

James Anderson and the 1723 *Constitutions of the Free-Masons*
With a Theory Regarding Freemasonry and Religion

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of the origins of Freemasonry is one that has been debated, pondered, and argued for many years. But while the origins are obscure, there is a time on which all agree as a modern starting point—the founding of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717. It is generally agreed that from this grand lodge Masonry spread throughout the world, and in the beginning, that expansion was facilitated by James Anderson’s 1723 *Constitutions*, the “Grand Lodge’s first attempt to define its organizational character and construct a meaningful history for itself.”¹ This paper critiques that history in light of Anderson’s situation and the time in which he wrote. At the end is a section regarding Freemasonry and religion, relating modern tensions between Freemasonry and established religion directly to Anderson’s *Constitutions*.

Background of Freemasonry

Many volumes have been written about the origins of Freemasonry, with as many differing opinions and theories. While that is out of the scope of this paper, I will simply relate the most popular and *probable*—that Modern Freemasonry (termed *speculative Masonry*) evolved out of the craft guilds of the late Middle Ages (*operative Masonry*). Certainly the organizational structure, ritual, and symbols of Freemasonry draw from that source. By the late 17th Century, lodges of operative stonemasons, firstly in Scotland, began accepting as members men of nobility and others who were not practicing

¹Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 53-54.

stonemasons.² In 1717, four lodges in London joined together, forming the Premier Grand Lodge of England, now considered the “Mother Grand Lodge” of the world.³ That status is because it was the first of its kind, and also because, theoretically, every other Grand Lodge received dispensation (or at least recognition) from the Grand Lodge of England in order to form.⁴

James Anderson’s *Constitutions*

The Reverend James Anderson was commissioned to write *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons* on September 29, 1721, by the Grand Lodge under the leadership of Grand Master Montagu, and he presented his work on December 27 the same year.⁵ These *Constitutions* have been hailed as “the most influential work on Masonry ever printed,”⁶ and the 1734 edition, edited and published by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia, is seen as “the seminal work of American Masonry.”⁷ Both the 1723 edition

²David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland’s Century 1590-1710* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988; paperback 1990), 229.

³This body was first styled the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster.

⁴This includes Grand Lodges in the United States, which each trace their roots to England. That U.S. Grand Lodges exist in every state, not just one for the whole nation as is the case in other countries, reflects the idea of state sovereignty. The Grand Lodge of England was the first such body in the modern period. The possible existence of earlier *grand* bodies is a matter of historical interest.

⁵David Stevenson, “James Anderson: Man & Mason,” *Heredom: The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society* 10 (2002): 102.

⁶Wallace McLeod, *The Grand Design: Selected Masonic Addresses and Papers of Wallace McLeod* (Highland Springs, Virginia: Anchor Communications, 1991), 32.

⁷Paul Royster, Introduction to *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons: Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, &c. of that Most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity*, by James Anderson, ed. Benjamin Franklin (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin, 1734; repr. Lincoln, Nebraska: The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries Office of Scholarly Communication, 2008). I am using Franklin’s edition, and quotes from Anderson in this essay are from that edition. Franklin’s edition is a “fairly faithful reprinting of the London original,” omitting only musical scores, the engraved frontispiece, and some Hebrew type (cf. Royster’s “Editorial Note”).

and Anderson's later 1738 edition were significant in forming eighteenth-century Freemasonry, and were translated into many languages, including Dutch (1736), German (1741), and French (1745).⁸

James Anderson's *Constitutions* have been immensely important for Freemasonry, setting the standard for British Freemasonry for almost a century, and providing a sort of template for later constitutions of many Grand Lodges.⁹ They were not very historically accurate, but the modern reader must consider Anderson's purpose in writing them, the nature of history writing at the time they were written, and Anderson's perspective. Perhaps the most significant impact which Anderson's *Constitutions* have left on the world is in the realm of the relationship between Freemasonry and religion.

