

***British Freemasonry, 1717-1813*, editado por Róbert Péter. Londres: Routledge, 2016. 2396 páginas. ISBN-13: 978-1138100190. ISBN-10: 1138100196.**

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British Freemasonry, 1717-1813 is a superbly produced five volume compilation of core texts from the first century of organised freemasonry. It presents a diverse collection of rare print and manuscript materials culled from masonic libraries, principally in London and Dublin. Each volume is arranged thematically. Each has a general introduction by an academic noted for their study of freemasonry who has then added specific comment about, and context for, each text.

The general editor, Róbert Péter, has provided an introduction to all the volumes, background to their compilation and a historiographical essay. The masonic collections from which these print and manuscript materials are drawn are both a strength and a weakness. Masonic organisations have a long history of collecting both printed works and the material culture associated with freemasonry and have thus accumulated many unique texts. In the case of the United Grand Lodge of England in London a library collection was consciously established and financed from the 1830s. Considerable efforts have been made, particularly in the twenty-first century, to make this material more accessible with improvements in the physical accessibility to the collections and the creation of online catalogues. The repositories of masonic collections have also taken steps to integrate themselves into national cultural arrangements. The Museum of Freemasonry, holding the collections of the United Grand Lodge, has been designated of national significance. However, as noted by Péter, its eighteenth-century collections have not been added to such general academic sources as the English Short Title Catalogue. This limits their overall visibility and the potential wider use of masonic texts. It is both a cause and result of the continuing lack of academic engagement with freemasonry in Britain. The publication of these volumes, will, it is hoped, raise the profile of this material.

In this context it is Volumes 4 and 5 of this series which may have the widest impact. Both volumes are edited by Róbert Péter. In Volume 4, *Debates*, he tackles the contrast between masonic idealism and practice. The criticism of freemasonry, where membership was open to those of all religions, by the Roman Catholic church has been extensively studied but here Péter also includes documents on the critical attitude of Protestant and Presbyterian bodies. Other texts give voice to individual freemasons whose views were opposed to governing masonic organisations. In the late eighteenth century George Smith

argued against the constitutional prohibition of women from membership of masonic lodges. Smith's essay is relevant not just to this debate within freemasonry but is also a contribution to evolution of attitudes about women's intellectual roles and capabilities in the eighteenth century. The development of strictures against excessive drinking and the proper management of lodge finances are not just internal matters but provide additional resources for studying the mentality of an emerging middle class.

The presence in Volume 5, *Representations*, of articles about freemasonry and the activity of masonic lodges taken from newspapers and magazines may seem an anachronism in this age of digitised newspapers. However, as Péter points out, their inclusion here overcomes gaps in the original source material and the limitations of search interfaces. Moreover the editor has added footnotes identifying many of the individuals and places concerned to provide context to the reports. Given the relative paucity of archive material for this period, newspaper reports often provide the only information on the involvement of certain political figures and the activities of lodges. More generally newspaper references shed light on freemasonry in the public sphere.

No review of this important publication could ignore the contribution of Jan A. M. Snoek, the leading historian of masonic ritual, who has edited Volume 2, *English, Irish and Scottish Craft Rituals*, and Volume 3, *Harodim Material and the Higher Degrees*, providing commentary on their evolution. These volumes are invaluable to students of masonic ritual but are of much broader interest to those interested in the development of language, the international transmission of ideas, publishing history and performance.

The widest possible use of these volumes is recommended.