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STEFAN-LUDWIG HOFFMANN, *Die Politik der Geselligkeit: Freimaurerlogen in der deutschen Bürgergesellschaft 1840-1918*, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft, 141 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 425 pp. ISBN 3 525 35911 X. DM 68.00

The illustration on the cover of this book depicts a Masonic initiation rite from the mid-nineteenth century. The new member appears in profile, his torso half-naked, his eyes covered with a blindfold, standing at the foot of a dais from which the master, carrying a gavel and sword, inducts him into the lodge. Another Mason is about to remove the blindfold. When the new Mason turns around, he will see a room full of brothers wearing sashes and aprons marked with the symbol of the Masons – the square and compass. Already we get a sense of what fascinated the friends and enemies of Freemasonry alike – the secrecy, the sensuality, the sociability, the theatricality, the blending of artisanal, bourgeois, and aristocratic symbols. The text that follows identifies the meaning of these features, complete with their apparent eccentricities and contradictions, in the context of the nineteenth-century German bourgeoisie, in an analysis that more than lives up to the promise of its cover.

Although the continued target of fierce criticism, surprisingly little has been written on the Masons after the eighteenth century, apart from the work by Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe 1723-1939* (1970) and several studies of individual lodges. One reason was practical: the Soviets seized the Masons' archives during the Second World War and severely limited access for historians. The author has been able to construct his study from these files, including some still in Moscow, as well as those of state ministries supervising the Masons, personal accounts of lodge life, and anti-Masonic literature.

Another reason for the oversight, Hoffmann points out, lies in the tendency of late modern historians to neglect institutions that had their heyday in the early modern period in favour of more obviously modern ones. Just as Ute Daniel and Ute Frevert showed that court theatre and duelling were not guillotined along with Louis XVI, Hoffmann makes a good case for the continued significance of Masons in the nineteenth century. Certainly, in numerical terms, the lodges were not all that impressive, increasing from 20,000 members in 1840 to just under 62,000 in 1914, and Hoffmann makes little effort to show how their members, who were drawn largely from the upper

bourgeoisie and included many industrialists, professionals, civil servants, and even monarchs, such as Emperor William I, applied Masonic values in their professional lives. Yet as an alternative model of social organization, or simply as a model of organization, the Masons continued to captivate contemporaries. As far as Hoffmann is concerned, the real interest lies in how the lodges grappled with problems that faced the bourgeoisie as a whole – how to maintain moral leadership and exclusivity in a society whose moral standards seemed to be descending to that of the lowest common denominator and whose demands for inclusion were ever gaining strength. For the Masons, who combined an abstract sympathy for humanity as a whole with a commitment to social élitism, the challenge was particularly acute.

The three sections of the book examine different aspects of this tension. Part One investigates the political dimension of the lodges, their admission policies, and their relationships with government. Part Two explores life within the lodges under the headings of sociability, fraternity, and *Bildung*. Part Three returns to political questions with an analysis of the complex relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism within the lodges. Throughout, Hoffmann relies heavily on the records of lodges in Breslau and Leipzig, two cities that had embraced Freemasonry relatively early, in 1741. Quite different in political outlook and internal practices, the lodges of Breslau and Leipzig, located in Prussia and Saxony respectively, testify to the enormous variation in Masonry. The author shows that the character of their lodges was a function both of the economic profile of the cities and of the political traditions of their states. As an administrative, manufacturing, and trade city in a state that supervised all associations scrupulously, Breslau's lodges had a large civil service membership and reacted cautiously to demands for reform. By contrast, the lodges of the trade and publishing city of Leipzig, well used to visitors of all hues, in a state that was more tolerant of political debate, were at the forefront of efforts to simplify Masonic rituals and open up membership to marginal groups.

Such differences became very obvious as demands for more democratic structures and practices both inside and outside the lodges grew, especially from the decade before the 1848 revolutions. Hoffmann argues that these demands posed a fundamental challenge to Masonry that even the liberal lodges could not answer satis-

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factorily. Apart from a brief flirtation with radical politics during the revolution, liberal lodges preferred gradual and limited change and clung to the principle of discriminatory admission procedures, while allowing the membership base to be broadened in certain directions. High membership dues, as well as an insistence on independence, easily excluded the lower classes. Unfortunately, we get little sense of the attitudes of workers, or even their socialist leaders, to the anti-democratic practices of the Masons, or even the irony of appropriating artisanal symbols while excluding artisans. Liberal and conservative Masons alike steadfastly avoided the implications of political and social change outside the lodges. The original justification for exclusivity – the pervasive eye of the state and the strict socio-legal division of society – became increasingly untenable in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless Masons continued to insist that the lodges served an important function as private spaces reserved for the cultivation of the moral character necessary for public life, thus leaving themselves open to the accusation of straightforward social élitism. Their persistent commitment to secrecy at a time when their rituals and practices had been leaked to the public can also be explained by an ordinary desire to feel special.

Hoffmann uses the obvious test case of attitudes to Jews to highlight the practical limitations of the Masons' professed love of humanity. Jews were admitted only exceptionally as visitors in the eighteenth century, from the 1840s as regular members initially by liberal lodges only, and generally with great reluctance towards the end of the century. The impetus was provided less by a commitment to tolerance than the expectations created by legal emancipation, achieved in Prussia in 1812 and Saxony in 1831. Internal debates about the admission of Jews to the lodges illustrate effectively the difficulties of both conservatives and liberals in accepting Jews as Jews. Here Hoffmann echoes the findings of Uriel Tal many years before.¹ Whereas Christianity was perceived as valid for all of humanity, Judaism was viewed as an exclusive faith and thus incompatible with universal love. Conservatives were more suspicious of secularized Jews, liberals of religious ones. Even when liberals endorsed admission, they expected Jews to abandon their distinctiveness. In yet

¹ *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics, and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870-1914* (1975).

another disappointment for Jews, the universalist ethos of Masonry, which had so impressed them originally, especially those of the majority reform movement, proved wanting.

