

Book Review: Freemasonry: A History

By

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The opinions presented in this paper are strictly those of the author and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Master and Wardens of the A. Douglas Smith Jr., Lodge of Research #1949 or the official views of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Virginia.

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'Freemasonry: A History' Looks more like a coffee table book than a scholarly work of history. It being filled with over 150 colorful pictures of historic aprons, china, jewelry boxes, certificates, and Masonic artifacts excites the visual sense and invites the reader to at least read the captions if not explore the text. If one were to use this book to advertise your membership to casual visitors to your living room or kitchen, be advised that the pictures may solicit questions to which the text may provide but only a partial answer. This book although appearing to be a simple and a basic pictorial of Masonic history, is certainly not simple and assumes a relatively sophisticated and broad level of academic history of the Fraternity.

'Freemasonry: A History' covers the development of Freemasonry from the rituals and mythology of the stonemasons of the medieval period, through the creation of the Masonic Ritual of three degrees, the formation of grand Lodges, and the early Masonic personalities, to the explosion of mystical Masonic rituals and societies that appeared on the European continent during the eighteenth century.

Author Angel Millar also explores many fascinating and rarely discussed subjects, such as the self-proclaimed 'Masonic' society of the Strict Observance (claiming to descend from the Knights Templar), as well the Golden Rosicrucians (a now extinct society once exclusive to Freemasons), both of which held sway on the European continent in the eighteenth century.

There are two chapters dedicated to the 'higher degrees', one focusing on those obscure Masonic societies already mentioned, and the other on the adoption of rituals such as the Rose Croix degree

into the York and Scottish Rites. In the last chapter Millar discusses other mystical societies related in one way or another to Freemasonry, ranging from the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the to the Shriners.

This colorful book carefully studies the development of the most important Masonic rituals (e.g., the three degrees up to Master Mason and the Royal Arch). Millar quotes not only from old manuscripts, seventeenth and eighteenth century newspaper reports, the diary of English Freemason, Elias Ashmole, but also statements from the United Grand Lodge of England, and Masonic Ritual itself. Notable also, Millar discusses a number of theories of Masonic historians regarding, for example, the possibility of influences from Cabala, English mystic Robert Fludd, the Knights Templar, and alchemy.

Some specific topics with considerable text are as follows:

Miller spends an entire Chapter addressing the relationships of Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism: A discussion of the original Rosicrucian group in Germany and its possible link with, or influence on, Freemasonry. There are numerous quotes from seventeenth century reports of the supposed connection of the two societies.

A separate chapter is devoted to the founding of the first Grand Lodge and the official establishment of Freemasonry. The division of the ancients and moderns and the symbolism of the first three degrees of Freemasonry.

The Royal Art chapter explores the Royal Arch degree, as well as the possible

influences of the English mystic, Robert Fludd and the German astronomer, Kepler.

In Sum-this is not a scholarly piece of work, rather a book that quickly moves from subject to subject-posing as many questions for the reader as answers. But it does stimulate the visual sense with the colorful pictures of Masonic aprons, regalia, certificates, charters and china and can inspire one to further research on a broad range of subjects.

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