wrong.

In 1997 André Kervella and Philippe Lestienne published a collection of manuscripts which revealed the existence in 1750 of two Chapters belonging to the “Ordre Sublime des Chevaliers Élus”. They had re-discovered these documents in the archives of Quimper [Q] in Brittany and Poitiers [P] in the Poitou-Charente region.³² These manuscripts all date from 1750 and they document an active knightly masonic Order—an Order that was operating at least a year before Von Hund founded the first lodge of his Order in Germany in 1751. And significantly, the membership list of this French Templar Order not only included the name of its then grand master, Count de la Tour du Pin, but it also listed Baron von Végesack, Captain in the regiment Orange Nassau in Dutch service, representing Hamburg, as a member.³³ Furthermore, in 1761 Willermoz wrote a manuscript

³⁰ Var 1985, LI, also quoted in Bernheim 1998, 72.

³¹ Bernheim 1998, 73.

³² Kervella & Lestienne 1997.

³³ Kervella & Lestienne 1997, 234-235; Bernheim 1998, 73.

catechism which turns out to be a shortened version of the catechism found in the archives of the “Ordre Sublime des Chevaliers Elus”.³⁴ Therefore, we now know that both Végesack and Willermoz had been telling the truth, that a masonic Templar Order did exist in France in 1750. Furthermore, as its statutes clearly show, there was more than one chapter of this Order in existence at that time, while the twenty-two listed members of this Order were drawn from all across France, Switzerland, Italy, Piémont, Prussia, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Edinburgh, Martinique, and two military regiments. This strongly suggests that the Order had probably been in existence for some time. Indeed, Kervella and Lestienne note³⁵ that the nineteenth-century masonic historian, Georg Kloss, had pointed out that a degree called “Petit Elu” had existed in Lyon (the place of Willermoz’s lodge) in 1743 (the year in which Von Hund was in Paris), and Kloss stated that he obtained this information from the writings of Thory³⁶ and Baron de Tschoudy³⁷—the latter writing as early as 1765.

Kervella and Lestienne also point out that, according to René Le Forestier, Végesack had claimed that the masonic Knight Templar Order of which he was a member had been founded between 1728 and 1733.³⁸ At that time, in 1730, the Jacobite Andrew Michael Ramsay—who would in 1736 deliver his famous oration in which he claimed that the Crusaders were the ancestors of the Freemasons—was the tutor of the son of the Prince of Turenne and his wife, Marie-Charlotte Sobieska. According to Kervella and Lestienne, both Marie-Charlotte and her sister Marie-Clémentine—who in 1718 married the Stuart Pretender James III—were members of a female Order, the *Chevalières de la Croix or de la Croisade*, which had been founded in 1709 in Vienna by the widow of the Austrian Emperor. In other words, Ramsay could have borrowed the idea for such an Order in 1730 from the mother of his pupil, and could have, as a response, created an equivalent male Order around that time: the “Ordre Sublime des Chevaliers Elus”. Consequently, when he delivered his Oration in

³⁴ Bernheim 1998, 73, 85-97.

³⁵ Kervella & Lestienne 1997, 233.

³⁶ Kloss 1852, 69.

³⁷ Kloss 1852, 70.

³⁸ Kervella & Lestienne 1997, 237.

1736, he would not—as was afterwards often suggested—have been referring to an Order which he intended to create, but to one which he had created already. That would also explain why in the Hanoverian Parisian lodge “Coustos-Villeroy” the protest was recorded in the minutes of the 12th March 1737 against some innovations which had been introduced in the lodge of the Grand Master, such as to keep a sword in one’s hand during the reception rituals, which was regarded unacceptable by the members of this lodge because in their view Freemasonry was *not* a knightly Order.³⁹

Therefore viewed in the context of these new discoveries, Von Hund’s story about having been inducted into a masonic Templar Order in or around Paris in 1743, now seems quite plausible. Of course, there are still gaps in our knowledge which require further research, but for the moment this theory seems to fit the facts as we know them, and it is therefore no longer possible to simply dismiss Von Hund as a fantasist.

III. What has to be done?

In the light of what has been said, it may have become clear that we have now entered a new phase in the historiography of Freemasonry, one in which much of its history needs to be rewritten. So, what has to be done? Of course, we will have to cover the complete scope of all the fields which influenced or were influenced by Freemasonry, and where Freemasonry or freemasons played a role. This is an immense task, but one that is not entirely new. Gould’s *History of Freemasonry* already tried to cover the history of Freemasonry in all the countries in the world and thus automatically paid some attention to many of these subjects. Still, truly scholarly studies in these fields are the exception rather than the rule.

