

Ric Berman, *The Foundations of Modern Masonry* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, Revised Second Edition, 2014). Review by Daniel Gardiner, GS, GL of Montana.

The presently accepted theory accounting for modern "speculative" Freemasonry, known as the "Transition Theory" among Masonic scholars, is that there was an intermittently and geographically sporadic yet ongoing gradual evolution from the material of the "Accepted" lodges of masons that coalesced into a version of the speculative Masonry employed by the Grand Lodge, which emerged on the London scene June 24, 1717.

Ric Berman essentially recognizes that, yes, there existed medieval stonemason's guilds; later, men who were non-operatives (i.e. gentlemen) joined the stonemason's lodges; still later, a speculative Grand Lodge was formed (that is, an organizing and governing body over lodges that moralized upon the working tools of an operative, or "real" stonemason).

Where Berman begins to depart from the presently accepted line of thinking is by examining the transition from the pre-modern Grand Lodge era of the late 1500s and the 1600s through the Revival of 1717 (modern Grand Lodge era, especially the 1720s through the end of the 1730s and generally ending by around 1740).

It is the contention of the author that the group of men who organized the "Revival" of 1717 were largely a completely different group of men, united in pursuit of common personal and political goals, that adopted, adapted, usurped, appropriated - or insert as you please any other term similarly conveying "assimilated" - the pre-existing identity of the Accepted Masons and reshaped it into a publicly acknowledged, popular, and fashionably patronized fraternal secret society that spawned what exists today.

Berman has arrived at the above conclusions after a new examination of evidence. Much of the present corpus of Masonic encyclopaedia relies heavily on the work done by the "authentic school" of research that sprang forth in the Gilded Age and waned after the Progressive Era (broadly speaking the 1870s/80s through WWI/1917). Since that time, with the exceptions of brief flourishing of networks of genuine researchers (for example, the inimitable Knoop, Jones, and Hamer), there has been a lack of credible or in depth original English-language research and analysis from Harry Carr's heyday of the 1960s forward, with some strong but infrequent individual exceptions.

Much of our current analysis of Freemasonry is based on work now 50-150 years old, and with very little added as we get closer to the present that has materially challenged anything from 50-75 years ago. Berman has taken advantage of all of the privileges of contemporary (2010 thesis) university education and access to primary sources, and it shows. Rather than rely solely on what's already been done - and there are definitely some gems to be found in working over the tailings of what others have already mined - Berman has broken new ground, digging in some surprising places.

Lack of space prevents me from giving the full review of several chapters that I would like, but several of Berman's highlights are:

- Accounting for the social activities of the Accepted lodges as heirs to the monopolizing trade guilds.

- Giving a successful alternative as to what connected Elias Ashmole and his vaunted companions in the Acception, and pulling the carpet out from under the same re-hashed handful of references to them, and here is a hint: it wasn't turning alchemy into Freemasonry.
- Taking the time for a 3-page aside to discuss Sir Christopher Wren's alleged Masonic career, and suggest a solution to the puzzle - something of a sidebar, but still adding to our present understanding of the era and Wren (via his obituary and notice of Anderson's Constitutions in the same newspaper).
- I had previously ignored the publishers of Anderson's *Constitutions* (1723 edition). Berman takes a moment to point out that their names as financiers of the work were prominent on the title page, whereas Anderson's was nowhere to be found on it (which last part I HAD noted), and demonstrates their social connections with the other officers in Grand Lodge. I don't know how Senex remained obscure with me prior to this book, but I am grateful to put him into the coterie of connected men.
- Giving Desaguliers his due, and putting his Huguenot connection into perspective (something close to 1 out of 10 laborers in London were Huguenots, a significance which probably should not be overlooked). Desaguliers, and his immediate collaborators in Grand Lodge, were networked with several groups that reciprocally influenced or helped each other, especially politically as allies seeking similar goals. Referencing Hogarth's playful engraving of Desaguliers boring his auditors in church was a nice nod, as Desaguliers was known to be less than enthusiastically devoted to his church-duties, and the author doesn't miss the opportunity to remind his readers that Anderson's congregation took over the church formerly headed by Desaguliers, a little bit of serendipity. Little touches such as these go a long way, even to readers such as myself familiar with them.

