The Influence of Freemasonry on Thomas Jefferson
03-18-18

The Link Between Freemasonry and Neoclassical Architecture
and
Its Influence on Thomas Jefferson

The Influence of Freemasonry on Thomas Jefferson
03-18-18

Introduction

There are noticeable parallels between the tenets of Masonic Fellowcraft and the principles of Neoclassical Architecture. Masonic themes can also be found in Thomas Jefferson's enlightenment, which occurred in France during his association with an elite circle of reform-minded Freemasons. In the time I have here this afternoon, I will comment on these parallels and these themes. Surprisingly, over the pass one-hundred years, they have received little attention.

For the Record

Intellectual historians of the 20th century avoided speaking about Freemasonry. I suppose they did because they perceived it as a cult whose mystery-based rituals were, so to speak, *unintellectual*.

J. B. Bury (1861–1927) did not mention that almost half the enlighteners he discussed in *The Idea of Progress* (1920) either were Freemasons or closely associated with them. Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), whose *Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1951) is considered by many to be the most profound commentary on the subject, said nothing about Freemasonry. Neither did Kingsley Martin (1897–1969), whose *French Liberal Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1962) "stands next to Cassirer". The word does not appear in either volume of Peter Gay's (1923–2015) massive two-volume dissertation, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (I: 1966, II: 1969). Nor is it found in Arthur Herman's (b. 1956) *Scottish Enlightenment – The Scot's Invention of the Modern World* (2001) This omission comes in spite of the fact that "fellow craft" originated in Scotland. It may be understandable that Robert Darnton (b. 1939) would ignore the subject in his study of the lower strata of the Enlightenment era's French literature, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (1982).

Among Jefferson's biographers, Adrienne Koch (1913–1971), whose awarding-winning text, *The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson,* appeared on the

200th anniversary of Jefferson's birth (1943), did not mention Fellowcraft as an element in Jefferson's "philosophy." Marie Kimball (1889–1955), did not include it in her discussion of Jefferson's experiences in France, *Jefferson – The Scene of Europe 1784–1789*, (1950). Dumas Malone (1892–1986) did not mention it in his detailed reconstruction of Jefferson's five-years in France, *Jefferson and the Rights of Man* (1951). Neither did Noble Cunningham (1926–2007), whose influential text, *In Pursuit of Reason – The Life of Thomas Jefferson,* was published in 1987. The subject was not covered in *Jeffersonian Legacies*, the anthology assembled by Peter Onuf "on the occasion of Thomas Jefferson's 250th birthday" (1993). Nor did William Howard Adams mention it in his insight-filled narrative, *The Paris Years of Thomas Jefferson* (1997).

Indeed, prior to the publication of my book, *Thomas Jefferson's Enlightenment – Paris 1785* (2015), there was nothing to indicate that "the Father of the Enlightenment in North America" ever met a Freemason. But as I point out in my books, all of the men in Jefferson's French circle were either were Freemasons or closely associated with them.

Before turning to the influences of Freemasonry had on Jefferson, I want to take a few moments to introduce the man who went to France and explain what I mean by "the Enlightenment.

The Architect who went to France

Jefferson began dabbling with Architecture while preparing to build his home on top of Monticello Mountain. Professor Frederick "Freddie" Nichols observed that "as early as 1767 Jefferson began studies for Monticello . . . Until 1770 he was busy with preliminary studies for the plans and elevations of the mansion, using James Gibb's *Rules for Drawing the Several Parts of Architecture,* Robert Morris' *Select Architecture*, and Palladio's *Four Books of Architecture*."[1] The plans Jefferson produced for his first version of Monticello

[1] Frederick D. Nichols. *Thomas Jefferson's Architectural Drawings*. Charlottesville. The Thomas Jefferson Foundation. 1961. 3.

confirm that by 1770 he was both familiar with and admired the neoclassical style whose champion was Palladio.