JAMES ANDERSON

James Anderson was born in 1679 in Aberdeen, Scotland. He attended Marischal College in Aberdeen, graduating with a Master of Arts in 1698. He received his ordination in 1702 and probably travelled to London as the private chaplain of a Scottish noble after the parliamentary union in 1707. He married an English widow and settled as a Presbyterian minister in London. Not much is known of his ministry, as the information comes only from his published sermons. It is known from those sermons that he tried hard to avoid getting caught up in the religious and political conflicts of his day.¹⁰

⁸Stevenson, *The Origins*, 231; Royster, "Editorial Note" in *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons*.

⁹Stevenson, "James Anderson," 93.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 95-97.

Because he stayed out of political and religious arguments, some even in his own denomination were hostile to him.¹¹ An important aspect of Anderson which can be seen in his sermons is that he “denounced the tendency...to see God as a figure distant from daily life”¹²—a tendency promulgated by Enlightenment rationalism. This is significant when we consider the relationship between Freemasonry and religion.

Anderson was interested in antiquarian research all his life; however it is unknown how the Grand Lodge had learned of his expertise.¹³ Anderson completed the *Constitutions* within three months of his commission, which may be evidence that he had already started work on them. Only a few glimpses of his later life are available. Marischal College gave him a doctor of divinity degree in 1731. He occasionally attended Grand Lodge meetings in the 1730s, and continued to publish sermons. In 1733 he wrote a treatise supporting the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁴ His later work consisted primarily of genealogy, including one publication for which he received a £200 gift from the queen. In 1738 he published a second edition of the *Constitutions*, much longer and more comprehensive than the first. He died in May, 1739.¹⁵

James Anderson was an “outsider” when compared to the typical Grand Lodge member at that time. He was a Non-Conformist minister (not conforming to the Church of England) and he was Scottish. These things may seem trivial now, but in early 18th Century London they would have been cause for controversy. During the revolution of

¹¹Ibid., 99.

¹²Stevenson, “James Anderson,” 97.

¹³Ibid., 99, 101.

¹⁴Ibid., 122-123.

¹⁵Ibid., 129.

1688 King James II was ousted and replaced by William and Mary, supposedly to protect Britain from Catholicism and absolutism. Because the Scots would not accept the Church of England, in 1690 the king allowed the Church of Scotland to be Presbyterian. This caused quite a bit of controversy and political and religious unrest in and around the city of London, where Anderson ended up.

It is significant that the compilation of the *Constitutions* was assigned to a Scot.¹⁶ But the Grand Lodge at the time was but a microcosm of the dissent and unrest in the society as a whole at the time.¹⁷ The *Constitutions* were written to unite members of that organization, in a time when British society in general, and especially in the city of London, was very divisive.

THE CONSTITUTIONS OF 1723

In creating this work, James Anderson compiled parts of “Records of Lodges beyond Sea, and of those in England, Scotland and Ireland, for the Use of the Lodges in London.”¹⁸ These records (known as the *Gothic Constitutions* and the *Old Charges*) were manuscript regulations from various Masonic lodges, mainly in the British Isles but also

¹⁶David Stevenson, a Scottish historian, uses this as one piece of evidence pointing to a Scottish origin for modern Freemasonry, as opposed to the generally accepted English origin theory. It should be noted that one of the main reasons for the acceptance, even today, of the theory of English origin is the perpetuation of the story of the history of Masonry given in the Old Charges—perpetuated by Anderson in his *Constitutions*. See also Margaret C. Jacob, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Facts and Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), chapters 1-3, for a more recent account.

¹⁷For an extensive account of the Grand Lodge at the time, and all the political trappings within it, see David Stevenson, “James Anderson: Man & Mason,” *Heredom: The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society* 10 (2002): 93-138.

¹⁸James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons: Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, &c. of that Most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity*, ed. Benjamin Franklin (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin, 1734; repr. Lincoln, Nebraska: The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries Office of Scholarly Communication, 2008), 47. All italics, capitalizations, and spellings are according to Franklin’s edition.

Germany, Boston and Philadelphia, which had been in existence prior to the founding of the Grand Lodge in 1717 (dating as early as 1583, 1400, and 1390).¹⁹ The Constitutions include a 40-page History of Freemasonry, Laws, Charges, Orders, General Regulations, and Usages (including procedures for chartering a new lodge, instructions for behavior in a lodge room, etc.). This essay focuses on the history section.