Desaguliers is something of a rock star again presently; a new biography is now available by Audrey T. Carpenter: *John Theophilus Desaguliers: A Natural Philosopher, Engineer and Freemason in Newtonian England*

- Identifying the connections between officers of the new Grand Lodge and the Royal Society (through Desaguliers), especially with a keen table showing Freemasons who were also members of the Royal Society and the further Freemasons that they proposed for membership within the Society.
- Recognizing the powerful lodge meeting at the Horn Tavern, whose contributions can't be overstated.
- A long overdue mini biography of the second (and fourth!) Grand Master, George Payne, (bookending Desaguliers) who was one of Desaguliers' collaborators in the Grand Lodge.

In his second term as our Grand Master he did his duty as a placeholder awaiting the first noble Grand Master. Payne, however, was more than a chair-warmer, and took an active hand in steering the new Grand Lodge.

I found this section to be immensely satisfying, as Payne had been nearly as neglected as the first Grand Master, Anthony Sayer (before Sayer's rescue from obscurity in an amazing paper in the *Transactions* of QC, which I recommend to all readers, 1975's "Anthony Sayer, Gentleman: The Truth at Last"). Berman says, "With the exception of Albert Calvert's brief piece in *Notes & Queries* in AQC *Transactions* 1917 and two other short references in AQC *Transactions* 1912 and 1918, no biographies have been produced by Quatuor Coronati. The ODNB is silent and other sources, such as Albert G. Mackey's *Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, have sparse or incomplete data," and it is hard to argue the point.

Berman touches on Payne's involvement in the *Philo-Musicae* episode (readers may or may not be familiar with the minutes of this group - their minutes document the first evidence of three distinct degrees being conferred now extant, to which I direct readers to Andrew Pink's PhD, "The Musical Culture of Freemasonry in Early Eighteenth-century London" and specifically, "A music club for freemasons: *Philo-musicae et -architecturae societas Apollini*, London, 1725-1727.") The little reminder that Payne and Desaguliers were neighbors, living only steps away, is a good detail that could have been overlooked.

- Berman rightly calls into question David Harrison's work, *The Genesis of Freemasonry* and twice refers to assertions of Harrison as "disingenuous." (pp. 66 and 200). I'm right there with him on that, and more than one reviewer apparently is as well. See, for example, the review of Harrison's work by Robert Peter, PhD, University of Szeged (Hungary)
- A gorgeous examination of the Westminster and Middlesex benches, and specifically how it related to the new Grand Lodge (sparked by Payne). This cross membership, like that of the Royal Society (and Desaguliers), was crucial to the success of the Grand Lodge. This examination, which probably could have been its own dedicated paper, if not a book, is worth the read alone. It also happens to be a brand new contribution to Masonic research by Berman. This was worth the price alone, for this reviewer, as it brought something brand new to the table.

Berman spends time comparing lists of dual members, and demonstrating their personal connections amongst each other. He says, "Although the hand written records of London magistrates held at the London Metropolitan Archives are somewhat hard to decipher, contemporary newspaper reports permit analysis of four relatively large sets of appointees to the bench. The appointments were those of April 1719, June 1721, August 1724 and November 1727." Berman delivers the goods, and we find an extraordinary revelation in how exceedingly pro-Loyalist/government these Justices of the Peace prominent in Grand Lodge were; men who had been selected for those qualities, and were prone to assisting one another. This group includes William Cowper, Grand Secretary of the new Grand Lodge, and clerk to the Parliament.