Professor Nichols included in his 1961 collection several drawings that show Jefferson's attachment to Palladian Neoclassicism. "While at work on Monticello," he notes, Jefferson "made plans also for buildings at Williamsburg and Richmond," including "an octagonal chapel," which referenced "the temple of Vesta. Pallad. B. 4. Pl. 38. 39."[2] Professor Nichols also included "Jefferson's ideas for remodeling the Governor's Palace," which were presented in drawings he did between 1772 and 1781. Nichols characterized them as "a striking example of Jefferson's leadership as one of the innovators for the movement of Romantic Classicism."[3]

"In 1776, Jefferson had presented to the House of Delegates a bill for the design of the capitol in Richmond . . . he also made studies for the Halls of Justice and then began his studies for the Richmond Capitol . . . they prove that he arrived at the conception of a temple form building before he left America and long before he met Clérisseau."[4] Fisk Kimball agreed. He noted in 1949 that "Jefferson had arrived at the fundamental scheme of the Capitol before he ever left America."[5]

A Few Words about the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment is recognized today as a period of intellectual development and societal transformation, which continued through the 18th Century. Professor Carl Becker characterized it as "the Age of Revolution." Changes in the ways men thought and interacted during this revolutionary era made the world more or less modern. It seems today like one large thing, but in reality it was different things that occurred in different places at different times. Three of these warrant mention here.

---

[2] Nichols. 4.

[3] Nichols. 4.

[4] Nichols. 4.

[5] See "Bill for the Removal of the Seat of Government of Virginia: 29 May 1779." Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Vol. 2, *1777–18 June 1779*. Julian P. Boyd, Editor. Princeton. Princeton University Press. 1950. 271–272.

The Influence of Freemasonry on Thomas Jefferson
03-18-18

The first rays of enlightenment appeared in **England** in 1660, which was the year the Royal Society was founded. The Enlightenment blossomed into an international phenomenon after Isaac Newton published his analysis on the mathematical laws that govern motion, which he did in 1687. Newton's work effectively completed the replacement of Natural Theology with Natural Science. This giant step in the way men perceived the world around them was followed in **Scotland** by the development of Moral Philosophy, in which Natural Religion replaced Revealed Religion and "Utility" replaced the Divine Will as the standard of right behavior for men in society. Voltaire brought the Enlightenment to **France** in the early 1730s. By the middle of the 18th century, it underpinned a reform movement focused on eliminating the corruptions of France's hereditary hierarchy and its established church.

Each of these advances began in a small circle of brilliant men. These *virtuosi* formed groups that attracted individuals with similar talents and interests. Through argumentation and demonstration based on empirical evidence and on Reason, exceptional men in these forums created a new framework for understanding the world and man's place in it.

First among these forums was the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge. Several of its founders, including Christopher Wren, were Freemasons. John Locke, said to be a Freemason, became a member in 1668. Isaac Newton, another Freemason, was elected the Society's President in 1703. An "enlightened" worldview, resting on Natural Science, spread as individuals like Wren, Locke, and Newton published their works, and their peers, having examined them, reapplied their methods in new investigations. It does not matter whether these exceptional men were drawn together by a shared interest in gathering and disseminating knowledge, or whether they were drawn into communion by a shared commitment to the "Royal Art" of living together in peace and prospering. The fact is that the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of the common

good, which was the objective Masonic Fellowcraft, went forward hand in hand.

By the beginning of the 18th century, eminent non-scientists were forming social clubs that resembled the Royal Society. By the third decade of the century so-called "tavern societies," which catered to the working classes, were also debating questions of Man in society and other enlightening subjects. Members of both groups were often Freemasons. As Masonic lodges spread through England and more individuals gained instruction in its Fellowcraft, the interaction of Masons from the different strata of English society increased and the number of Fellowcrafters engaged in helping those less fortunate and working to improve society's characteristics increased.

