

Freemasonry and civil society: reform of manners and the *Journal für Freymaurer* (1784-1786)

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Freemasonry as a tool of moral improvement

In 1784 the Bohemian mineralogist Ignaz von Born, in his capacity as master of the Masonic lodge *Zur wahren Eintracht* [True Union] in Vienna, took the initiative to publish the first successful Masonic periodical in Europe, the *Journal für Freymaurer*.¹ It was subsequently edited in twelve quarterly volumes, with an average of 250 pages, printed in 1000 copies and disseminated across the entire Habsburg Monarchy, a vast undertaking, bearing in mind the transport infrastructure of the eighteenth century. The journal contained extensive treatments of religious traditions resembling Freemasonry, essays on Masonic virtues and values, reviews of Masonic literature, poetry and Masonic news from all parts of Europe. But a significant number of the essays included in the journal also covered the impact of Freemasonry on society. The Masonic movement interpreted itself as a moral force with the potential to transform manners for the universal benefit and improvement of society and mankind. Born wrote in his address to readers that, within the Order of Freemasons, freedom of thought and equality of all natural rights was a fundamental law. Hence, it was a right to communicate the results of such free deliberation to fellow brethren.² Based upon a series of essays focusing on the moral aspects of Freemasonry, this article attempts to outline the content of these 'free deliberations' that only a few years before the French Revolution read surprisingly radical, especially in the context of the Habsburg Monarchy.

A second representative of Habsburg Freemasonry treated in this article is Josef von Sonnenfels, of Moravian-Jewish origin, one of the most prominent political writers of the century in the monarchy.³

1. The most comprehensive study on the character of Born (including a bibliography) is still *Die Aufklärung in Österreich: Ignaz von Born und seine Zeit*, ed. Helmut Reinalter (Frankfurt am Main, 1991).
2. Ignaz von Born, 'Vorerinnerung', *Journal für Freymaurer* 1 (1784), p.5.
3. H. Reinalter, 'Sonnenfels, Joseph von', in *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815-1950*, vol.12 (Vienna, 2005), p.422-23; 'Helmut Reinalter, Joseph von Sonnenfels als Gesellschaftstheoretiker', in *Joseph von Sonnenfels*, ed., idem (Vienna, 1988), p.139-56. A

Moreover, he joined von Born's lodge in Vienna, served as one of its key officers and engaged together with him in the publication of the *Journal für Freymaurer*. For its first volume, Sonnenfels produced an essay 'Von dem Einflusse der Maurerey auf die bürgerliche Gesellschaft' ('On the impact of Freemasonry upon civil society'), thirty pages in which he outlined the significance of Freemasonry as a tool of moral perfection and as civic value for the individual and where he – given his professional background as a state reformer, this is highly significant – identifies the fraternity as an important force for the improvement of civil society. For Sonnenfels the relationship between private and public societies and their manners was obvious: 'Die einzelnen, die minderen Vereinigungen haben mit der grossen einerley Ursprung, den Trieb der Geselligkeit, und das Bedürfniß der Mittheilung.'⁴

Margaret C. Jacob has characterised this disposition towards a formal function of Freemasonry in society as a reflection of its desire to constitute 'schools for government'. Masonic lodges constituted experimental zones of governance, where democratic skills could be practised, preparing Freemasons to fulfil functions in a reformed model of state.⁵

My case study of Sonnenfels' article in particular and the *Journal für Freymaurer* in general attempts to illuminate the position of Freemasonry in the discourse of manners in the Habsburg Monarchy. Constricted by governmental regulation and prohibition, the space for Masonic activities was limited but, in the absence of other forums, Freemasonry played a significant role in mirroring the moral conceptions and needs of high-ranking members of Habsburg society. These moved between social utopianism, esoteric escapism and a strong conviction that rational perfection of society was achievable.

Kristiane Hasselmann has recently investigated the role of Freemasonry in the constitution of civic 'habitus' in the eighteenth century.⁶ Placing Freemasonry within the context of the British 'reform of manners', Hasselmann points out that it was identified by societal elites as a 'potent tool of ethical education'. As normative form of intervention in traditional behaviour it was 'utilised for the reformation of interpersonal

comprehensive biography is offered by Hildegard Kremers in *Joseph von Sonnenfels: Aufklärung als Sozialpolitik: Ausgewählte Schriften* (Vienna, 1994), p.9-13. See also Abafi, *Geschichte der Freimaurerei in Österreich-Ungarn*, vol.1, p.156-59.