- Berman also gives Martin Folkes and William Stukely a biographical set-up. Berman does this so well many times throughout the book that it could almost be taken for granted, because the little sketches serve to allow the demonstration of connections between the large cast of characters that he juggles. While all of the bankable connections (like the Royal Society) are pursued, Berman finds time for a brief examination of others: for example, 1/3 of the Royal College of Physicians were verifiably Freemasons, and likely up to half (due to other reasons); Freemasons made up about 1/5 of the Society of Apothecaries; some 16% of the Society of Antiquaries were masons, including prominent members Stukely, and three Grand Masters (Lord Coleraine, the vice president, and the Dukes of Richmond and Montagu), and sets out a table of possible and probable members and their lodges; and around 1/5 of the members of the Spalding Society were Freemasons, with another table showing memberships.
- Berman's treatment of the embarrassing succession between the noble Grand Masters, the Duke of Montagu and the Duke of Wharton - scandal, maybe? - is handled well. Both men were well known and interesting on their own. The Duke of Wharton, playboy sixth Grand Master (in 1722), famously sort of elected himself, and as rapidly found himself ushered out the door, and opened his own society mocking Freemasonry. One of the Appendices, #2, dealing with Anderson's *Constitutions* of 1723, suggests that, "The power of the Grand Master to 'choose his own Deputy Grand-Master, who must be then, or who must have been formerly, the Master of a particular Lodge' may have been inserted by Desaguliers as a specific reaction to the attempt by the Duke of Wharton to take control of Grand Lodge in 1722."
- I've saved my favorite thing for last: Berman's treatment of pro-establishment politics among Grand Lodge - that is, Loyalist, pro-Hanoverian Whigs. Had I laid out this review similarly to Berman's book, the connections with Whiggish politics would be salting every paragraph. The importance of Berman's contribution to the understanding of Grand Lodge era, post-1717 Freemasonry can't be overstated, and I am not sure that the author himself properly understands what he has done: single-handedly destroyed the "Jacobite origin" theory with his Whiggish networkers. This is in keeping with John Hamill's paper in AQC, "The Jacobite Conspiracy." Future proponents of the Jacobite origins for Freemasonry will need to account for and provide a strong alternative to Berman.

Let me give this its own line: Berman takes the wind out of the Jacobite sails.

Any member new to Masonry who takes a stroll through Masonic literature won't take long looking at the Revival of 1717 before he encounters a mythical landscape of deposed Jacobite supporters, Scottish Knights Templars, secret higher degrees, and the like. Simply put, Berman drives home over and over again that the new Grand Lodge was not only not neutral but was exceedingly pro-Whig, that is, not Jacobite. Provocative.

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My quibbles with the book are few:

(1) a typo on page 27 (the only one that I noticed, which stands in opposition to those home grown books published through a vanity press by Masons with no academic background and armed with bad research and an agenda to serve); an accidental addition of a parenthesis to the text. Oh, the horror! Well, not really.

(2) Berman's addressing of the Leland-Locke manuscript, which ought to have been left in the discard pile, as it has long since largely accepted by Masonic authorities as a forgery. While Berman acknowledges that the weight of Masonic luminaries lands in the "forgery" camp, he does entertain the possibility of its genuineness in order to explore some points. Better to extinguish the memory of this fraud than perpetuate its existence into future generations, or at least until some hearty soul tacks against the wind to prove its authenticity.

(3) Berman's addressing of the Ancient's Grand Lodge, formed in the 1750s, as a schismatic offspring of the "Premier" Grand Lodge of 1717, known as the Moderns. Sadler demonstrated something like 100 years ago that the long-held theory that the Ancients were the result of a split caused by infighting within the Moderns was wrong, and rather that the Ancients were composed of mainly Irishmen and the working class living in London, excluded from privileges and participation in the premier Grand Lodge, and formed a new Grand Lodge. Granted, Berman only makes the statement in passing, and then only once, and it has zero bearing on the rest of his thesis; however, such an assertion (see page 14), if assumed to be true, ought to have been referenced in the endnotes. Is Sadler wrong? Perhaps another newish (present-day) Masonic scholar, Andrew Prescott, has tackled the subject and I somehow missed it. It would be a radical reshaping of the Masonic worldview, in the same way as Sadler's was. For all that, as I stated, Berman's reference to the Ancients as schismatics is (that I recall) a single throw-away reference. But on this see another of Berman's books: *Schism*.