We surely need more and better studies of guilds, confraternities, chivalric and knightly orders (both the original and the neo-ones), but also of friendly societies, masonic “spin-off” societies and Trade Unions, many of which we now know incorporate part of the masonic heritage. We need serious studies looking at the influence of a wide range of religious and esoteric traditions on the development of

³⁹ Kervella & Lestienne 1997, 247. See for a full transcript of these minutes Lefebvre-Filleau 2000, 208-227, esp. 214.

Freemasonry, as well as Freemasonry's gradual opening up to non-Christian members, especially in the secularisation process during the colonial era. We need further studies concerning the role of freemasons (and sometimes masonic Orders) in the context of political and social history, including the history of non-European ethnic groups and women. We also need more studies on the interaction between Freemasonry and the Arts, and about anti-masonic movements. But in a way, all this is "fringe". What we need in the first place, and what is lacking most of all, is research focusing on Freemasonry itself, that is, Freemasonry as an initiatic society. And this has been recognised more than once before.

As early as 1969, the renowned British historian John Roberts wrote an article with the title: "Freemasonry: Possibilities of a Neglected Topic", in which he expressed his opinion that "it is surprising that in the country which gave freemasonry to the world it has attracted hardly any interest from the professional historian".⁴⁰ These historians "were too easily satisfied with an over-simple judgment about European masonry as a facet of anti-clericalism"⁴¹ and "ignored their influence as cultural agencies, as generators and transmitters of ideas and symbols, and as sources of attitudes and images".⁴² He then pointed out that this was different in France, which he illustrated by discussing the work of two exemplary French historians in particular: Alain le Bihan and Pierre Chevallier. The former he praised for two books,⁴³ the first one of which is an inventory of all the lodges and chapters of the two French Grand Lodges in the second half of the eighteenth century, while in the second one the Parisian members of the Grand Orient de France are listed. Clearly, Roberts overlooked John Lane's *Masonic Records*,⁴⁴ or else he would not have taken the first book of Le Bihan as an example of what still had to be done for the research of English Freemasonry, but the English equivalent of the

⁴⁰ Roberts 1969, 323.

⁴¹ Roberts 1969, 325.

⁴² Roberts 1969, 326.

⁴³ Le Bihan 1967 and 1966 resp.

⁴⁴ Lane 1895. For Scotland, similar data were compiled by George Draffen.

second one still remains a *desideratum*.⁴⁵ The second author mentioned by Roberts, Pierre Chevallier, did in France in the 1960s what was started in England only two decades later, viz. the scanning of all kinds of archives for evidence of early masonic activity. Chevallier, for example, went through the reports of the police in Paris for the second quarter of the eighteenth century, where he discovered very much which was previously unknown. That type of work has been taken up successfully by scholars in the last two decades, not only in England, but elsewhere as well. At the end of his article Roberts summed up what, in his view, still had to be done:

[1] The whole function of Masonry as a social institution – its anthropological aspect, even – is still unexamined and we do not know what role it played in the life of society and individual members. Was it, for example, ... an important agent of social intercourse, mixing groups and providing a way of crossing class barriers which must have been formidable even in the (relatively) open-minded society of eighteenth-century England? Or did it, as it seems to have done in France, carry into itself and its structure the divisions of the society in which it took root? ... [2] Then there is the educational agency of freemasonry to be studied ... [3] We may also wonder whether, in a different social context, it was inevitable that freemasonry should find itself drawn into more frequent conflicts with society in Europe than in England. ... [4] More widely still, we may reflect on the implications of freemasonry for the understanding of that growth of the concept of privacy and the private life to which the eighteenth century contributed so much. ... [5] the preliminary to any historical construction must be the establishment of firm sociological knowledge about English freemasonry. ... The first and most important facts to establish are who became freemasons, and why. For almost every country except France and Russia⁴⁶ such studies have still to be initiated. From them it should be

⁴⁵ Andreas Önnerfors has recently published such a list for Sweden (Önnerfors 2006).