4. 'The particular, the smaller associations have in common with the larger an identical origin, the drive to sociability, and the need for communication'; Josef von Sonnenfels, 'Von dem Einflusse der Maurerey auf die bürgerliche Gesellschaft', *Journal für Freymaurer* 1 (1784), p.135-64. All translations in this article, unless stated otherwise, are by the author.
5. M. Jacob, *The Origins of Freemasonry: facts and fictions* (Philadelphia, PA, 2006), p.9, 15, 19, 25, 47, 52 and 69.
6. Kristiane Hasselmann, *Die Rituale der Freimaurer: zur Konstitution eines bürgerlichen Habitus im England des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bielefeld, 2009).

association'.⁷ She consequently treats the regulation of behaviour as communicated through rituals of Freemasonry, ritual conceptions of space and interaction between secrecy and publicity. The border between these spheres also constitutes the starting point of my later treatment of the first successful Masonic journal in German, the *Journal für Freymaurer*, and Sonnenfels' article on the impact of Freemasonry on civic society. It is an obvious paradox that the morality and ideology of a 'secret' society is discussed openly in a journal that was accessible to the public. Hasselmann in her study discusses a series of articles written under the signature 'Masonicus' and inserted in 1797 into a British Masonic journal, the *Freemason's magazine* (1793-1798). Following the idea that Freemasonry is 'a moral system; which, by a secret, but attractive force, disposes the human heart to every social virtue', six essays on the Masonic character outlined the ethics of Freemasonry.⁸ Their purpose, according to Hasselmann, was to argue for 'correction of individual habit achieved by independent conduct of life and autonomous and active formation of character' as the foundation of an 'ethics of acculturation', the acquisition of moral standards and behavioural patterns through repetition.⁹ This morality of praxis is opposed to a morality of principles, and is the reason why Freemasonry engaged in so much (bodily) ritual activity both in the concealed space of the lodge and in public.

Although Hasselmann's study draws upon English sources, most of her findings have implications for Freemasonry in Europe in general. The Masonic movement spread from 1717 onwards from London to the continent, representing a particular British form of sociability in a time when anglophilia was *en vogue*. The English grand lodge, moreover, claimed the right to define and certify the 'regularity' of Masonic bodies throughout Europe and in the world, an ambition that intensified considerably after 1760, if not earlier. Within the concept of regularity, ethical as much as organisational standards were defined to which most of the Masonic bodies in Europe voluntarily subscribed (but also arbitrarily diverted from). This is important to stress, as Freemasonry was never an international organisation with a centre, a governing body and a truly consistent ideology. Even though Freemasonry in the process of cultural transfer adapted to a large variety of local contexts, religious as much as cultural, key features are to be found across European space. The lodge as the smallest organisational unit, ruled by a master and

7. 'wirksame[s] Instrumentarium ethischer Erziehung'; 'in den Dienst einer Reformation des zwischenmenschlichen Umgangs gestellt'; Hasselmann, *Die Rituale*, p.53-55.

8. Original source in English as quoted in Hasselmann, *Die Rituale*, p.277-78.

9. 'Korrektur des individuellen Habitus über die selbstbestimmte Lebensführung und aktive Selbstformung des Charakters'; 'Einübungsethik'; Hasselmann, *Die Rituale*, p.282-83.

officers (in most cases elected), staged meetings in which new members were admitted by a ritual of initiation. Knowledge of Freemasonry was conferred in a number of degrees (originally three, but later considerably more) and through instructions and orations. A lodge would also charge a membership fee and by various means raise money for charitable projects (originally intended for members or relatives in distress). Furthermore a lodge would keep records of its meetings, correspondence, finances and members, to whom certificates of membership were issued in order to facilitate mobility within a global network of lodges.

A formal lodge meeting would generally be followed or interrupted by conviviality, a ritualised meal with rules for toasts and songs as well as formal openings and closings. Many lodges engaged in public cultural events such as concerts, theatre performances, balls or other divertissements. They also arranged public processions and ceremonies on the occasion of important festivities, the laying of foundation stones or Masonic funerals.

A lodge would normally seek formal approval ('constitution') from a higher Masonic authority and consequently join this body as a corporate member of its (provincial) sub-branches and communicate with other lodges and corporate bodies. There are many examples of lodges and similar local units, however, Masonic and quasi-Masonic, which did not care about such approval. Regional levels of organisation within Freemasonry are relatively transparent and consistent, but when it comes to the super-regional or what we today would call the 'national' or 'international' level, the organisational principles are complex and sometimes contradictory, exposed to political ambitions and personal preferences. This certainly applies to the situation in the Habsburg Monarchy, where it did indeed matter if a lodge was located in Prague or in Vienna, as will be explained later.

Despite a rich diversity of practices, a common denominator of all forms of Freemasonry was the conviction that moral improvement of the individual and in consequence of the community is possible. Using symbolism of craftsmanship and architecture, work on personal perfection could be morally interpreted as the construction of a building (often referred to as the 'Temple of Felicity', a common image in enlightened rhetoric), comprehending the principles of composition as much as the causes of its destruction. The third degree of master Mason implied overcoming mortality in order to live a life in dignity, as was stressed in most Masonic systems. Equipped with this morality, practised through ritualised work in different Masonic degrees, we find a significant number of Freemasons engaged in public activities associated with enlightened values. It should however be emphasised that, in view of the lack of clear evidence, it remains difficult to establish whether Freemasonry determined individ-

uals to undertake public action or whether it served as a self-affirmation of intrinsic values already held by these individuals.¹⁰ Did Freemasonry cause the Moravian state reformer Sonnenfels to propose the abolition of torture and capital punishment; did the fraternity inspire the Bohemian scientist Born when he organised one of the first international scientific conferences? Or did these individuals, in their efforts to engage in forward-looking activities, find moral encouragement in Freemasonry?

