

## Review

# Jasper Ridley's *The Freemasons*

by Trevor W. McKeown

Jasper Ridley's *The Freemasons* is a well written, balanced history with none of the indignant apologetics of the masonic writer, nor the hysterical accusations of an anti-masonic screed. As an introduction to Freemasonry, it can be heartily recommended.

There are, unfortunately though, a number of errors which, while not affecting the overall value of the book, do affect its value as a reference text. The following list includes several which some readers might consider to be less errors than questions of interpretation. Perhaps the harshest criticism that can be made of Ridley's writing style is his use of absolute statements which, while in themselves are true, fail to acknowledge the sometimes contradictory reality.

**[p. 13.] "a new religious sect, which became known as the Rosicrucians, arose in Germany"**

While there were those writers who claimed to be rosicrucians, or were labeled rosicrucians, and others who wrote about Rosicrucianism, there is no documentation that any actual body or organization—much less a sect—actually existed until relatively recent times.

**[p. 14.] the candidate "agreed that if he broke his oath, it would be right to put him to death by cutting out his heart, liver and other entrails."**

A common misunderstanding, both among non-masons and freemasons, is the meaning of the physical penalties. Although different jurisdictions describe them in a variety of phrasings, all the penalties are preceded by the expression "under no less a penalty than...". The implication is that the actual penalty—the spiritual anguish of knowing that he has willfully perjured himself—is a greater penalty than any physical one could ever be.

**[p. 24.] "The Templars were found guilty of most of the crimes of which they were accused."**

It is not true that the Templars were found guilty as charged in 1312; Pope Clement V actually declared the charges not proven, but dissolved the Order because it had been brought into so much disrepute that it could not continue to operate.

**[p. 26.] "Knights Templars"**

Throughout the book, Ridley refers to the Knights Templar as "Knights Templars".

**[p. 56.] Coustos was sentenced to "serve for five years as a slave in the galleys."**

Coustos was sentenced to the galley—not galleys—in Lisbon for four years. The Galley was a docked ship used as a prison from which prisoners would be hired out as labourers for government or private projects.

**[p. 71.] "Originally there were three masonic degrees."**

Originally there were two masonic degrees.

**[p. 72.] "...there were 33 degrees to which a mason could be raised..."**

Ridley is unclear as to what bodies were conferring these degrees and when. The Scottish Rite system of 33 degrees was not developed until 1802 in Charleston, South Carolina. The expression "raised" is potentially misleading.

**[[p. 114.] "Adam Weishaupt, a Jew by race who had been baptized a Roman Catholic and had become the professor of canon law at the Roman Catholic university of Ingoldstadt in Bavaria...."**

Weishaupt's mother had converted to Catholicism to marry his father and he was raised as a Catholic. The expression "a Jew by race" is a controversial one. Weishaupt was appointed Professor of Natural and Canon Law.

**[p. 115.] "In his hasty flight he left his papers behind, and they were found and published by the government of Bavaria."**

Most information regarding the rituals and objectives of the order is derived from papers and correspondence found in a search of Xavier Zwack's residence in Landshut on October 11, 1786, and a search of Baron Bassus's castle of Sondersdorf in Bavaria in 1787—not from Weishaupt's papers.

**p. 116.] "Mrs. Nesta Webster, who in 1920 formed her organization, the British Fascists...."**

Ridley does not cite his source. Other sources describe her membership in the group and her writing for their newspaper but not her founding of the group.

**[p. 142.] "Barruel's book was not translated into English, but it formed the basis of a book in English by John Robison." (1797)**

Barruel's book was not the basis for Robison's. Robison began writing *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Freemasons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies* in 1795. The Abbé published the first two of his four volumes in 1797 and the last two in 1798. During the interval, Robison's book appeared. He issued an hurried third edition in 1798, citing, with some satisfaction, the Abbé's first two volumes in a postscript.

**[p. 179.] "...Chesebro and Sawyer then appeared, and they and Lawson forced the struggling Morgan to enter the carriage."**

Ridley fails to mention that Chesebro was county coroner and therefore authorized to serve arrest warrants; that, while in jail, Morgan was well provided with food and liquor through the night and following day and was drunk and argumentative when released into Chesebro's custody, precipitating the outcry of "murder!"; and that the arrival of John Whitney calmed down Morgan who then freely entered the carriage. At the insistence of Morgan, and with no attempt at secrecy—and in broad daylight—the procession of couriers, outriders, carriage and sulkey and other riders stopped at almost every tavern and inn enroute to the Niagara River.

**[p. 205.] "When the Grand Lodge of Grand Orient were informed...."**

Admittedly the history of Continental Freemasonry is complex, but Ridley doesn't always clearly distin-

guish between the Grand Orient and Grand Lodge of France.

**[p. 223.] "...Leo Taxil. He was a French Freemason...."**

He received his first degree and was expelled within the year, before he received his second. Technically this makes him a freemason under the Grand Orient system but to call him a freemason is disingenuous.

**[p. 226.] "In 1905 a Russian, Sergei Nilus, published a book in Russia, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion... he had written it himself.*"**

Sergei Nilus published the first public edition of the *Protocols*. The direct predecessor of the *Protocols* can be found in the pamphlet *Dialogues in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*, published by the non-Jewish French satirist Maurice Joly in 1864, although it appears that Joly plagiarized Eugène Sue's 1843 serialized novel, *Les Mysteres de Paris*. Paris agents of the Okhrana redacted the earlier works of Joly and Goedsche into a new edition which they called the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The manuscript of the *Protocols* was brought to Russia in 1895 and was printed privately in 1897.

**[p. 237.] "The South African Freemasons had never taken part in the struggle against apartheid...."**

They did lobby for, and secure exemption.

**[p. 253.] "A new theory has been put forward in Croatia...."**

Details of contemporary anti-masonry are ascribed to one Branko Markic but no information is supplied regarding his authority or citations.

**[p. 265.] "The murderer, who wrote taunting letters to the police signed 'Jack the Ripper' and claiming to be the murderer, killed five, or probably six, prostitutes in the very poor working-class district of Whitechapel in the East End of London, and disemboweled them in a manner not dissimilar from the form of killing referred to in the initiation proceedings in masonic lodges."**

Jack's victims were street-people living desperate lives under the worst of conditions; popularly called prostitutes, the term does not begin to describe them. Of the eleven Whitechapel murders, five, possibly six, are ascribed to the Ripper.

The disembowelments, as described in the coroners' reports, are not masonically significant.

**[p. 270.] "The P2 lodge of the Italian Grand Orient was founded by Lucio Gelli."**

In 1967, Bro. Licio (not Lucio) Gelli, who had been initiated into a lodge in Rome in 1965, was appointed master of P2 by the Grand Master of the day—he did not found the lodge. In 1877 the Grand Orient granted a warrant to a lodge in Rome called "Propaganda Massonica". When the Grand Orient was revived after the Second World War it was decided to number the lodges by drawing lots; Lodge Propaganda drew number two, thus it became P2.

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