
Although masonic historiography has soared in the last fifty years, the interaction with women’s studies has only just started. Even if the presence of women was acknowledged, thanks to the pioneer work produced by Le Forestier and later Françoise Jupeau-Requillard and Gisèle & Yves Yvert-Messeca, women’s agency as such has only become an issue recently, following the seminal studies by Alexandra Heidle and Jan Snoek’s *Women’s Agency and Rituals in Mixed and Female Orders* (Leiden: Brill 2008), Maïre Fedelma Cross’s *Gender and Fraternal Orders in Europe, 1300–2000* (a collective work, Chippenham and Eastbourne: Palgrave Macmillan 2010) as well as Margaret Jacob and Janet Burke’s articles (recently collected in *Les Premières franc-maçonnes*, Bordeaux: PUB 2010).

In 2010 the Bordeaux symposium on the history of women and freemasonry since the Enlightenment revealed the scope of the field now open to scholars as more than fifty papers were devoted to the issue and recently published (Cécile Révauger and Jacques C. Lemaire, *Les Femmes et la franc-maçonnerie des Lumières à nos jours, La Pensée et les Hommes*, [Bruxelles, 2011 & 2012, 2 vol.]). Yet in spite of major progress in the historiography of women and freemasonry, a gap remained, which Jan Snoek’s new book has just bridged: no study had been exclusively devoted to the Adoption Rite as such. The scientific quality of the work is impeccable. The author wanted to test the theory of “transfer of ritual” which he formulated within the research programme on “Ritual Dynamics” initiated at the University of Heidelberg by the German Research Foundation (DFG). He benefited from the recent restitution of the Moscow archives (the French Masonic archives seized by the Nazis and recovered by the Soviet army at the end of World War II) to the French masonic bodies, the Grand Orient de France and the Grande Loge de France. As the French adoption lodges were successively affiliated to the two bodies those archives were essential. Furthermore, Jan Snoek was able to collect data from the Masonic Fund of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, from the main European masonic libraries as well as from private archives such as the minutes of the only lodge which still practises the Adoption Rite today, the Cosmos Lodge in Paris. Indeed, contrary to the other studies devoted to the adoption lodges, Jan Snoek’s work does not examine the eighteenth century only—although the bulk of the adoption lodges belong to the age of the Enlightenment—but covers the whole range of lodges, some of them extant in the twentieth century and one in the twenty-first century (Cosmos).

As the author argues in favour of the “transfer of ritual” theory he successfully shows the impact of the Adoption Rite in the Netherlands, France, and more marginally, Germany and Denmark and Sweden. He also endeavours to
Jan Snoek’s book helps discard a certain number of prejudices concerning Adoption lodges: the fact that they were exclusively French (although French lodges represented the vast majority, some European examples have recently been uncovered), that they came to an end with the French Revolution (Yvert Messeca and Jupeau Requillard had proved that a new, allegedly different form of Adoption lodges emerged in the nineteenth century in France but Snoek provides evidence stemming from the rituals themselves), and most of all that the “sisters” were under the absolute control of “brothers” within the lodges. No scientific study had so far been devoted to the twentieth-century adoption lodges who worked under the aegis of the Grande Loge de France and were the ancestors of the current Grande Loge Féminine de France, namely the two lodges called Le Libre Examen and Nouvelle Jérusalem.

Jan Snoek’s major achievement has been to take stock of all the existing rituals of adoption and thus show their incredible wealth, not only in terms of numbers but also in quality. Snoek has successfully highlighted the dynamism and evolution of those rituals and so doing has proved that the women themselves transformed those rituals and repeatedly enriched them. He carefully identified all those rituals, to undertake a minute analysis and was the first to classify them in different families. The classification rests on the basis of ‘the presence or absence of a number of distinct features in the questions and answers from the catechisms of the first three degrees’ (see Appendix F). Thus Snoek has established distinctions between categories of rituals which he has named as ‘the Clermont Family’, the ‘Guillemain de Saint Victor Sub-Family’, ‘The Grand Orient Family’ and ‘mixed families’. All in all, he has examined the rituals reproduced in over a hundred and thirty manuscripts.

Jan Snoek’s work is really a landmark in the history of women’s agency in freemasonry as it will now allow world scholars to rest their case on asserted facts. Contrary to what generations of historians of masonry—French for the most part—have repeated, namely that adoption lodges were sub-lodges, meant to compensate frustrated sisters who had failed to enter men’s lodges, evidence of the contrary has now emerged: the men and women who worked in those