Sonnenfels and Born at the centre of Habsburg Enlightenment

Ignaz von Born and Josef von Sonnenfels are representatives of the chances and limitations of careers in a complex premodern composite state like the Habsburg Monarchy, uniting disparate religious traditions, languages and historical territories under one common roof. Born and Sonnenfels met during their youth, when studying in Vienna. Later in life they shared an interest in Freemasonry and its potential role in a new state reorganised through Josephist enlightened reforms.

Ignaz von Born was born in 1742 in Alba Iulia (Karlsburg) in Transylvania.¹¹ His father owned and operated a silver mine, certainly promoting his son's interest in mineralogy from early on. At the age of eight Ignaz became an orphan, and was initially educated at a local school run by the Piarist order, strongly represented in the school system in the Habsburg Monarchy. To promote his education, he was sent to a Jesuit grammar school in Vienna, joining the order in 1759. After his time at school and in the preparatory novitiate, however, he left the order and became interested in studying law. He joined a group of young enlighteners, also including Sonnenfels, who in 1761 established a *Deutsche Gesellschaft*, a society for the promotion of the arts. He also studied law in Prague, and then from 1763 to 1766 attended the courses on mining and mineralogy taught by Johann Tadeas Peithner at Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague.

Following his marriage, he settled on the estate of Staré Sedliště (Altzedlitzsch) in western Bohemia and continued to frequent academic circles in the capital. In the Carpathian city of Banská Štiavnica (Schemnitz), a mining academy was established by imperial decree in

10. The author of the short treatise 'Über den Charakter des Maurers' ('On the character of a Mason'), *Journal für Freymauer* 1 (1784), p.187-92 (188) claimed, however, that 'Wie die Atmosphäre auf den Körper wirkt, so wirkt der wohlthätige Geist des Ordens auf die Seele des Eingeweihten' ('the benevolent spirit of the Order affects the soul of the adept such as the atmosphere affects [the constitution of] the body').

11. See H. Reinalter, 'Ignaz von Born – Persönlichkeit und Wirkung', in *Die Aufklärung*, ed. H. Reinalter, p.11-32.

1762, to which Born became affiliated. Following extensive travel to different mining areas in the Hungarian part of the monarchy, Born was appointed 'assessor in the Royal Mint and Mining Office' (*Bergrat*) in Prague. As early as 1772, however, he quitted state service. Back on his estate, he spent his time writing mineralogical works, and contributed to the foundation of the Bohemian Private Learned Society (Böhmische Gelehrte Privatgesellschaft), the nucleus of the later Royal Bohemian Society of Sciences. The overlap between science and Freemasonry was remarkable; Born himself was a member of the lodge Zu den drei gekrönten Säulen [Three Crowned Pillars] in Prague.¹² Within these circles the critical journal *Prager gelehrte Nachrichten* was published. Born's scientific authorship rendered eligible for him membership of the most prestigious societies and academies across Europe. He was elected as a member of the Royal Society in 1774.¹³ Three years later Born was appointed to a position in Vienna and reapplied for admission to the state service, which was the starting point for promotion and a higher career.

Back in the Habsburg capital Born returned to his talents as a writer and published an acrid satire directed against monastic orders. In 1781 Born became affiliated to the lodge Zur wahren Eintracht and was elected to the chair as early as the following year. During his time as master of the lodge, its intellectual activities flourished. Apart from the *Journal für Freymaurer* a quarterly scientific journal was published, the *Physikalische Arbeiten der einträchtigen Freunde in Wien*.¹⁴ Weisberger claims that through the publication of this journal the lodge 'was identified with major breakthroughs in the realm of geology' and that the articles 'undoubtedly were read by scientists throughout Europe and enabled this lodge to serve as an international centre for the study of geology'.¹⁵

Although the lodge was at the zenith of its development for a period of three years, internal struggles and external pressures, as much as Born's declining health, finally led him to resign from Freemasonry in 1786. One of the reasons was that he was identified as an active member of the Order of Illuminati, which had been prohibited and persecuted in Bavaria from 1785 onwards. Born's home, however, remained a crystallising point in Vienna's social life, and he carried on with his

12. H. Reinalter, 'Ignaz von Born als Freimaurer und Illuminat', in *Die Aufklärung*, ed. H. Reinalter, p.33-68, treats Born's links to Freemasonry extensively.

13. His membership has been ascertained by investigations carried out by M. Teich, 'Ignaz von Born und die Royal Society', in *Die Aufklärung*, ed. H. Reinalter, p.93-98.

14. These are treated extensively by Richard William Weisberger, *Speculative Freemasonry and the Enlightenment: a study of the craft in London, Paris, Prague and Vienna* (New York, 1993), p.130-37. He points out that their main content was devoted to geology.

15. Weisberger, *Speculative Freemasonry*, p.135.

scientific authorship as well as with developing chemical procedures of amalgamation. He also organised an international conference for mining and metallurgy experts in Schemnitz, one of the first events of this kind. Born's example demonstrates that Freemasonry in the Habsburg Monarchy attracted leading scientists and intellectuals and compensated for the lack of other establishments such as academies or learned journals.