Content

The purposes behind the history section of the *Constitutions* are laid out in the dedication, which was written by the Deputy Grand Master, Rev. John Theophilus Desaguliers, to the Grand Master who ordered the *Constitutions*.²⁰ According to the dedication, Anderson “compiled and digested” the information from the “old Records.” He “made everything agreeable to history and chronology” to give an “exact account of Masonry from the beginning of the world.” The idea was to present Freemasonry as having ancient roots and as a thread throughout all of (relevant) history up to the present.²¹

The bulk of the content was written as a history of what Anderson referred to as the *Science* (geometry) and the *Art* (Masonry). Starting with Adam, not unusual for an historian in his time, Anderson attempted to trace through history the use and proponents of the Royal Art (i.e. Masonry). His first paragraph provides a nice summary of the point he tried to convey:

¹⁹McLeod, 33.

²⁰The dedication is included in an appendix to this essay.

²¹John Theophilus Desaguliers, dedication of *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons*.

Adam, our first Parent, created after the Image of God, *the great Architect of the Universe*, must have had the Liberal Sciences, particularly *Geometry*, written on his Heart; for even since the Fall, we find the Principles of it in the hearts of his Offspring, and which, in process of time, have been drawn forth into a convenient Method of *Propositions*, by observing the Laws of *Proportion* taken from *Mechanism*: So that as the *Mechanical Arts* gave Occasion to the Learned to reduce the Elements of *Geometry* into Method, this noble Science thus reduc'd, is the Foundation of all those Arts, (particularly of *Masonry* and *Architecture*) and the Rule by which they are conducted and performed.²²

So beginning with Adam, knowledge of geometry/Masonry passed through successive generations through to the present (the time at which Anderson was writing).

Adam passed the “knowledge” of geometry to his sons Cain and Seth. Anderson obviously took the ideas about Cain’s progeny and their type of work or trade directly from the book of Genesis.²³ Noah, descendant of Seth, then built the famous Ark, “which, tho’ of Wood, was certainly fabricated by *Geometry*, and according to the Rules of *Masonry*.”²⁴ Anderson refers to Noah and sons as “*Masons true*,” whose offspring were employed to build the Tower of Babel.²⁵ After the dispersion which God caused because of the Tower of Babel incident, they took their knowledge of geometry and Masonry with them.²⁶ “And tho’ afterwards it was lost in most parts of the Earth, it was especially preserv’d in *Shinar* and *Assyria*,”²⁷ where Nimrod built the Babylonian and Assyrian kingdoms.

²²Anderson, 7-8.

²³Genesis 4:20-22.

²⁴Anderson, 9.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

In these parts, upon the Tygris and Euphrates, afterwards flourish'd many learned priests and mathematicians, known by the name of Chaldees and Magi, who preserv'd the good science, Geometry, as the kings and great men encourag'd the Royal Art.²⁸

While he obviously stretched things a bit, we cannot say that Anderson was not historically informed for his day.

The early “taste and genius” of Egypt was supposedly due to Mitzraim, one of the grandsons of Noah, via Ham, who brought the Royal Art down to Egypt. The other sons of Ham—Cush, Fez (Phut), and Canaan—were also good builders. The sons of Canaan merit a special mention, because their walled cities were so fortified, “that without the immediate intervention of God in behalf of his peculiar people, the Canaanites were impregnable and invincible.”²⁹

Like a typical product of the Judeo-Christian tradition, Anderson spent many pages focusing on the “Holy branch of Shem.”³⁰ For, according to Anderson’s version, Abraham had learned the “arts of Assyria”, including geometry “and the arts that are performed by it,” in Ur, and then transmitted them to his sons and grandsons.³¹ Anderson also noted that “the Jews believe that Abram also instructed the Egyptians in the Assyrian Learning.”³² Very interesting is the paragraph which serves to explain the transition between the tent-dwelling nomads who wandered the desert to the sedentary Israelites

²⁸Ibid., 10.

