

**Michel König, 1717-1747 *Les 30 Glorieuses de la Grande Loge des 'Modernes' vues par la presse de l'époque***, Numénilivre - Éditions des Bords de Seine, Paris, 2019. Paperback. ISBN 978-2-36632-0954, 215 pages, 18€.

*Reviewed by Bro. Christopher Powell*

A book has just come off the Masonic press in France that is of particular interest to historians of English Freemasonry. Michel König's *1717-1747 Les 30 Glorieuses de la Grande Loge des 'Modernes' vues par la presse de l'époque* discusses the first 30 years of the Premier Grand Lodge from the point of view of what was published in the London and provincial newspapers at the time.

König's book opens with a section on the recent QC debate as to whether the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster was founded in 1717 or 1721. Not surprisingly, König comes down heavily on the side of 1717 dismissing the arguments of Prescott and Sommers as 'far-fetched', 'achronic' and 'light'. In a way this is the least interesting part of the book since anyone knowing the facts dismissed this debate long ago.

The most interesting aspect of König's new book is his use of contemporary newspapers indicated in the sub-title of the book: *vues par la presse de l'époque* [views by the press at the time]. König prints around 150 cuttings from the newspapers themselves as well as a translation of each into French. It is a pity the cuttings were not cleaned up before printing by removing distractions such as highlighting and snippets of extraneous material, but it is marvellous to have facsimiles of the originals to read and study. They are very small - a magnifying glass is required - and not always as sharp as they might be, but it is a pleasure to read and study such a profusion of original source material.

Of particular interest to the Masonic historian is the fact that König has not restricted his search of contemporary newspapers to the Burney Collection at the British Library. Many of the cuttings in *1717-1747 Les 30 Glorieuses* are from newspapers not in that collection and so are new to most readers. There is a tendency among Masonic

historians to believe that the newspaper collection at the British Library known by the name of its original collector, Charles Burney, is complete and this is far from the case. Whilst it is the largest single collection, now containing more than a million digitised pages, it is very far from complete and is especially weak in items from provincial presses. Other major collections are to be found at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, in local history libraries around Britain and in large private collections both in the UK and US. Many are not digitised and online, whilst those that are require a private subscription. König has spread his net wider than the Burney collection to include important examples from Scotland - in particular the *Caledonian Mercury* - and the north of England - especially the *Newcastle Courant*. There is a complete list of every newspaper he has consulted at the end of his book.

In the period under discussion, 1717-1747, the provincial presses often reprinted items from the London newspapers. When these are no longer extant, the provincial reprints are all that is available to the scholar. Occasionally, the provincial papers included more detail than the London papers. For instance, whilst the *London Evening Post* of 24th January, 1730 in reporting a meeting of Lodge IV referred to a new initiate as simply 'Mr Martin', the *Caledonian Mercury* of 29th January, 1730 informed its readers that he was the playwright Benjamin Martin [or Martyn] author of the recently-performed and soon to be published tragedy *Timoleon*. Happily, König quotes the fuller source.

König's book is divided into four sections:

1. *Retour à '1717'* [Return to '1717'] deals with the debate on the date when the Grand Lodge was founded;
2. *L'Age d'Or de la Franc-Maçonnerie 'Moderne'* [The Golden Age of 'Modern' Freemasonry] surveys lodge events reported in the press at the time;
3. *Les Années Desaguliers* [The Desaguliers Years] considers the part Desaguliers himself played in the early history of the Grand Lodge;
4. *Extensions et Résistances* [Expansions and Oppositions] examines the founding of the Grand Lodges of Scotland, Ireland and France; this section also includes a brief look at anti-masonry during the period.

It is good to report that König's book is up-to-date, not just in its appraisal of the recent 1717/1721 debate but, much more importantly, by taking into account in section three all the new information contained in Audrey Carpenter's excellent biography of Desaguliers published in 2011 by Continuum.

As a publication, *1717-1747 Les 30 Glorieuses de la Grande Loge des 'Modernes' vues par la presse de l'époque* is rather untidy typographically and it is certainly not free from factual errors, but it is a source book that every student of the period 1717-1747 should possess even if he or she does not read French since the most important information contained within its covers, the 150 or so newspaper facsimiles themselves, are all in English.

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