Josef von Sonnenfels was born in 1733 in Mikulov (Nikolsburg) into the family of a Jewish translator and professor of oriental languages, Lipman Perlin. After a move to Vienna, Perlin converted to Catholicism, adopted the name Alois Wiener and was ennobled as Baron von Sonnenfels. His son Josef was initially educated at a school run by the Piarist order. After having served in a regiment under the command of the Order of the Teutonic Knights (*Deutschmeisterregiment*), Joseph studied law in Vienna and at the same time attempted to launch himself on an academic career. He was also engaged actively in the *Deutsche Gesellschaft*, where he met Born. Following the Seven Years War, in 1763 Sonnenfels was appointed professor of cameral sciences and applied political science (*Polizey- und Kameralwissenschaft*).¹⁶ Apart from his academic duties Sonnenfels also edited moral weekly journals such as the title *Der Mann ohne Vorurteil* (*The man without prejudice*, 1765-1767). As a theatre critic, he attacked the vulgarisation of the Vienna stage and identified theatre as a means of moral education. In his capacity as Director of Illumination of Vienna, Sonnenfels united his ideological positions with practical implementation and created the first European permanent street lighting. Among his many publications, his most influential work argued for the abolition of torture, a call that was followed by equal legislation in the Habsburg Monarchy. Sonnenfels united his career in public life with an active membership in the Masonic order. He was, according to his own account, initiated into a Masonic lodge in Leipzig ('Balduin') and later joined the lodge Zur wahren Eintracht in Vienna, where he was adopted as a master Mason and of which he later became deputy master. Together with Born, he was engaged in the publication of *Journal für Freymaurer* as well as in other external activities of the lodge. Sonnenfels was also an active member of the Order of Illuminati. He regarded enlightened absolutism as the ideal form of government, but proposed a pyramidal social order where inequalities were balanced by the state. Sonnenfels'

16. See J. von Sonnenfels, 'On the love of the fatherland', in *Late Enlightenment – emergence of the modern 'national idea': discourses of collective identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945)*, ed. Trencsényi Balász and Michal Kopeček, vol.1 (Budapest, 2006), p.127-31; Keith Tribe, *Governing economy: the reformation of German economic discourse, 1750-1840* (Cambridge, 1988), p.55-90.

greatest impact was in the area of economical and juridical theories, which he influenced strongly.

Sonnenfels and Born had made their way upwards in the Theresian and Josephinian state by their own merits and did not belong by birth to its most privileged stratum. Both originated outside the epicentre of the Habsburg Monarchy, but managed early (in Sonnenfels' case despite his Jewish ancestry) to integrate with the functional elites in Vienna, promoting rational developments in both fields of public activity, within cameralism as much as within mineralogy. Despite their momentous work in these areas, both were attracted by Freemasonry and devoted a considerable amount of their time and efforts to its elaboration. In this process they managed to receive support from members of lodges not only in Vienna, but also across the Habsburg Monarchy and abroad. This is not least mirrored by the edition and dissemination of the *Journal für Freymaurer*. In an attempt to capture the duality of both personalities, Born has been characterised as 'an esotericist proceeding rationally' and Sonnenfels as an 'exotericist with a metaphysical background'.¹⁷

Weisberger identifies the lodge of Born and Sonnenfels, Zur wahren Eintracht, as a 'haven for Masons involved in the literature of reform'. The journal 'provided its literary members with the opportunity to publish their works concerning reform'; they 'viewed the lodge as an essential urban agency for the promotion of their Enlightenment and Masonic concepts concerning reform'.¹⁸ Before we examine this publication and its content more closely, it is, however, essential to summarise the development of Freemasonry in the Habsburg Monarchy with special attention to Bohemia and Moravia.

The development of Freemasonry in the Habsburg Monarchy

Freemasonry, entering the world of Enlightenment sociability in London with the foundation of a grand lodge in 1717, became disseminated throughout Europe during the 1720s and 1730s. The first lodge in the Habsburg Monarchy was established in the Austrian Netherlands as early as 1721.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the first lodge in Prague, Zu den drei gekrönten

17. '[der] rationalistisch verfahrenende[...] Esoteriker' and an 'Exoteriker mit metaphysischem Hintergrund'; Alexander Giese, 'Freimaurerisches Geistesleben im Zeitalter der Spätaufklärung am Beispiel des "Journals für Freymaurer"', in *Bibliotheca Masonica: Dokumente und Texte zur Freimaurerei*, ed. Friedrich Gottschalk (Graz, 1988), p.1-90 (39).

18. Weisberger, *Speculative Freemasonry*, p.137-38.

19. See Eva H. Balázs, *Hungary and the Habsburgs, 1765-1800: an experiment in enlightened absolutism* (Budapest, 1997). Weisberger, *Speculative Freemasonry* is another major reference; however Weisberger's book has been received critically by the scholarly community.

Sternen, was founded in 1741, followed by Zu den drei gekrönten Säulen (the lodge into which Born was most probably initiated), and later Wahrheit und Einigkeit [Truth and Unity] as well as Zu den neun Sternen [Nine Stars]. In Moravia, the centre of Freemasonry was Brno, where the first lodge was established in 1782.

