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Steven C. Bullock. *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. xviii + 421 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2282-1.

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With exceptions such as Dorothy Ann Lipson's *Freemasonry in Federalist Connecticut* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), the work of historians in the last two decades has concentrated on the 1820s emergence of the "blessed spirit" of Antimasonry and its subsequent spread. Among others, Ronald P. Formisano, Paul Goodman, Kathleen S. Kutolowski, and William P. Vaughn have contributed to our understanding of that political movement. *Revolutionary Brotherhood* shifts our attention to Freemasonry itself and provides a much-needed scholarly survey of the American Masonic experience from its colonial beginnings, through Masonry's republican transformation and the later Antimasonic upheaval, and, briefly, to the subsequent reemergence of the chastened fraternity as a benign expression of, even a prototype for, the fraternal enthusiasm of the later nineteenth century. Drawing on contemporary manuscripts, newspapers, pamphlets, on Masonic sermons, orations, and lodge records, and on the rich store of writings by Masonic historians and antiquarians, Steven C. Bullock has sought to distill the manner in which Masonry reflected fundamental changes in American culture and politics.

Modern "speculative" Masonry built on the rituals of "operative" Masonry, the rites of passage celebrated by the artisans whose craft had left monuments that suggested permanence, ancient order and wisdom to men of the early eighteenth century. Led by members of the English elite or men close to them, the speculative brothers freely elaborated craft rituals to suggest that they had uncovered secret pathways to ancient knowledge and pure religion. Keeping within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy, as Bullock points out, they emphasized Biblical beginnings rather than the hermetic traditions of learned magic in general and alchemy in particular. This early Freemasonry served to bolster social order, urbanity, and general piety in an England uncomfortable with the memory of sixteenth-century upheavals.

In this form, Freemasonry by the late 1730s haphazardly made its way across the Atlantic to the American provinces, where seaboard mercantile and professional leaders used it as a vehicle through which they could publicly express their superiority, unity, and cosmopolitan ties to gentility and enlightenment. Yet twenty years later this expression of American Masonry began to succumb to a movement begun in Britain and in no small measure the handiwork of men standing outside the existing lodges' social pale. The "new" men of this forceful upwelling called their order "Ancient," defined it as pure, and affixed the label "Modern" to their beleaguered opponents, who could only win acceptance after "healing" by Ancients. Making its way across the Atlantic, Ancient Masonry developed rapidly, drawing heavily on coastal artisans and interior elites who, to establish their prestige, capitalized on the images of the older vein of Masonry.

Bullock explores the ways in which revitalized Masonry resonated with the republican Revolution that gave birth to the United States. Officers of the Continental Army flocked to Masonry; it helped to provide them with confidence in their status and to ensure conviviality among them. More broadly, the fraternity came to embody and to build on dynamic tensions in the new nation: on the one hand, appreciation for the opportunities opened to all free men in a society without a formal aristocracy and, on the other, the growing presumption that the processes of that society could generate an elite characterized by virtue and talent, a natural aristocracy. Led by men such as De Witt Clinton, Masonry promised a patriciate that would behave benevolently, with Christian charity, never exploiting fraternal ties selfishly. Within Masonry the religious texture of ritual grew richer and more extensive; Masons now sanctified churches by lay-

ing their cornerstones.

Membership nevertheless served to give personal advantages in an expanding, increasingly mobile, and market-oriented society in which face-to-face knowledge diminished. Bullock shows that, even as Masonry served that purpose, it assumed the character of an emotionally charged, sacred enterprise, into which a man could retreat from the harsh realities of the "world," his character refined as he grew in Masonic devotion and in knowledge of Masonic mystery. Simultaneously worldly and unworldly, Masonry, Bullock reveals, reflected and embodied the tangled uncertainties of the men of the new republic. The sacralization of the elite fraternity endangered rather than protected it, however. Bullock argues that "from the perspective of the attempt to purify and reshape American society in the 1820s, Masonry's tensions seemed, not a creative attempt to deal with the cross purposes of its culture, but an attempt to deceive the public: another example of the hypocritical visible front hiding true inward identity" (273). Profane deeds following the 1826 murder of a discontented brother, William Morgan of Batavia, New York, revealed Masonry as a whited sepulcher, a fit target for the democratizing ethos that lent fuel to contemporary revivalists: "seeing Masonry as a microcosm of society's worst elements, Antimasons challenged not just the fraternity but the larger post-Revolutionary order it had come to represent" (294-95).

No doubt there is truth in this, but it is appropriate to expect a more probing and precise assessment of the manner in which Masonry engendered Antimasonry. For example, if sacralized Masonry offered a retreat from the world, it competed not only with what Jon Butler has termed "Christianity's pursuit of institutional power and authority" (*Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990], p. 257): Masonry necessarily competed with the home as the center of women's sphere, the place in which women had a hand in forging the American middle class. Lipson emphasized women's antipathy to Masonry, and the research of Alan Taylor, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and James D. Folts shows that women of the period could act forcefully to establish their spiritual authority. Much of the public opinion that opposed Masonry may have been hammered out in the home, making letters between women and women's diaries, so important to Nancy F. Cott's exploration of sisterhood, part of the social record of Masonry.

Bullock, moreover, does not address the relationship of nineteenth-century Masonry and Mormonism, an important omission given the occult strains in American life presented by Taylor, Butler, and more recently by John L. Brooke in *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Brooke frames the problem broadly: "if the treasure-diviners of the early Republic drew upon a German lore of magic and metals, and perhaps upon a thin vein of alchemical analogy and practice running from English radical traditions, a revitalized hermeticism was flowing from an increasingly dense network of Masonic orders and from a broader revival of the occult that was beginning to shape the Romantic and Gothic sensibility" (93). We need to learn if the spirit and fabric of Masonry fostered hermeticism and the occult; that could comment on the relationship between republicanism and popular culture.

Such reservations, however, do not deny that Bullock has provided a careful survey of early Masonic development and, in particular, valuable insight into Masonry's responses to rapid change in the early republic. His work should remain a vital part of the literature.

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