For most German historians, the account of the relationship between Catholics and Masons will be less predictable, although again it reflects the broader trend. Here the question of Catholic membership was not a function of lodge statutes but of Catholic-Protestant relations. A majority of German Masons were Protestant, lodges being at their most dense in the northern and middle states, weakest in the south and (officially) absent from the Habsburg Empire as per a ruling of 1801. Catholics with the necessary credentials, including priests, often joined lodges in Catholic regions in the early part of the century. Hoffmann cites a Mason who suggested a link between the lodges and the *Deutschkatholiken*, but fails to elaborate on this point (p. 71). It would be interesting to know how Freemasonry shaped attitudes to issues such as celibacy, feminism, and dogma, although the link may not be sustainable in light of the different regional basis of the *Deutschkatholiken*, who were strongest in the south-west.

The author is even-handed in showing the part played by both Catholics and Protestants in the growing disinclination of Catholics to join lodges in the second half of the century. Echoing the work of Thomas Mergel, he shows that the triumph of ultramontanism, and more particularly, the Catholic Church's Anti-Masonic campaign, made it increasingly difficult for Catholics to remain members. Catholic Masons, like most of the Catholic bourgeoisie, when forced to choose, opted for mainstream Catholicism, with the result that Catholic lodge members were reduced to an anti-ultramontane rump. While not the first to pinpoint the origins of the theory of a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy in the writings of Catholics during the 1848 revolutions, Hoffmann throws up some interesting ironies for readers familiar with both sides of the heated inter-confessional discourse of the nineteenth century. Catholic claims of Masonic subversion of the state, sexual excesses, and effeminacy have obvious parallels with those of Protestants against Catholics, especially the Masons' supposed opposite, Jesuits. He also shows that Catholics were becoming less welcome in the lodges and gives some credence to Bishop Ketteler's view that the Protestant Association (*Protestantenverein*), founded in 1864 by Johann Caspar Bluntschli, was the

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public voice of the Masons on confessional questions. Certainly, the venom with which Bluntschli and his followers condemned alleged Catholic fanaticism, backwardness, and immorality must have made Catholic Masons feel very uncomfortable indeed. The discrepancy between the Masons' claims to stand above confessional divisions and their Protestant ethos provided further ammunition for Catholic propagandists.

It is easy to be patronising towards men who were so blind to their own contradictions, but, to his credit, the author adopts a measured tone. He allows the reader to see the idealism of his subjects as well as the real limits of their approach. Motives for joining the lodges ranged from a desire for social prestige and business contacts to an interest in self-cultivation, an alternative experience of the metaphysical, and philanthropy. Believing that industrial society had encouraged materialism and self-indulgence, some Masons stepped outside the lodges to lend their support to moral reform movements against alcoholism and *Schmutz und Schund* literature. Hoffmann sees the same idealism in their attitude to international relations. German Masons, he tells us, advocated a love of humanity while at the same time believing that their own nation was superior because it possessed this love to the fullest degree. He goes too far, however, in using the discourse of Masons such as Fichte and Bluntschli to mount a challenge against writings on nationalism which view cosmopolitanism and nationalism as incompatible. Certainly, one must be wary of crude accounts of a descent from eighteenth-century cosmopolitanism to nineteenth-century nationalism as a prelude to twentieth-century barbarism, but why is the discrepancy between claims of universalism and the reality of national chauvinism any less problematic than that between supra-confessionalism and anti-Catholicism? Hoffmann admits that this claim became increasingly hollow over the course of the century, as evident in the turn towards *völkisch* nationalism and Francophobia from 1870 to 1918, but one wonders why it should be taken so seriously in the earlier part of the century.

One should not underestimate the challenge of identifying how Masonic values changed over time. While the testaments of Masons themselves provide answers to many practical and political questions, the rituals and language they employed may be more revealing for more abstract matters such as sociability and masculinity. In this case, the historian can either focus on changes in the product itself or

in its reception. Hoffmann chooses the latter. He is quick to point to the changing meaning of words such as love, which early in the century corresponded perfectly to the Masons' perceptions of their relations with one another, but later became associated with what was widely seen as the sexual perversion of homosexuality. We learn little about how the rituals and language of the lodges changed over time, however. It is unclear to what extent lodge life was shaped by holdovers from the eighteenth century or innovations of the nineteenth. Perhaps this failure is responsible for a certain confusion in establishing the relationship of the lodges to their time. Hoffmann seems to suggest that the lodges continued the blending of occultism and rationalism that he identified as typical of the eighteenth century, without explaining whether that blending became less attractive in the nineteenth. Some reflections on the links between Masonry and the later occult movement would complement his otherwise illuminating account of Masonic religiosity. It would also be interesting to investigate how the exoticism of the lodge shaped real encounters between Germans and foreigners, especially in the colonies, although the book cannot be faulted for leaving this question aside.

As it is, the study provides plenty of points of interest to historians of a wide range of topics – the bourgeoisie, masculinity, Jews, Catholics, liberalism, conservatism – as well as illuminating broader phenomena such as the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, ideas and practice, reason and play. As a study of *Geselligkeit*, it encourages scepticism about the claims of Tocqueville and more recently, Robert Putnam, about the virtues of associational life. The history of Masons suggests that it takes more than associations to make a democracy.

RÓISÍN HEALY is Lecturer in History at the National University of Ireland, Galway. She is currently revising her doctoral dissertation, a study of anti-Jesuitism in the Kaiserreich, for publication while acting as a Visiting Scholar at the Center for European Studies at Harvard University.