Freemasonry in Prague suffered under attacks from the Catholic Church which ebbed away under the patronage of Duke Albrecht Casimir of Saxe-Teschen (starting in 1774). As mentioned previously, it was in the circle of renowned Bohemian Freemasons that the initiative towards the establishment of the Royal Bohemian Society of Sciences was taken. At the same time, however, Freemasons in Prague engaged in esoteric activities and showed an affinity towards alchemy (which had a large number of practitioners in the Bohemian capital) and Templarism.²⁰

Adding to the ambiguous character of Freemasonry in Prague, in 1773 an orphanage, Zum heiligen Johannes dem Täufer, was established, taking care of twenty-five children and offering them an education.²¹ An article in the *Journal für Freymaurer* in 1785 covered this foundation, hailing the founders as a 'society of philanthropists which has already for a long time received acclaim from the nobility'.²² The ethical rules of the orphanage were codified (in a fashion that recalls Masonic rules and regulations) and regulated worship, behaviour towards teachers and superiors, behaviour in school and diligence in learning, mutual behaviour between children, moral conduct and rules of the house, awards and punishments.²³ Official acclaim peaked with donations from Empress Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II, who after a visit to the orphanage was quoted as saying 'C'est la première maison de cette sorte, que je trouve en ordre.' An article in the same issue of the journal announced that the lodge Zu den vereinigten Freunden [United Friends] in Brno intended to publish a weekly magazine for the benefit of the poor, containing 'letters of moral content, dialogues, fables, subjects on economy, stock-breeding'. Just a few years later Freemasons in the Moravian city launched an ambitious initiative to augment agriculture. In its

20. Balász, *Hungary and the Habsburgs*, p.38-40.

21. Ignaz Cornova, *Geschichte des Waiseninstituts zum heiligen Johann dem Täufer in Prag* (Prague, Auf Kosten einer Gesellschaft von Menschenfreunden, 1785).

22. 'Gesellschaft von Menschenfreunden, die sich schon lange die Verehrung der Edlen erworben'; 'Züge maurerischer Wohltaten' ('Traits of Masonic benevolence'), *Journal für Freymaurer* 8 (1785), p.201-208. Under this heading a number of Masonic news items were reported throughout the twelve volumes of the journal.

23. It has been proved that the moral code for the orphanage was written by the priest August Zippe and the orphanage was directed by the professor of morality Karl Heinrich Seibt. See Martin Javor, *Slobodomurárske hnutie v českých krajinách a v Uhorsku v 18. storočí*, p.140-42.

proposal forced labour was attacked as an obstacle to economic development.²⁴ Masonic orphanages and institutions for education and care of children had been established in other European countries and should be interpreted not as mere benevolent charities, but as promoting improvement of standards of education and medical care, in line with a (sometimes contested) rationalisation of society.²⁵ The practice of Masonic charity during the eighteenth century, however, was also repeatedly utilised as an argument directed towards anti-Masonic rhetoric.

Freemasonry in Vienna started in 1742 with the foundation of the lodge Aux Trois Canons, closed by imperial decree only a year later. Balász claims that the establishment in Vienna was promoted from a lodge in Breslau, by then under Prussian occupation, as a means of extending Berlin's influence over the Habsburg elite, which as such gave Freemasonry in the Habsburg Monarchy a political dimension. Maria Theresa in 1766 prohibited membership of Masonic and Rosicrucian lodges for imperial administrators.²⁶ Although Masonic activities continued, they did not reach their zenith before the reign of Joseph II (1780-1790). At that time Vienna had eight lodges with a total of about 800 members.

A Masonic chivalric system called Strikte Observanz (Strict Observance), organised across the whole area of Europe since its inception in 1754 and more systematically after 1764, divided different parts of the continent into provinces based upon the organisation of the medieval Knights Templar.²⁷ The system was very efficient in recruiting high-ranking members of society to the 'Inner Order', which numbered no fewer than 1600 knights.²⁸ Every province was divided into subunits: prefectures, sub-priories and commanderies. Apart from northern German, Dutch and Danish territories, the seventh province also encompassed Silesia, Bohemia and Moravia, whereas the eighth stretched from southern Germany to northern Italy, including Austria and Hungary. Prague was one of eighteen subunits of the seventh

24. See Jiří Beránek, 'La crise de la Franc-Maçonnerie tchèque à l'époque de la Grande Révolution française', *Acta Universitatis Carolinae: studia historica* 35 (1989), p.131-52 (142-43).

25. A recent study of the Masonic orphanage in Sweden highlights these aspects. *250 år i barmhärtighetens tjänst – Frimurarnas Barnhusverksamhet 1753-2003* (Stockholm, 2003).

26. Gerald Fischer Colbrie, *Die Freimaurerloge Zu den Sieben Weisen in Linz 1783-1999* (Linz, 1999), p.14.

27. Standard works in the complex history of the Strict Observance are René Le Forestier, *Die templerische und okkultistische Freimaurerei im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, vol.1: *Die Strikte Observanz* (Leimen, 1987); Ferdinand Runkel, *Geschichte der Freimaurerei in Deutschland*, vol.1 (Berlin, 1931).