The Spread and Downward Migration of Cosmopolitanism

Freemasonry is connected in various ways with the Occult. But it became a force for social change because it is rooted in concepts of **Civic Virtue**. The tenets of Fellowcraft, being Benevolence, Charity, Education, Justice, Morality, and Truth, are universal and conducive to the common good.

These concepts became interesting to the best men in England at the end of the 17th century, and to those beneath them as the 18th century progressed. This was so because the industrial revolution was transforming their habitation from a timeless, repetitive agriculture-based organism into a constantly changing, profit-driven industrial system that depended on energetic, able individuals whatever their parentage.

Professor Margaret Jacob finally made Freemasonry a subject for scholarly investigation
in 1991. In her acclaimed text, *Living the Enlightenment – Freemasonry and Politics in the Eighteenth Century*, she dared to "discard the map provided by Cassirer and others, at moments finding their taxonomy so idealized as to mislead."[6] Neither an abstract principle nor a concept, Jacob points out that

[6] *Living the Enlightenment – Freemasonry and Politics in the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford University Press. New York. 1991. 19.

Freemasonry is a "Royal Art" practiced "by the free born . . . from the beginning of the world."[7]

Members of the 18th Century's thinking class applied masonic principles when they demonstrated the mechanical Laws of Nature and established "utility" as the foundation for right behavior. Civic-minded members of the privileged classes drew on them while organizing benevolence societies and pressing for social reform. But individuals in England's swelling underclasses also practiced them while preparing to become productive members of its bustling new commercial society.

Abandoning Cassirer's premise that the Enlightenment was the work of "about twenty men," being the great philosophers and their closest associates, Professor Jacob shifted to a concept of the Enlightenment as a "vast cultural upheaval."[8] She was certainly correct in doing this. Since she provided relatively little information about impulses that animated this upheaval, I will point out that an industrial revolution was occurring in England. Because of this revolution, England's feudal system was collapsing. As this collapse was taking place, a new commercial society was forming; an underclass of urban poor was gathering in a new bottom tier of England's "open society"; and civic-mindedness was spreading among its upper classes as they sensed their responsibility to "ameliorate" the condition of the unfortunates beneath them. Finally, after being "roused" by placemen like John Wilkes—another Freemason—England's working poor began to organize politically to assist themselves, and that professional "politicians" began using the weight of their numbers to win political office.

Freemasonry was an Engine of Social Progress

Social reforms that took place later in Professor Becker's Age of Revolution were as important for making the world modern as the advances in scientific knowledge that distinguished its opening decades.

---

[7] Jacob. 32.
[8] Jacob. 215.

Open to all faithful men of good will, the Masonic lodges of the 18th century were places where men from every segment of society and every walk of life gathered to do business. In addition to every sort of money-making enterprise, their businesses included organizing programs to improve themselves, to uplift their neighbors, and to correct ills that afflicted their communities.

When I use the term "the Enlightenment," I mean the intellectual development and the spread of knowledge that marked the opening decades of the 18th century. And I also mean the social integration, the downward spread of cosmopolitanism, and the political activism that occurred as the 18th century advanced through it middle and later decades. Freemasons were leaders in all of these enlightening events.

FREEMASONRY IN FRANCE

David Hume was never initiated into the Craft, but he circulated comfortably in Edinburgh's stimulating Masonic circles. He took these connections with his skeptical empiricism, his unbelief in God and Revelation, and his heretical views in respect to right behavior to France in 1763.

During three years in France, Hume communed with the leaders of France's Enlightenment, many of whom were Freemasons. Among these were Diderot, d'Alembert, Rousseau, and Helvetius. (Hume also met Voltaire, but he had not yet been initiated into the Craft.)

Helvetius was captivated by Hume's rational theory of right behavior and incorporated Hume's concept of "utility" into his own scheme for reforming Man in society. In *De l'esprit* (1758), Helvetius argued that given equivalent circumstances and opportunities, individuals would accomplish equal amounts. The perfect society he described there, which had no organized church, was administered by a technocracy of enlightened social engineers who would educate the masses. When needed, they would use Epicurean stimulation to promote outcomes that contributed to human progress.