²⁹Anderson, 11.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., 12.

who built the Temple of Solomon, the most significant architectural achievement from the perspective of Freemasonry:

Indeed, the select Family long used *Military Architecture* only, as they were Sojourners among Strangers; but before the 430 years of their Peregrination were expired, even about 86 years before their Exodus, the kings of Egypt forc'd most of them to lay down their Shepherds Instruments, and Warlike Accoutrements, and train'd them to another sort of Architecture in Stone and Brick, as holy Writ, and other Histories, acquaint us; which God did wisely over-rule, in order to make them good *Masons* before they possess'd the promis'd land, then famous for curious *Masonry*.³³

Finishing the lead-up to Solomon's Temple, Anderson mentioned the Tabernacle built by Bezaleel and Aholiab (which provided a model of Solomon's Temple) under Moses the "General Master-Mason."³⁴

So that the Israelites, at their leaving Egypt, were a whole Kingdom of *Masons*, well instructed, under the Conduct of their Grand Master Moses, who often marshall'd them into a regular and general Lodge, while in the Wilderness, and gave them wise *Charges, Orders, &c.* had they been well observ'd!³⁵

Following a generous description of the building of King Solomon's Temple, "by far the finest piece of *Masonry* upon Earth before or since,"³⁶ Anderson gave another summary statement imbedded in the text:

...however ambitious the Heathen were in cultivating of the Royal Art, it was never perfected, until God condescended to instruct his *peculiar people* in rearing the above-mention'd stately *Tent* [the Tabernacle], and in building at length this gorgeous *House* [Solomon's Temple], fit for the special Refulgence of his Glory...³⁷

³³Anderson, 12.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid, 16.

³⁷Ibid, 17.

It followed that “the wise King Solomon was Grand Master of the Lodge at Jerusalem, and the learned King Hiram was Grand Master of the Lodge at Tyre, and the inspired Hiram Abif was Master of Work.”³⁸ The Temple was so impressive that it attracted “inquisitive artists of all nations” who “corrected the architecture of their own country upon their return.”³⁹ Thus, and because many of the artists employed for work on the Temple were foreigners, “*Masonry* was improv’d in all the neighbouring nations,”⁴⁰ and many kings and other rulers became Grand Masters.

Nebuchadnezzar is referred to as a Grand Master-Mason because of his building endeavors in Babylon.⁴¹ And because of those endeavors, the Jews captive under Nebuchadnezzar retained their skill in Masonry, so that, under Cyrus and led by Zerubbabel, they were capable of building the second temple. This second temple, although not quite the quality of Solomon’s, because it was built on the same foundation “was still the most regular, symmetrical, and glorious edifice in the whole world, as the enemies of the Jews have often testified and acknowledg’d.”⁴²

The Greeks received the Royal Art from Assyria, but had somehow lost it over time:

The Grecians having been long degenerated into Barbarity, forgetting their original skill in Masonry, (which their Fore-Fathers) brought from Assyria) by their frequent Mixtures with other barbarous nations, their

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Anderson, 17.

⁴⁰Ibid. Anderson specifically mentioned the Temple of Diana at Ephesus as having been influenced by the Temple in Jerusalem.

⁴¹Anderson, 18.

⁴²Ibid., 21.

mutual invasions, and wasting bloody wars; until by travelling and corresponding with the *Asiatics* and *Egyptians*, they reviv'd their knowledge in Geometry and Masonry both, though few of the Grecians had the Honour to own it.⁴³

Again they received it, but all their great architectural achievements were built after Solomon's Temple—and many of them after that of Zerubbabel—and therefore must have (in the mind of Anderson) taken ideas from it. After Pythagoras the Greeks improved the Royal Art, and reduced the elements of geometry to the use of the “mechanical Arts.”⁴⁴ At this point Anderson makes another link, showing Masonry as a common thread between the ancient Mesopotamians and the Classical Greeks:

Pythagorus travell'd into Egypt the year that Thales [of Miletus] dy'd, and living there among the priests 22 years became expert in Geometry and in all the Egyptian Learning, until he was captivated by Cambyses King of Persia, and sent to Babylon, where he was much conversant with the Chaldean Magi, and the learned Babylonish Jews, from whom he borrow'd great Knowledge, that render'd him very famous in Greece and Italy, where afterwards he flourish'd and dy'd; when Mordecai was the prime Minister of State to Ahasuerus King of Persia, and ten years after Zerubbabel's Temple was finish'd.⁴⁵

Many other learned philosophers arose in Greece, including Euclid, who gathered up the scattered elements of geometry, including the 47th Problem, “which, if duly observ'd, is the Foundation of all Masonry, sacred, civil, and Military.”⁴⁶

And as the noble Science came to be more methodically taught, the *Royal Art* was more generally esteem'd and improv'd among the Grecians, who at length arriv'd to the same Skill and Magnificence in it with their Teachers the *Asiatics* and *Egyptians*.⁴⁷

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Anderson, 23.