⁴⁶ Probably Roberts is referring here to Bakounine 1940.

possible to attack not only new questions but to re-open some long posed. [6] One obvious group of such problems clusters around the old debate about the masonic part in the Enlightenment. ... [7] In freemasonry we find also an additional component of ritual and symbolism to be taken into account. ... This means, in the end, that freemasonry may offer entirely new approaches to the whole range of eighteenth-century civilization.⁴⁷

In 1992, twenty-three years after Roberts published these seven *desiderata*, the Catholic University of Nijmegen organised the first academic conference on Freemasonry in The Netherlands, where the historian of literature André Hanou presented a paper in which he explicitly mentioned no less than fourteen such *desiderata*.⁴⁸ The list starts with the wish for [1, 2] more adequate bibliographies, [3] membership lists, and [4] overviews of which masonic documents and objects are to be found where, including archives of states, cities, lodges and private persons. [4a] To these basic requirements I personally would add the necessity to provide the large well known collecting institutions with sufficient means to prevent important documents to be sold at auctions to private collectors in whose treasure chests they often become inaccessible for researchers, as happens now almost daily. [5] Then Hanou mentions the problem of the accessibility for scholars who are not masons of the collections in the possession of masonic institutions: some of these collections—such as those in France and The Netherlands—are open for such scholars, but others—such as those in England—will not give them access to rituals, while those in Scandinavia don't give them access at all. [6] And many more scholarly editions of important texts are necessary. [6a] To which I would personally add, that we need also many more translations of important books, especially from French, Spanish, German and Swedish into English. The points mentioned so far, continues Hanou, are no more than the requirements which will make serious research possible. Research projects which are especially necessary include [7] prosopographic studies of the boards of Grand Of-

⁴⁷ Roberts 1969, 334-335.

⁴⁸ Hanou 1995, 42-45. Reprinted in Hanou 2002, 112-114.

ficers of the Grand Lodges, [8] *scholarly* lodge histories, and biographies: [9] of important or influential freemasons, [10] of book-traders, publishers and authors of masonic texts, including lodge Orators, [11] of masonic authors of literary texts, [12] of masonic politicians and governors, and [13] of masonic artists, including musicians. [14] And then he finishes his wish-list with the observation that, last but not least, yes in fact first and foremost, we need research of Freemasonry as a ritualistic, initiatory society. Hanou concludes that “it is not unthinkable that [for this last type of research] a separate research discipline will turn out to be necessary”.⁴⁹ Finally Hanou warns that serious scholarship will have to be prepared for the fact that there is neither one Freemasonry, nor one Enlightenment; both come in a multitude of varieties which may be utterly confusing for anyone starting to work on these subjects, but which the professional researcher needs to carefully distinguish.⁵⁰ The wish-lists of Roberts and Hanou remain as alive today as they were when first formulated.

Like Roberts and Hanou, Andrew Prescott also recently expressed his opinion that “the subject field in which the study of Freemasonry sits most comfortably is that of the history of religion” since, he noted, “the history of Freemasonry forms part of the history of religion”.⁵¹ Indeed, as Freemasonry is first and foremost an initiatory society, its ritual tradition should be studied from the perspective of the sciences of religions, not only the history of religions, but the comparative science of religions as well. For example, in studying the transfer of masonic rituals from male to mixed and female orders, I discovered that the rituals of the adoption lodges⁵² clearly have a close relation to those of the Royal Order of Scotland. And in my most recent research on the Independent United Order of Mechanics—a Friendly Society which claims to have been created in 1757 in Lancashire as a copy of Freemasonry for Irish day labourers and free blacks—I was astonished to find that they may have their roots in that same tradition as well. In other words, aside from the traditions

⁴⁹ Hanou 1995, 45 = Hanou 2002, 114.

⁵⁰ Hanou 1995, 45 = Hanou 2002, 115.

⁵¹ Prescott 2007, 14.

⁵² Masonic lodges in which women were initiated. They existed in France from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards.

of both the “Moderna” and the “Antient”, there was a third masonic tradition in England, which binds together a number of Grand Lodges and Orders, a tradition which seems to have been responsible, much more than the other two, for the creation of most “higher degrees” of English origin which we know today. It is through a comparative science of religions approach to the rituals of these diverse organisations that their family relation can be discerned. This third English masonic tradition also stands at the roots of a number of developments on the continent of Europe, including the development of part of the higher degrees there as well as the emergence of the “Adoptive Rite”, especially in France. It is significant for the lack of attention which this third tradition has received from most scholars with a masonic background in the past, that on the one hand the Royal Order of Scotland is often appreciated as the *summum bonum* of Freemasonry, whereas the “Adoptive Rite” is usually slightly described as only a toy for the girls to keep them quiet, not true Freemasonry, while actually both represent the same masonic tradition. In order to co-ordinate work on this largely white spot on the map, an informal working group has been established.