Helvetius's rationalistic vision of society resonated with his fellow Freemasons, *encyclopedists* Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert. After reading Helvetius's controversial work in 1769, Jeremy Bentham made Utility the foundation of his enlightened social system. Benthamian *Utilitarianism* equated individual happiness to the general welfare and asserted that the general welfare is the proper standard for determining right behavior. The idea that promoting the greatest good for the great number enhances general well-being provided the essential rationale for social reformers through the post-Enlightenment century and after that.

The Enlightenment started in France after Voltaire introduced his countrymen to Isaac Newton and his master work. Montesquieu, a Freemason, followed Newton by explaining that Natural Laws also govern the process of Society. Having read Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* Étienne de Condillac continued Locke's investigation into the workings of the human mind. As Condillac and other "mind men" investigated how men think and know, an energetic cadre of literati joined Voltaire in condemning the inhumanity of France's hierarchical hereditary social system and the tyrannical authority of its established church.

By the middle of the 18th century, an agricultural revolution had altered the structure of English society and an industrial revolution was rapidly changing its economy. As England industrialized and its economy became commercial, forces of capitalism and entrepreneurialism exerted increasingly powerful leveling forces that facilitated social reform. This was not happening in France because high taxation and government regulation kept theses forces of social progress in check.

The vast majority of the French people, peasants who worked the land, remained without knowledge, rights, or opportunity. As peasants in the country struggled to survive, educated commoners in Paris, members of France's *petit bourgeoisie*, flocked to cafes—and Masonic lodges—where they debated matters of politics and social equality. Having no voice in their

nation's political processes, and lacking the "good justice" that was the right of all Englishmen, many of these young men became radicals.

French Lodges in Jefferson's Paris

When Jefferson reached Paris, it was home to four notable Masonic lodges. The men who became his closest friends were associated with these lodges. A fifth lodge attracted many of the architects whose works Jefferson admired and visited.

La Loge du Contrat Social (the Lodge of the Social Contract) was the oldest of theses lodges, being constituted in 1766. In 1776, it changed its name to honor Jean Jacques Rousseau.

The Lodge of the Social Contract was the first in France to adopt the Fellowcraft of the Scottish Rite, which embraces the idea that Freemasons belong to a brotherhood and are themselves an order of knights. It therefore attracted many members of the French military. Many of the French officers who served in the American Revolution were members of this lodge. First among these was the marquis de Lafayette. Other members were vicomte de Rochambeau, his aide count de Ségur, count Chambrun (Lafayette's cousin), and vicomte de Mirabeau (whose brother wrote a passionate attack against the Society of the Cincinnati). John Paul Jones was an American member of this lodge.

La Loge des Amis Reunis—the Lodge of the Friends United) was founded by wealthy financier Charles Pierre-Paul, marquis de Savalette de Langes, in 1771.

The marquis was the son of Charles Pierre Savalette de Magnanville, who was the senior of two *Gardes du Trésor royal* (Keepers of the Royal Treasury). In 1773, his son became the junior Keeper of the Royal Treasury. Because so many members of this lodge were, like the marquis, rich, it was

referred to as the home of *les Crésus de la Maçonnerie*—the wealthy ones among the Masons.

Members of this lodge advanced through twelve “orders”. The highest was known as *La Philalethes*, the seekers of truth. The members of this lofty circle had ties to an esoteric sect known as the Bavarian Illuminati, whose two-fold mission was to teach people how to be happy and help them achieve it by freeing themselves from the shackles of (religious) superstition.