28. *Verzeichnis sämtlicher innern Ordensbrüder der Strikten Observanz* (Oldenburg, 1846) listing civil and chivalric names as well as occupations of the knights.

province, first named Sub-priory Droysig and later Prefecture Rodomskoy. Compared to Vienna, in the eighth province only ranked as a sub-priory, the jurisdiction of Prefecture Rodomskoy extended much further into the eastern territories of the Habsburg Monarchy and was accordingly also more influential.²⁹ The Strict Observance finally collapsed in 1782, due to immense internal tensions that would also influence Habsburg Freemasonry.³⁰

Freemasonry in the entire Holy Roman Empire underwent, prior to the French Revolution, a highly complex development that can only be hinted at. The end of the Strict Observance in 1782 left an organisational and ideological vacuum. By then, the tensions within German Freemasonry (in which Bohemian and Moravian developments must also be located) had grown into an open polarity between radical Enlightenment positions and proto-Romantic irrationalism, represented by the Bavarian Illuminati (among whom we must count representatives of the lodge Zur wahren Eintracht) on the one hand and neo-Rosicrucians on the other. Dan Edelstein has recently warned eighteenth-century scholars not to overemphasise the assumed dichotomy between the Enlightenment and its 'dark' undercurrent. Edelstein highlights instead the 'epistemological fuzziness' of the Enlightenment, which is certainly necessary for our understanding of Freemasonry and also its moral programme in the Habsburg context.³¹

Furthermore a Prussian Grand Lodge, Grosse Landesloge der Freimaurer von Deutschland (established in 1770), formally exercised Masonic jurisdiction in the Habsburg Monarchy. This in turn led to the establishment of a national Austrian Masonic body in 1784. When Joseph II in 1785 introduced severe measures to control Freemasonry in his territories it was in response to political developments rather than disappointment that Freemasonry did not fulfil his expectations in its role of promoting Josephist reforms.³²

During the short reign of Joseph's son, Leopold II (1790-1792), Freemasonry was still accepted, although anti-Masonic propaganda concern-

29. Weisberger, *Speculative Freemasonry*, p.111-13 treats the supremacy of Strict Observance Masonry in Prague in contrast to Vienna.

30. Ludwig Hammermayer, *Der Wilhelmsbader Freimaurer-Konvent von 1782: ein Höhe- und Wendepunkt in der Geschichte der deutschen und europäischen Geheimgesellschaften* (Heidelberg, 1980) provides an extensive account of this development.

31. *The Super-Enlightenment: daring to know too much*, ed. Dan Edelstein, *SVEC* 2010:01, p.31. The book also includes an important chapter on 'Sacred societies' such as Masonic lodges.

32. This question is extensively reflected in Colbrie, *Die Freimaurerloge*, where the greater part of Joseph's 'Handbillet' is reproduced on p.13, its origin and intention discussed on p.25-30.

ing its presumed role in the French Revolution had been spread to the Habsburg Monarchy. These sentiments increased dramatically with the violent developments in France, and in 1795 Leopold's successor, Francis II, finally prohibited Freemasonry throughout the Habsburg Monarchy. Although there are signs of continued Masonic activities, the further development of the fraternity in the Habsburg Monarchy and its successor states was severely damaged for more than a century.

The *Journal für Freymaurer* (1784-1786)

Although there had been previous attempts to establish specialised periodicals directed at a readership interested in Masonic matters, the first successful project was realised by Ignaz von Born and the *Journal für Freymaurer*. The *Journal* was edited in Vienna between 1784 and 1786 in twelve quarterly volumes with an average of 250 pages. It was printed in 1000 copies, officially as 'a manuscript for brother masters of the order'. Alexander Giese has suggested that such a high number of copies from the beginning perverted the idea of an internal publication.³³ Even in the journal itself we find references to the fact that its articles leaked out into the public domain and were reprinted elsewhere. The *Journal* can hardly be regarded as a publication with a limited radius of influence.³⁴ It contains for the most part treatises, followed by Masonic news, orations and poems. The treatises investigate primarily the relationship between Freemasonry and various ancient religious traditions and mysteries. In the section on Masonic news the contemporary persecution of Freemasonry and Illuminati is covered extensively. Some of the orations argue for social responsibility close to a radical agenda. The 3046 pages of the *Journal* are subdivided as shown in Table 1.

If these figures are translated into a graph, it becomes clear that treatises make up the largest amount of the content, but diminish with time. Masonic news items only dominate the coverage in two volumes; however, they increase over time. The variation between poems and orations is far less dynamic. This numerical analysis of the content is just a first step in categorising the vast content of the journal, and follows the editorial subdivision already announced in its first volume.³⁵

33. Giese, 'Freimaurerisches Geistesleben', p.12; A. Giese, 'Das "Journal für Freymaurer"', in *Journal für Freymaurer* (Vienna, 1967), p.34-59.

34. See also Elisabeth Rosenstrauch-Königsberg, 'Ausstrahlungen des Journals für Freymaurer', in *Beförderer der Aufklärung in Mittel- und Osteuropa: Freimaurer, Gesellschaften, Clubs*, ed. Eva H. Balázs *et al.* (Berlin, 1979), p.103-25.

35. 'Nachschrift', *Journal für Freymaurer* 1 (1784), p.249.

Table 1: Division of content / pages in the *Journal für Freymaurer* (1784-1786). (Percentages are rounded up or down and do not always add up to 100.)