⁴⁵Ibid, 22.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., 23.

Eventually the Romans learned the science and the art from those who they conquered, “and like wise men, led captive, not the body of the people, but the Arts and Sciences, with the most eminent Professors and Practitioners to Rome; which thus became the *Center of Learning*.”⁴⁸ Augustus Caesar encouraged Masonry, particularly Vitruvius, “the Father of all true Architects to this Day”:⁴⁹

Therefore it is rationally believ'd that the glorious Augustus became the *Grand-Master* of the Lodge at *Rome*, having, besides his patronizing *Vitruvius*, much promoted the Welfare of the *Fellow-Craftsmen*, as appears by the many magnificent Buildings of his Reign, the Remains of which are the Pattern and Standard of *true Masonry* in all future Times, as they are indeed an Epitome of the *Asiatic, Egyptian, Grecian and Sicilian* Architecture, which we often express by the Name of the *Augustan Stile* [Style], and which we are now only endeavoring to imitate, and have not yet arriv'd to its Perfection.⁵⁰

Masonry flourished in Rome such that there was a lodge attached to almost every Roman garrison.⁵¹ Because of the far-reaching influence of the Roman Empire, neighboring territories and conquered peoples learned to imitate the Roman styles of architecture. Masonry's prosperity during the Roman Empire came to an end with the invasions by the Goths and Vandals, similar to the end of Masonry in the Near East and Africa at the hand of the Muslims.⁵²

Early British history included lamentation over the loss of Roman Masonry and a stagnation of Masonry because of war:

⁴⁸Anderson, 24-25.

⁴⁹Ibid., 25.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., 27.

⁵²Ibid.

Thus, upon the declension of the *Roman Empire*, when the *British Garrisons* were drain'd, the Angles & other lower Saxons, invited by the ancient Britons to come over and help them against the Scots and Picts, at length subdu'd the South Part of this island, which they call'd *England*, or Land of the Angles; who being a-kin to the *Goths*, or rather a sort of *Vandals*, of the same warlike Disposition, and as ignorant Heathens, encourag'd nothing but War, till they became Christians; and then too late lamented the Ignorance of their Fathers in the great Loss of *Roman Masonry*, but knew not how to repair it.⁵³

But soon the British began to adopt Masonry, both from the traditions of the Britons and from foreign leaders such as Charles Martell, who sent Masons to Britain.⁵⁴ Although the Viking invasions caused a loss of many records, they did not hold back the “good work” (i.e. Masonry).⁵⁵ William the Conqueror and his son King William Rufus (who built Westminster Hall) encouraged Gothic Masonry.⁵⁶ King Edward III employed an officer called the King's Free-Mason, who oversaw the building of several abbeys, along with St. Stephens Chapel at Westminster.⁵⁷

Anderson cites “Records and Traditions” as evidence that the Kings of Scotland generally encouraged the Royal Art. The Nobility, Gentry and Clergy of Scotland had always cooperated in Masonry. The strength of Masonry in Scotland benefitted England, preserving it while Queen Elizabeth discouraged it. However, James VI of Scotland, referred to by Anderson as a Mason King, upon succeeding to the English throne, revived Masonry in England. The first king of Great Britain, he was also the first to recover

⁵³Anderson, 28.

⁵⁴Ibid., 28-29.