In keeping with this enlightened vision, the Lodge of Friends United embraced a social philosophy based on equality. One of its tenets was the abolition of the privileges that accompanied social rank. Many of lodge’s elite members agreed that this should be done. Among these were Jefferson’s close friends, the duc de la Rochefoucauld and the marquis du Condorcet. Du Pont de Nemours, whom Jefferson also came to know, was another a member of this lodge.

La Loge de la Candeur (the Lodge of Truthfulness) was under the jurisdiction of the duc d’Orleans. This lodge, which was inaugurated in 1775, became the parent of an “adoption” lodge—a lodge for women—known as *la Loge de Grande Maitresse* in honor of its leader, the duchess de Bourbon-Condé, who was the duc’s sister.

The rite that guided the Lodge of Truthfulness centered on Benevolence. To accomplish its enlightened social mission, it supported a progressive political agenda, which included establishing a constitutional monarchy and replacing Louis XVI with his distant cousin, the duc d’Orleans. Among the members of this lodge were prince de Broglie, Adrien Maurice, duc de Noailles (Lafayette’s father-in-law), Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, and Jacques Pierre Brissot de Warville. Brissot was a spy and political propagandist for the duc d’Orleans and an acquaintance of Jefferson. He later the leader of the Girondist Party and was decapitated during the Terror.

The fourth lodge was probably the most famous. **La Loge des Neuf Soeurs** (the Lodge of the Nine Sistersm) the Lo was founded for scholars in 1776 by Joseph Jérôme Lefrançois de Lalande, noted astronomer and close friend of Claude Adrian Helvetius. Helvetius's widow, Anne-Catherine de Ligniville, helped found it. In addition to their shared interest in science, members of the Lodge of the Nine Sisters supported creation of a republican government in France.

Among the men associated with the Lodge of Nine Sisters were Benjamin Franklin and Voltaire. Several members of Jefferson's French circle, including Pierre Cabanis, de Stutt de Tracy, and Volney, were members. So was Jefferson's charming secretary, William Short. Other notable members included humanitarian Joseph-Ignace Guillotin and revolutionary activist Camille Desmoulins.

La Grande Orient de France: The Lodge of the Architects

La Grande Orient de France was a gathering place for architects. Martha Langford reports that "a compilation of the Parisian membership of the Grand-Orient, from 1773 to 1789, yields the names of one hundred and twenty architects."[9]

Jefferson was familiar with works by several of these men, notably Jean-François-Thérèse Chalgrin, Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, Victor Louis, Jean-Rodolphe Perronet, Jean-Baptiste Rondelet, Pierre Rousseau, Jacques-Germain Soufflot, and Charles De Wailly."

Why did so many French architects join this and other Masonic lodges? As I say, Freemasonry rests on civic virtues, which are modes of behavior that contribute to human excellence, like being benevolent, being just, and being truthful. When individuals practice these virtues, they make themselves happy, they contribute to social harmony, and they promote the common

[9] Martha Langford. *An Expression of Freemasonry in Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's Propylaea for Paris?* Department of Art History. McGill University. Montreal. 1991. 31.

good. These outcomes are the objectives of Masonic Fellowcraft and central to its principles.

I suppose some architects in 18th century Paris became Freemasons because they wanted to do well, to live well, and to contribute to the well-being of their communities. But they were probably also drawn to the Craft by the Masonic concept of God as the Great Architect of the Universe. Fellowcraft taught architects that they promote the general well-being when they design and build buildings that conveyed the values of the Great Architect of the Universe.

First century (BC) Roman military engineer Vitruvius Pollio gave the first account of what these values are. In his great work, *de Architectura*, he insinuated an inseparable connection between the Creator and Architecture. To be excellent, Vitruvius explained, buildings must exhibit the three virtues of the *Vitruvian Triad*: they must be solid, useful, and beautiful. Vitruvius went on to explain that architects endow their works with these virtues with designs that arrange geometric forms that exist in nature in the ways they exist in nature. The divine proportions that God employs throughout nature are exhibited in the greatest of all his works, which is the body of Man. Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) illustrated these universal proportions in his famous rendering of the Vitruvian Man, which he fashioned in 1490.

