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# Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe (Society)

By Margaret C. Jacob



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## Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe (Society) By Margaret C. Jacob

Long recognized as more than the writings of a dozen or so *philosophes*, the Enlightenment created a new secular culture populated by the literate and the affluent. Enamoured of British institutions, Continental Europeans turned to the imported masonic lodges and found in them a new forum that was constitutionally constructed and logically egalitarian. Originating in the Middle Ages, when stone-masons joined together to preserve their professional secrets and to protect their wages, the English and Scottish lodges had by the eighteenth century discarded their guild origins and become an international phenomenon that gave men and eventually some women a place to vote, speak, discuss and debate. Margaret Jacob argues that the hundreds of masonic lodges founded in eighteenth-century Europe were among the most important enclaves in which modern civil society was formed. In France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Britain men and women freemasons sought to create a moral and social order based upon reason and virtue, and dedicated to the principles of liberty and equality. A forum where philosophers met with men of commerce, government, and the professions, the masonic lodge created new forms of self-government in microcosm, complete with constitutions and laws, elections, and representatives. This is the first comprehensive history of Enlightenment freemasonry, from the roots of the society's political philosophy and evolution in seventeenth-century England and Scotland to the French Revolution. Based on never-before-used archival sources, it will appeal to anyone interested in the birth of modernity in Europe or in the cultural milieu of the European Enlightenment.



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#### **Review**

"This is one of the most outstanding contributions to the social interpretation of the Enlightenment in recent years. It should serve as a model for younger historians (it will for me) of how to go about tackling a historical problem."--William Connell, Rutgers University

"Margaret C. Jacob has now carried forward the frontiers again....The book is...a major step towards an account of masonry which satisfactorily integrates it with other sides of the eighteenth century...Professor Jacob ought to be widely read."--The English Historical Review

"What [Jacob] does do very well is to take us behind the scenes to listen to little groups of people, in one or two eighteenth-century European cities, as they lived their social and intellectual lives in the muddle of ideas, ideals, prejudices, assumptions and social aspirations that make up life as people live it. For that we can all be grateful to her."--French History

"A model of the new intellectual history. There have been many calls for a 'social history' of the Enlightenment, but few have actually achieved one, and none in such grand fashion. Jacob gets beyond the symbolism and ritual to place Freemasonry squarely within the social and political contexts of eighteenth-century Europe, and the unique breadth of her archival work gives the book a genuine comparative core. This pioneering study--bold, comprehensive, and vivid--is likely to be the standard work on the subject for years to come."--Gary Kates, Trinity University

"[Jacob's argument] is both elegant and seductive, and she makes an interesting contribution to our knowledge of the period....What she does...very well is to take us behind the scenes to listen to little groups of people, in one or two eighteenth-century European cities, as they lived their social and intellectual lives in the muddle of ideas, ideals, prejudices, assumptions and social aspirations that make up life as people live it. For this we can all be grateful to her."--TLS

"Jacob offers a very informative, innovative, useful, ambitious study."--American Historical Review

"A more timely book than Living the Enlightenment would be hard to imagine. Margaret Jacob has constructed a chain of richly documented case studies... Living the Enlightenment ... has no rival in the breadth and depth of its research and in its lucidity on the political import of its subject... Will have a salutary impact on the study of 18th century Freemasonry and on efforts to recover the social and political meaning of the Enlightenment for years to come."--Journal of Modern History

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"A valuable contribution to the social history of the Enlightenment ... Historians of the Enlightenment owe a considerable debt of gratitude to Jacob ... A major contribution to our understanding of a seminal period."--The Historian

#### **About the Author**

Margaret C. Jacob is at New School for Social Research.

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