⁵⁵Ibid., 29.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

Roman Architecture from “the Ruins of *Gothic Ignorance*,”⁵⁸ and he patronized the great architect Inigo Jones, whom Anderson calls “our great *Master-Mason*.”⁵⁹ Charles I, the son of James the VI/I also patronized Inigo Jones and saw Masonry through the period of civil war in the early 17th century.⁶⁰

Charles II is the first person in the text referred to as an “*Accepted Free-Mason*.”⁶¹ What the term means in this context is not understood completely. It makes sense that the king was not an operative Mason, but why then did Anderson not apply the term to any earlier rulers? Under James II, Masonry dwindled, but after the Revolution of 1688, King William sponsored many works of architecture (and was “reckon’d a *Free-Mason*”).⁶²

In a final summary paragraph the reader is reminded of the historical extent of Masonry:

In short, it would require many large volumes to contain the many splendid instances of they mighty influence of Masonry from the creation, in every age, and in every nation, as could be collected from Historians and Travellers: but especially in those parts of the world where the Europeans correspond and trade, such remains of ancient, large, curious, and magnificent colonading, have been discover’d by the inquisitive, that they can’t enough lament the general devastations of the Goths and Mahometans; and must conclude, that no other art, was ever so much encourag’d as this; as indeed none other is so extensively useful to mankind.⁶³

⁵⁸Ibid., 35.

⁵⁹Ibid., 36.

⁶⁰Anderson, 36. Anderson made no mention of Cromwell.

⁶¹Ibid., 37.

⁶²Ibid., 37-39.

⁶³Ibid., 41-42.

This is followed by a few more paragraphs illustrating how the (then) current Grand Lodge officers represent the pinnacle of this long line of respectable Masons throughout history. One of Anderson's points seems to have been that all good leaders and rulers throughout history (particularly English history) were operative Masons or were intimately involved with them.

HISTORICITY

As with any historian doing work regarding an organization to which they belong (e.g. church historians, state historians), Anderson, as a Freemason, was influenced by Freemasonry. While today we would question his methods when he ascribed attributes and Masonic titles to certain Old Testament characters, at that time it was not unheard of to embellish one's own family history, or that of other organizations. It was not until the so-called "Realistic School", a group of British Masonic historians in the 19th Century who were the first to question Anderson, that modern scholarship was applied to the history of Freemasonry.⁶⁴

Although the text in general is nearly historically worthless, as it merely copies Biblical material and highlights of British history with the rude and blatantly superficial addition of Masonic ideas, there are certain areas where Anderson shows the marks of a good historian. There is evidence in the text that he was making an effort to strive for good historical work:

...the old Constitutions in England have been much interpolate, mangled, and miserably corrupted, not only with false spelling, but even with many

⁶⁴William Preston Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party in the United States 1826-1843* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 10.

false facts and gross errors in history and chronology, through length of time and the ignorance of transcribers, in the dark illiterate ages...⁶⁵

He used footnotes throughout, to allow the reader smooth reading of the main text.⁶⁶ For example, a footnote about the Biblical character Nimrod:

Nimrod, which signifies Rebel, was the Name given him by the holy Family, and by Moses; but among his Friends in Chaldea, his proper Name was Belus, which signifies Lord, and afterwards was worshipped as a god by many Nations, under the Name of Bel or Baal, and became the Bacchus of the Ancients, or Bar Chus, the Son of Chus.⁶⁷

He attempted to reconcile differences in sources.⁶⁸ He gave parenthetical remarks.⁶⁹ He admitted areas in which he had a lack of historical knowledge.⁷⁰ He argued with his sources. He accepted the possibility of “a Mistake in Transcribers,” and in one instance gave a transliteration of a Hebrew phrase.⁷¹ He also mentioned gaps in the historical record.⁷²

We cannot fault Anderson for using the Biblical record as an unquestionable historical source, as that was the norm for Anderson’s day. Even in the light of Enlightenment Biblical criticism, it can be said that Anderson used the Bible to appeal to people’s familiarity with it, especially if one of his goals was to demonstrate the qualities

⁶⁵Anderson, 78.

⁶⁶There is some indication that Anderson may have had help from another person with some of the footnotes. This distinction is given by some scholars to J. T. Desaguliers.

⁶⁷Anderson, 9.

⁶⁸e.g., in a footnote he tried to explain a difference in the number of workers in I Kings 5:16 and II Chronicles 2:18, 13.

⁶⁹e.g., that Egypt is *Mitzraim* in Hebrew, 10.

⁷⁰e.g., about the posterity of Japheth, the brother of Shem and Ham, 11.

⁷¹Regarding the translation of the name of Hiram Abiff, 14-16.