These ideas are woven together in Classical Architecture. This style of Architecture obeys the instructions of Vitruvius by emphasizing designs that exhibit the proportions employed by God in his creation. Andrea Palladio revived this classical style—and its underlying logic—in 16th century Italy. Inigo Jones brought it to England at the same time. Architects in the 17th and 18th centuries employed Palladio's neoclassical style by creating designs that featured circles, squares, and octagons arranged in the universal proportions Vitruvius discerned sixteen centuries earlier.

Freemasonry appealed to 18th century French architects for another reason relating to their profession. In the Masonic creed, God created seven liberal

arts so humans could acquire the knowledge they needed to achieve personal excellence and social harmony. Freemasons count Geometry as the first of these arts because it reveals God's divine plan. The Temple of Solomon symbolizes this concept: Freemasons depict Solomon's Temple both as an example of the Creator's divine architecture and as the embodiment of divine knowledge. They also perceive Solomon's Temple as an allegorical link between man and perfection.

Patrizia Granziera helps to clarify this mysterious idea by noticing that, in addition to casting architecture as the master of all arts and the center of all human knowledge, Freemasonry created a "dialectic between Architecture and Morality." During the humanistic awakening that occurred in the 15th and 16th centuries, she explains, Freemasons transformed the temple of the human body into a moral edifice. In the first decade in eighteenth century England, Granziera continued, the Earl of Shaftesbury, a Freemason, "revived the idea that the moral function of art is applied in Architecture." The first manifestation of the cosmic order, Shaftesbury asserted, is "the correspondence between the harmony of the soul and the harmony of Architecture." In the parlance of the enlightened English earl, Architecture became "an expression of the 'Inner Beauty' that is the moral essence and Virtue of its creator." This inspiring idea energized the bond that tied French architects both to Freemasonry and to Palladian Neoclassicism.

Before identifying the Masonic architects who beautified Jefferson's Paris, I will comment on Jefferson's well-known interaction with neoclassical architect Charles Louis Clérisseau and take a brief detour through England where Jefferson inspected several Masonic houses and gardens.

Regarding Charles-Louis Clérisseau

In his Autobiography, Jefferson remembered that"I was written to in 1785 (being then in Paris) by Directors appointed to superintend the building of a

Capitol in Richmond, to advise them as to a plan . . . Thinking it a favorable opportunity of introducing into the state an example of architecture in the classical style of antiquity, and the Maison quarrée of Nismes, an ancient Roman temple, being considered as the most perfect model existing of . . . Cubic Architecture, I applied to M. Clérisseau, who had published drawings of the Antiquities of Nismes, to have me a model of the building made in stucco."[10]

According to Professor George Green Shackelford, "Jefferson had been encouraged to see Maison Carrée early in 1786 by his new friends, three of whom commended to him the artist-architect Charles-Louis Clérisseau: the abbé Arnoux, the duc de la Rochefoucauld, and the Comte de Tessé, all of whom were patrons who had underwritten publication of Clérisseau's great book."[11]

Jefferson visited the temple twice in the spring of the following year. "It was Nîmes," Professor Shackelford explained, "that he considered to be the greatest example in France of 'Roman taste, genius, and magnificence [to] excite ideas.'"[12] Shackelford added that "most admirers of Jefferson know that the Roman temple at Nîmes called the Maison Carrée served as the prototype for Virginia's capitol, but many do not know that Jefferson and French artist-architect Charles-Louis Clérisseau chose this prototype and completed their plan for the capital *before* Jefferson went to Nimes."[13]

Assuming Shackelford is right on his timing, Jefferson probably began working with Clérisseau a month or so before he departed for England, which was in the beginning of March. Perhaps while he was gone, Clérisseau reviewed Jefferson's drawings. And perhaps when Jefferson returned, which was at the end of April, he recommended a couple minor modifications. I assume these changes did take long to make because Jefferson delivered the

---

[10] Jefferson's Autobiography. Peterson. Merrill, Editor. *Thomas Jefferson – Writings*. New York. The Library of America. 1984. 41. See also: Willard Sterne Randall. *Thomas Jefferson: A Life*. New Word City. 2014. "The New capital in Richmond."