	1784		1785					1786			Total		
Volume	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Treatises (I)	[146]* 57%	150 58%	116 46%	160 63%	52 20%	156 61%	74 30%	38 14%	112 46%	100 38%	94 39%	160 65%	1358 45%
Orations (II)	58 23%	68 26%	44 17%	22 9%	30 12%	26 10%	66 27%	16 6%	24 10%	52 20%	32 13%	14 6%	452 15%
Poems (III)	22 9%	2 1%	64 25%	11 4%	32 12%	24 9%	52 21%	18 7%	26 11%	20 8%	10 4%	10 4%	291 9%
Masonic news (IV)	-	28 11%	16 6%	30 12%	125 48%	38 15%	44 18%	168 63%	68 28%	80 31%	92 38%	36 15%	725 24%
[rest]**	29 11%	12 5%	12 5%	32 13%	21 8%	12 5%	12 5%	28 11%	12 5%	12 4%	12 5%	26 11%	220 7%
Total page number per volume	255	260	252	255	260	256	248	268	242	264	240	246	3046
Total page number per year	1022	1032					992			3046			

* the first volume does not contain this section but its content is still referred to as 'treatise' as it shares the same characteristics as the rest of the articles in this section

** the remaining pages comprise unpaginated blank, title / content pages, indices or editorials

Sonnenfels' discussion of the relationship between Freemasonry and society

For among the many excellent and divine institutions which your Athens has brought forth and contributed to human life, none, in my opinion, is better than those mysteries. For by their means we have been brought out of our barbarous and savage mode of life and educated and refined to a state of civilization; and as the rites are called 'initiations', so in very truth we have learned from the beginnings of life, and have gained the power not only to live happily, but also to die with a better hope.³⁶

This quote from Cicero on the practice of initiatory societies in Athens and its civilising effects in affecting concepts of a good life sets the stage for Sonnenfels' treatment of the influence of Freemasonry upon civil society. The first part of his oration is devoted to dismissing the idea that the human being in his natural state is lost in individuality. On the contrary Sonnenfels argues that theories building on such a view of the savage individual are erroneous. Every individual feels a genuine desire and need for social intercourse. Engaging in social life is the foundation of positive experience, a plan carefully crafted by the Great Architect with square and compasses. These social needs secretly guide the human being to fulfilment and ultimate satisfaction. But this 'germ of Felicity' ('Keim der Glückseligkeit') has also been abused; the prospect of a civic society in which humans mutually support each other has been perverted. Care has been replaced with suppression, freedom with slavery; property has been seized by hunger for profit. Despotism has oppressed right and law.

From this grand prospect Sonnenfels develops the idea of correspondence between the small association and society at large. Historically, men of virtue assembled to work for the ennoblement of the human race. The sum of individual virtue created a shared value, a joint direction towards a communal aim. But there were associations in history which misused this potential for perfection, fearing to communicate their jealously guarded secrets to the public, selling them for profit, using the cover of secrecy in order to promote vices or plotting against the government. No wonder that legislators had to react against the perversion of the intended cause. On the other hand Sonnenfels warns against drawing conclusions from condemnation of individuals or individual groups and projecting these conclusions onto the whole. A number of contemporary examples are cited, and in a footnote reference is made to a satire on the persecution of Freemasonry by the Catholic Inqui-

36. Cicero, *De legibus*, II.36; translation as quoted in Tobias Reinhardt, 'Readers in the Underworld: Lucretius, de Rerum Natura 3.912-1075', *The Journal of Roman studies* 94 (2004), p.27-46 (37).

sition.³⁷ States persecuting the fraternity disregard potential benefits arising from Freemasonry. Its inner constitution has the potential to influence the public body.³⁸

In the following section Sonnenfels ridicules the ambition of the 1782 convent of Wilhelmsbad to define the ultimate goal of Freemasonry. He claims that this goal is intrinsically self-evident and that the reputation of the fraternity will be damaged when the public perceives that Freemasonry itself does not seem to know its true purpose. In Sonnenfels' view this cannot be anything other than augmenting the number of virtuous citizens, thus improving individual states and ultimately promoting the welfare of humanity.

Subsequently he refers to Warburton, who claimed that the mysteries of antiquity had a positive influence upon the state.³⁹ Sonnenfels concludes that suppression of initiatory practices has adverse consequences for society. There is an obvious parallel between the Greek institutions and Freemasonry in that it promotes patriotic devotion to state and regent, obedience to law, morality and righteousness. This canon of civic virtues is represented in the internal rules and regulations of the order, whose rituals distantly mirror their Greek counterparts.

Already the desire to become a Freemason, supported by virtuous sponsors, corresponds to the development of the maturing citizen, as preparation for initiation improves society. Correspondingly, obedience to Masonic obligations benefits the order, the state and the world alike. Brethren care for their fellow citizens in benevolent humanity as a sacrifice to common welfare. As it fosters civic virtues, becoming a good Freemason implies becoming the best kind of citizen. Furthermore, Freemasons act as guardians of public order, something that anti-Masons have plainly not understood, as they continue to draw conclusions from the behaviour of single members, projecting value judgements onto the entire organisation. The legitimacy of strict rules of exclusion is described and defended.⁴⁰ The more selective Freemasonry becomes, the

37. 'Gegen das verabscheuungswürdige Institut der Freymaurer' ('Against the appalling Institution of Freemasons'), *Journal für Freymaurer* 2 (1784), p.175-224.