⁷²Anderson, 24, 27.

of a good Mason.⁷³ However, where he doesn't have the Old Testament as a basis, his historical knowledge is lacking; and although presumably he used a multitude of sources, he did not cite them specifically. Nevertheless, he did present excerpts of some relevant documents.⁷⁴ When writing of recent British history, especially the Statutes for Laborers (concerning labor unions), he provided worthwhile commentary.⁷⁵

He used dates in the margins of the text giving both Anno Mundi and Before Christ. He did acknowledge the uncertainty of dating systems at his time, and explicitly does not regard "uncertain accounts."⁷⁶ Anderson acknowledged that the Great Pyramid was built "long before the Israelites were a People."⁷⁷ Even when talking about Pythagoras, he used the Bible for chronological reference.⁷⁸

There are a few instances where Anderson adds what I believe are *teasers* for non-Masons who may have read the text. One reads, "It is not expedient to speak more plain of the premises, except in a *formed Lodge*."⁷⁹

Anderson was given the task of perusing, correcting and digesting existing records and documents into a "new and better method." His purpose was to unite the Grand Lodge which had just been formed—to give them legitimacy and an impressive

⁷³e.g., Sampson cannot have been a Mason because he revealed his secrets to his wife, 13.

⁷⁴A record of Freemasons from the reign of Edward IV, 30-31; a judicial opinion relating to the legality of certain Statutes of Laborers, 57. Anderson also questioned the historicity of the History of Semiramis, 24.

⁷⁵Anderson, 33.

⁷⁶Ibid., 8.

⁷⁷Ibid., 10.

⁷⁸Ibid., 22.

⁷⁹Ibid., 10; also 12, 13.

heritage which would attract new members of high social status. He met that goal. He probably knew that what he was writing was not a genuine account, but included allegory to authentic history. He was possibly alluding to the transition from operative to speculative Masonry in England and Scotland when he noted that “the *Noble* and the *Wise* thought it their Honour to be assisting to the ingenious *Masters* and *Craftsmen*” at the time of King Solomon’s Temple.⁸⁰ The only mention of his James Anderson’s authorship is on page 80, where he is listed among other masters and wardens of lodges which were members of Grand Lodge at the time.

REGARDING FREEMASONRY AND RELIGION

Perhaps the most influential way Anderson’s *Constitutions* have impacted history concerns the relationship between Freemasonry and religion. Freemasonry has encountered animosity and bitterness from certain branches of Christianity, from both ecclesiastical and laypeople, for centuries. Conversely, Freemasonry has always been a friend to organized religion—this is a paradox which Masonic authors have struggled with for over two centuries. Shortly after the *Constitutions* the first Papal Bull banning Masonry was issued.⁸¹ I would argue that the two are directly related, and I believe most, if not all, of the modern tensions between Freemasonry and organized religion stem from this.

⁸⁰Anderson, 17.

⁸¹Pope Clement XII published *In eminenti apostolatus specula* on April 24, 1738. This is interesting, because neither England nor Scotland were Catholic nations at the time. This was not the first Christian anti-Masonic publication, but is definitely the most significant up to that date.

Prior to the founding of the Grand Lodge of England Masons were “charg’d in every Country to be of the Religion of that Country or Nation, whatever it was.”⁸² But one effect of the *Constitutions* was to allow into the Craft any man who was not an atheist. From a certain perspective this seems exclusionary—keeping out the atheists—but many anti-Masonic Christian writers have seen this as supporting a pluralistic syncretism which “permits, at one level, a variety of gods of different faiths to occupy its altar according to individual Masonic belief.”⁸³ They perceive Masonry as deistic.⁸⁴ While certainly there was deistic influence in later years (certain Founding Fathers who were members of the Craft come to mind), Anderson personally denounced deism, calling it a “contagion”.⁸⁵ It is significant that in the history section of the *Constitutions* he referred to Jesus Christ as “God’s Messiah, the great Architect of the church.”⁸⁶

The logic behind Anderson’s wording in the *Constitutions* to allow Masons freedom of religion is easily seen when considering the context of the time in which he wrote. England and Scotland at that time were dealing with Jacobite uprisings and threats, governmental controversies with Whigs and Tories, and the aspiration of the Church of England to extend its authority over Scotland. James Anderson, a Presbyterian minister, was very probably only trying to unite a very divided and divisive society.

