Freemasonry & the Enlightenment. Architecture, Symbols, & Influences


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Abstract

This wide-ranging, thorough and superbly illustrated study of Freemasonry's influence on Western culture, especially in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, follows Professor Curl's previous book, The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry (1991), which was hailed at the time not only as "an immensely useful, and sane, introduction to a field often fraught with speculative sensationalism", but as "a mine of information", and one of the most "original and important" contributions towards a greater understanding of the Enlightenment published in recent times. It won the coveted Sir Banister Fletcher Award as Best Book of the Year in 1992. Now, building on his earlier work, Curl has hugely expanded his investigations, showing how aspects of Masonic ideas have permeated the design of buildings, parks, gardens, and cemeteries, as well as much else. His Glossary outlines some of the complex ideas and iconography of the Craft (notably the symbolic and moral significance of the Architect's and Mason's instruments and tools), and the extensive Bibliography contains an enormous amount of material to stimulate further research, not least into the curious phenomenon of antipathy towards Freemasonry by authoritarian closed minds and totalitarian bigots. The illustrations are exceptional, and are accompanied by detailed captions (themselves as illustrated history of elements found in Freemasonry). It is a curious fact that many historians have avoided Freemasonry through prejudice and timidity, but in this work Professor Curl has grasped the nettle, and shows there is a huge wealth of material available (much unaccountably hidden from view or deliberately ignored for reasons that defy analysis), some of which will whet the most jaded of appetites.

Freemasonry & the Enlightenment: Architecture, Symbols, & Influences. NX180 .F76 C874 2011 Art & Architecture Library (Bowes). Freemasonry & the Enlightenment: Architecture, Symbols, & Influences is an enriched and expanded development of an earlier work by the author, this book being prefaced by that other eminent British historian of Freemasonry, Andrew Prescott. After an elaborate and exceedingly up-to-date introduction to the complex history of the genesis and first steps of the organisation, Curl considers Masonic influence in iconography, architecture, garden design, tombs and music. As Freemasonry has borrowed a broad range of its symbols and images from other traditions, whether esoteric or not, one is always at risk of confusing different registers of meaning. Any study of the Enlightenment which fails to take Freemasonry into account must be regarded as having enormous lacunae, for it is obvious that the Enlightenment and the Craft were closely intertwined in Europe and the Americas for the best part of a century. Significant numbers of eminent figures of the 18th and early-19th centuries were Freemasons (think of Goethe, Haydn, Mozart, Voltaire, and Washington, for example), and it is impossible to delve into the vast ramifications of the Age of Reason without a consideration of the Craft (which was also immensely important in Georgian Britain).