38. See also 'Ueber das Verhältnis des Maurerordens zum Staat' ('On the relationship of the Masonic order towards the state'), *Journal für Freymaurer* 10 (1786), p.124-52.

39. Probably in William Warburton's *Remarks on Mr. David Hume's Essay on the natural history of religion* (London, Cadell, 1777). The topic was developed further in the treatise 'Ueber den Einfluß der Mysterien der Alten auf den Flor der Nationen' ('On the influence of ancient mysteries on the prosperity of nations'), *Journal für Freymaurer* 9 (1786), p.80-116.

40. More context is needed to read between the lines. It appears not only at this point that Sonnenfels refers to a specific case. The articles 'Situation eines ausgeschlossenen Maurers' ('Situation of an excluded Mason'), *Journal für Freymaurer* 8 (1785), p.149-78, and 'Ueber den Bann der Freymaurer' ('On Masonic banishment') in the same volume (p.81-101) extensively treat mechanisms of exclusion and repulsion.

more power will be added to the sum, multiplying the efforts of benevolence and charity. Finally Sonnenfels makes a strong argument concerning the equality experienced within the fraternity, easing social distance and thus enabling a sense of community between different ranks in society. With all these positive qualities, how is it possible that Freemasonry continues to be perceived negatively?

Sonnenfels, in the final part of his oration, returns to the necessity of a strict (and rather elitist) recruitment policy. Selection to membership is not meticulous enough. There is a significant difference between the number of candidates and their value. Referring to events within the Strict Observance, where imposters had joined the ranks of lodges and influenced the order negatively, Sonnenfels warns against a trivialisation of membership. He hopes the Convent of Wilhelmsbad will address the issue of how to 'police initiation' ('Polizey der Aufnahme') in order to raise internal discipline. He argues conclusively for a strict application of rules for membership, especially in balloting for a new candidate (which refers to the Masonic practice of two votes per candidate, a black and a white ball, hence the expression 'blackballed' for exclusion). The balloting process is the utmost instrument of selection and, at the very end of Sonnenfels' oration, every Freemason is severely warned against a positive vote for a candidate who does not bring the necessary immaculate qualities to become a Freemason.⁴¹

Sonnenfels' treatise addresses a number of topics that relate to internal matters, such as the Convent of Wilhelmsbad in 1782, as well as to the philosophical basis of Freemasonry and, in consequence, its role within civil society. Sonnenfels is convinced that the human being is placed into a social context and hence has a social responsibility that needs to be developed in order to fulfil human destiny. From history he takes the argument that initiatory societies contributed to shape community; an increased number of virtuous men (carefully selected, however) will improve society at large. Internal rules and regulations of the Order form a canon of civic virtues that can be drawn upon as a basis for citizenship, defining the role of Freemasonry in society.

Conclusion

The *Journal für Freymaurer* extensively treats values discussed in Viennese lodges during the heyday of Habsburg Freemasonry. Dissemination

41. These positions concerning strict membership selection, the duty of the sponsor and legitimate reasons for not accepting new members are outlined extensively (with a constructed historical example in the Order of Pythagoreans) in Sonnenfels' oration 'Eudoxus, oder über das Anhalten und die Bürgerschaft: Zwey Gespräche' ('Eudoxus, or on recruitment and sponsorship'), *Journal für Freymaurer* 1 (1784), p.195-224.

across the Habsburg Monarchy and participation of local lodges allows the conclusion that the debate in the capital mirrored the self-perception of Freemasons in a vast territory of Central and Eastern Europe. Sonnenfels formulated in his article a role for the fraternity in the moral improvement of society and mankind at large. Perfection of personal morality through the educational tools of Freemasonry, ritual, instruction and obligation to internal rules and regulations served a higher function in the reform of interpersonal relations in the (patriotic) community of the state, with potential cosmopolitan implications.⁴²

In Sonnenfels' view, repeated in many other articles of the *Journal*, Masonic morality is both individual and collective. Not only has selection before initiation to be carried out carefully in order to ensure that the individual candidate already brings essential qualities with him. The experience of ritual is basically a personal experience, enacted by the collective as an initiatory mystery play. It is only the addition of individual qualities that constitutes the common charisma. The role of Freemasonry is to create strong individuals, who also apply their moral convictions outside the secluded space of the lodge.

If Sonnenfels' elitist idealism is representative of Habsburg Freemasonry of the period, below the line it did not convince the government of the fraternities' utility in the reform of the state. In the end the over-extensive spread of an associational practice into the provinces and ranks of Habsburg society was identified as a problem. Joseph II's strict regulation of Freemasonry must also be seen in the light of the contemporary persecution of the Bavarian Illuminati and of other esoteric movements associated with mainstream Freemasonry. Although tolerated under Leopold II, the prohibition of Freemasonry under Francis II in 1795 leaves little doubt that the Habsburg government was unable to identify Freemasonry as a positive moral force in society. Seen in the European context, however, the Habsburg Monarchy was in the long run isolated in its view of Freemasonry. It formed an exception to the rule.

42. A short treatise, however, called for the adoption of cosmopolitan values: 'Ueber den Kosmopolitismus des Maurers' ('On the cosmopolitanism of the Freemason'), *Journal für Freymaurer* 7 (1785), p.114-20.