⁸²Anderson, 48. This particular charge has been subject to some historical analysis in modern times questioning the meaning of this idea for Jews, or even of Christians living in a non-Christian nation.

⁸³John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Fast Facts on the Masonic Lodge* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), 86.

⁸⁴J. W. Acker, *Strange Altars: A Scriptural Appraisal of the Lodge* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 20. Historians, and contemporaries of Anderson, have used the word deist in many different ways. See Stevenson, *Origins*, 228, note 33.

⁸⁵Stevenson, “James Anderson,” 97.

⁸⁶Anderson, 25.

Following the papal bull, *In eminenti apostolatus specula*, issued in 1738 by Clement XII, prohibiting Catholics from joining Masonry, many other papal documents and decrees followed, with the most explicit being *Humanum Genus* by Leo XIII in 1884, which made radical claims about Freemasonry. Certain Protestant groups followed suit and soon there was an upsurge of anti-Masonic sentiment that even led to Anti-Masonic political parties in both England and the U.S.⁸⁷

CONCLUSION

Whereas the founding of the Premier Grand Lodge of England marks a threshold in the formative history of modern Freemasonry, and whereas the *Constitutions of the Free-Masons* were written by James Anderson to give historical legitimacy to that Grand Lodge and are still indirectly impacting the Craft today, James Anderson and his *Constitutions* are significant to the history of Freemasonry. Even though Anderson was extremely (and at times explicitly) biased, with the express purpose of finding the thread of Freemasonry throughout history and promoting the Grand Lodge, his history has impacted the fraternity of Freemasons in many important ways. Even today, after the “Realistic School” of Masonic Historians, there are still many, if not most, Freemasons who take for granted much of what was written by Anderson and promulgated by his Grand Lodge. Anderson, though influenced in his own day by the religious entanglements brought about by 17th century British politics and society, has in turn influenced many people in the realm of Freemasonry and religion. Where he

⁸⁷Certain events, such as the Taxil hoax and the Morgan incident only added fuel to an already burning fire.

was trying to be accepting of diverse views, in order to calm the excitement in his society, many since then have seen his words as promoting a “Masonic religion.” Research has led many scholars back to Anderson and his *Constitutions*, and then to realize that many of the sources which Anderson was “digesting” are still extant in small lodges in Britain and elsewhere. In a way, James Anderson and the Masonic history he wrote have actually promoted Masonic scholarship in the modern era.

APPENDIX

The dedication reads:

To
His Grace the Duke of
MONTAGU.

My Lord,
By Order of his Grace the DUKE OF WHARTON, the present Right
Worshipful GRAND-MASTER of the *Free-Masons*; and, as his *Deputy*, I
humbly dedicate this Book of the *Constitutions* of our ancient *Fraternity*
to your *Grace*, in Testimony of your honourable, prudent, and vigilant
Discharge of the Office of our GRAND-MASTER last year.

I need not tell your Grace what Pains our learned *Author* has taken
in compiling and digesting this Book from the old *Records*, and how
accurately he has compar'd and made everything agreeable to *History* and
Chronology, so as to render these NEW CONSTITUTIONS a just and exact
Account of *Masonry* from the Beginning of the World to your *Grace's*
Mastership, still preserving all that was truly ancient and authentick in the
old ones: for every Brother will be pleas'd with the Performance, that
knows it had your Grace's Perusal and Approbation, and that it is now
printed for the Use of the *Lodges*, after it was approv'd by the *Grand*
Lodge, when your Grace was GRAND-MASTER. All the *Brother-hood* will
ever remember the Honour your Grace has done them, and your Care for
their Peace, Harmony, and lasting Friendship: Which none is more duly
sensible of than,

My LORD,

Your GRACE's

most oblig'd, and

most obedient Servant,

and Faithful Brother,

J.T. DESAGULIERS,
Deputy Grand-Master.⁸⁸

⁸⁸John Theophilus Desaguliers, dedication of *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons: Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, &c. of that Most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity*, by James Anderson, ed. Benjamin Franklin (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin, 1734; repr. Lincoln, Nebraska: The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries Office of Scholarly Communication, 2008).

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