

Martin Gandoff, *Over 300 Years of Masonic Ritual*, Lewis Masonic, 2017. Paperback, ISBN 978-0-85318-543-7, 240 pages, £14.99.

Reviewed by Bro Leif Endre Grutle

The celebration of the (alleged) tercentenary jubilee of the *United Grand Lodge of England* encouraged much new research into the origins and development of Freemasonry, resulting in the consecutive publication of a plethora of new books on varying Masonic topics. Among all the new material offered, I personally awaited Martin Gandoff's *Over 300 Years of Masonic Ritual*, with much anticipation, as this is a subject of special interest to me. Sadly, my expectations were far from met when the book was made available.

In his introduction Gandoff writes that the book is intended to be: *A basic, readable book, which will help you to understand why 1717 was so important, give you a good working knowledge of what happened and why, and encourage you to do much more reading and discussion.* I am afraid that the author fails to succeed in his intentions, and to my great disappointment, this book cannot be recommended to students of Masonic history and ritual. The shortcomings of the book are legion, but I will limit myself to present just a few problems in this review.

Firstly, I find Gandoff's use of old, and partially dated, sources disturbing. With the exception of brief mentions of some more recently published papers in AQC, his newest source was published as far back as 1993. Older collections of primary sources, like *The Early Masonic Catechisms*, *The Early French Exposures 1737-1751* and *English Masonic Exposures 1760-1769*, hold of course the same significant position today as when they were first published. The works of Bernard E. Jones and Harry Carr are also still valuable when used with some caution, but by ignoring the more recent works by, for example, professors Snoek, Jacob, Sommers and Prescott, Gandoff cuts off both himself and the reader from newer research and updated conclusions. Further, the author shows no familiarity with standards within his field, such as Brill's *Handbook of Freemasonry*, or Bogdan's *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*, and one should also expect that he would make use of some of the last years' groundbreaking research from Ric Berman.

Secondly, some strange errors indicate that Gandoff might have a lack of familiarity with some of the sources he actually has chosen to use. For example, he includes the *Edinburgh Register House MS* as part of the *Old Charges*, albeit Knoop, Jones and Hamer explicitly placed this, and similar manuscripts, in a different class of Masonic documents. Gandoff is also constantly referring to the *Dialogue between Simon and Philip*, as the *Dialogue between Simon and Peter*! It is also worth mentioning that the author has used a great deal of abbreviations, and this makes the reading of the book more complicated than necessary. This is especially noticeable when Gandoff invents his own abbreviations instead of complying with established terms within Masonic research, as when he writes AGL, when *Antients* would suffice. Throughout the book, his five main sources are also hidden behind the acronyms *HC1*, *HC3*, *BJ1*, *KJH1* and *KJH2*, and the present reviewer finds this irritating, and it consequently slows down the reading. I cannot help thinking that this work would have gained much by some more advice and revisions from the editors at Lewis Masonic!