Not only research of the origins and earliest developments of masonic rituals is necessary. In my view, the study of Freemasonry tends to overemphasise questions of origins.⁵³ Later developments are at least as important, because Freemasonry, including its ritual tradition, was never static. After the great reformation in the 1720s within Desagulier’s Grand Lodge, a second wave of reformations of masonic rituals swept over Europe between 1780 and 1820. These reformations were as dramatic as those of a century before. The creation of the new rituals for the newly founded United Grand Lodge of England is but one example, those of Schröder from 1801 in Germany and those for the first three (so called “blue”) degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite written in 1804 in Paris are others. All

⁵³ When I decided to take the history of masonic rituals, degrees and Rites as my specialisation within the History of Religions, I decided to avoid the discussion about origins as much as possible. Only when I had to teach introductory courses on Freemasonry, I felt I could not avoid this subject completely. Discovering then the shallowness of the secondary literature about it, I decided to have a closer look in order to form my own opinion.

have in common the giving up of the Christian mystical aspect of the masonic rituals and the introduction of Romantic and proto-Victorian moralistic features. This opened the way for accepting besides Christians not only Jews and Muslims (who could relate to the central symbolism of building the Temple of Solomon), but adherents of other religions as well. The first of these were the Parsees in the 1840's.

At the start of the twentieth century, not Freemasonry but Theosophy was the main esoteric current in the Western world. Today we can hardly imagine any more how pervasive its influence actually was. It is not surprising then, that in those days the most dramatic, third, reform of masonic rituals did not take place in the so called "regular" Grand Lodges, but rather in Annie Besant's branch of the mixed Order "Le Droit Humain". These rituals were heavily imbued with Theosophical concepts. Whereas the creation of "Le Droit Humain" as a masonic grand lodge which accepted both male and female candidates on equal terms had received only limited interest, the response to the combination of this principle with Theosophical concepts was overwhelming: between 1903 and 1918 Annie Besant alone is said to have succeeded in creating more than 400 lodges world-wide, from England to India and from Australia to Brazil and the USA. In other words: these rituals were, like those of the "Premier Grand Lodge" and those of around 1800, perfectly suited to their time. Indeed, members of other Grand Lodges, "regular" ones included, were often members of the Theosophical Society, which was chaired by Annie Besant. And they too introduced Theosophical ideas into the rituals of their lodges. After the death of Annie Besant in 1933 and the second World War, however, the great time of the Theosophical Society was over, and Freemasonry did not find the inspiration to reform its rituals in such a way as would have adapted them to the new era. On the contrary, a tendency to "freeze" the rituals can be detected in this period⁵⁴ while the Western Culture changed at top speed, seeing the emergence of the "New Religious Movements" and the "New Age Movement", thus creating an ever wider gap between these rituals and

⁵⁴ In the so called "regular" grand lodges, this freezing in fact started already in the first half of the twentieth century. Maybe the formulation of the "Basic Principles for Grand Lodge Recognition" in 1929 can be seen as a symptom of the same tendency.

their cultural context. It is not surprising, then, that membership declined. These developments too should be studied from the perspective of the history of religions.

But, of course, today it is no longer possible to claim a subject as wide as Freemasonry as the object of one scholarly discipline only. Besides the sciences of religions—including ritual studies—history will remain important for example for the study of the relationships between Freemasonry and politics, and it can only be hoped that a sociological approach to the study of Freemasonry as asked for by Roberts will not remain restricted to Germany as was mainly the case during the 20th century. We also need art history, gender studies and performance studies to pay attention to our subject. And I won't claim completeness for this list of scholarly disciplines which are able to make valuable contributions to the study of Freemasonry.

It is clear, then, that the task before us is immense. The time that a single scholar, such as Gould, could have the illusion that he would be able to cover it all himself, belongs definitely to the past. There is work to do for each one of us and we need to co-operate. So, it is of the utmost importance that we have been brought together here at this conference [the author here refers to the ICHF in Edinburgh 2007, *editorial note*]. Those who took the initiative to organise it therefore must be congratulated for having done so. I am sure that we will later look back on it as a crucial event in the development of the study of Freemasonry. I wish you all a fruitful conference, and thank you for your attention and patience.

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