Those are some small complaints!

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This book is an amazing current treatment of Masonic history, and deserves a place on the shelf of anyone interested in the origins of the Grand Lodge of 1717 as demonstrated by primary sources, as opposed to those who favor unicorns, rainbows, and lollipops - which seem to be the inspiration for much of the dreck masquerading as Masonic history, research, analysis etc. today.

Herein you won't find: speculations about fornicating ancient aliens, seeding their race through Annunaki, a hybrid race of space-faring giants then; their offspring learning arcane knowledge, probably including construction of the Egyptian pyramids, passed through a priesthood of Magi (or Pythagoras, or Hermes); comparative religion and cross-pollination

of a common base of knowledge, showing itself by monolithic monuments erected around the world; Jewish splinter sects acquiring their secrets (or substitute Islamic Gnostics or the Druse); Jesus and his disciples retaining an ancient goddess female tradition, and a secret bloodline; the heirs to Mary Magdalene and Jesus' union, transporting to France, or the British Isles; descendants of the secret bloodline being persecuted by the hated misogynistic Catholic Church (boo, hiss! tomatoes!) in their incarnation as the Cathars and other heretical sects; secrets of those sects in Rennes-le-Chateau and the Rex Deus group; the discovery of lost secrets under the Temple Mount in Jerusalem by the Knights Templar; the dissolution of the Knights Templar, their "Battle of Bannockburn" appearance, or departure from La Rochelle; burial of treasure by the Knights Templar in North America, including Oak Island; and the Knights Templar hiding in a fully developed speculative Freemasonry, and assimilating their hidden knowledge of all of the above into Masonry. Or Rosicrucians, Martinism, or alchemy, for that matter. You know: the sexy stuff.

What, then, do you get here? Primary sources and a good examination of how modern Freemasonry began.

You still doubt? Ask yourself this: how did Freemasonry go from the legends in the Old Charges, beginning with the Regius MS of c. 1390, to the three degree system of today? Evidence suggests that the old operative ceremonies were short on a moralizing element - and, for that matter, a degree - and the stories they told were of various times, places, and people; and yet, the reshaped rituals from the 1720s forward contained a Unity of Time, Place, and Character, three degrees, and so on. Certainly it has not been definitively proven that the operatives practiced the same thing that modern Freemasons do. We can trace when and where and by whom particular peculiar phrases in Masonic ritual were first delivered. American Masons went so far as to change their Due Guards and Signs in 1843, and yet folks insist on comparing the present-day American Fellow Craft Due Guard with notions of power in Egyptian glyphs from 3,000 years ago! Any claim to antiquity or an underground stream, unbroken and delivered by Adepts, of The Mysteries, must account for this. And has not. Now, Ric Berman has entered the fray, and carpet-bombed the wishful thinking. The bar to clear has been raised.

If you, or someone you know is a "Masonic history buff," this is the book that they won't have and would make a great addition to their library, much like fellow PhD, David Stevenson's, book would. See: *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590 to 1710* (Berman acknowledges the work done by Stevenson, while focusing on what turns out to be an entirely separate event). Everyone has a set of Mackey's, probably a hand-me-down copy of *Morals and Dogma*, and anymore it seems like S. Brent Morris' *Idiot's Guide* or Hodapp's *Dummies* - all great for their respective purposes; and still I say, go ahead and do them a favor and gift them this book. Test their mettle! Are they, or you, really the history buffs claimed? Give the gift of Masonic education. ... Also, be prepared to apologize if your recipient is an armchair lightweight!

5 out of 5 stars, and I can't wait to see a team-up between Ric Berman, Andrew Prescott, and Andrew Pink. We might have our new Knoop, Jones, and Hamer, folks!