[11] George Green Shackelford. *Thomas Jefferson's Travel's in Europe, 1784 – 1789*. Baltimore. The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1995. 104.

[12] Shackelford. 103.

[13] Shackelford. 103.

corrected drawings to model-maker Jean-Pierre Fouquet and, paid him before the end of May.

On 2 June 1786, Jefferson noted entry in his Account Book, "pd. Clerissault for a book 72f. pd. do. for plans for state of Virginia 288f." When he submitted his accounts to the State of Virginia on 9 December 1789, he included the following item: "1786 June 2. pd Clerissault for his assistants in drawing the plans of Capitol & Prison 288.0."[14]

Assuming Professor Shackelford is right on his timing, Jefferson probably began working with Clérisseau a month or so before he departed for England, which was in the beginning of March 1786. It seems while he was gone, Clérisseau reviewed Jefferson's drawings. I assume when Jefferson returned at the end of April, Clérisseau recommended a few minor modifications. After making the revisions, Jefferson delivered the corrected drawings to model-maker Jean-Pierre Fouquet and paid him, which he did before the end of May.

It is not clear that Jefferson maintained a close relationship with Clérisseau after that. There is no record, for example, that he mentioned to his former advisor that he visited Nimes where "spent whole hours" gazing at the Maison Carrée "like a lover at his mistress," (as he told Madame de Tessé in his 20 March 1787).

Touring England: 10 March 1786 – 27 April 1786

Cosmopolitans in 18th century England were frequently Freemasons. Among them were James Addison, James Boswell, William Congreve, Daniel DeFoe, William Hogarth, Alexander Pope, Richard Steele, Jonathan Swift, and James Thomson. Men of rank who were Freemasons included William Cavendish – Duke of Devonshire, Edward Harley – Earl of Oxford, Charles Lennox – Duke of Richmond, Thomas Pelham-Holles – Duke of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Robert Walpole – Lord Orford. Richard Boyle – Lord Burlington of Chiswick

[14] Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Vol. 9. 1 November 1785–22 June 1786. Julian P. Boyd, Editor. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1954. 603–604.

and Richard Temple – Lord Cobham of Stowe were Freemasons whose homes and gardens Jefferson visited.

William Kent (1685–1748), Freemason, re-introduced the Palladian style of architecture to England with his villa at Chiswick House west of London. He may be better known today for originating the 'natural' style of gardening known as the “English landscape gardens” at Chiswick House, Stowe House in Buckinghamshire, and Rousham House in Oxfordshire.

English cosmopolitan Horace Walpole (son of Lord William) described Kent "as a painter, an architect, and the father of modern gardening. In the first character, he was below mediocrity; in the second, he was a restorer of the science; in the last, an original, and the inventor of an art that realizes painting and improves nature. Mahomet imagined an Elysium. Kent created many."

Professor Granziera characterized Lord Burlington as “the most important promoter of English Palladianism.” The Earl was, she said, “especially interested in reviving the classical purity of Palladio.” In this light, his famous villa at Chiswick should be seen “as an anticipation of the neo-classic style.” “In the garden,” Professor Granziera added, “the link with Freemasonry is also reinforced by the presence of two sphinxes on the gatepiers and a miniature Pantheon with an obelisk on a circular pond standing in front of it.”

Professor George Shackelford give this account of Jefferson’s visit to Chiswick: “On 2 April Jefferson set out in his coach for Chiswick . . . It was appropriate that this gentleman-architect visit leisurely and alone at Chiswick . . . Although it had stimulated the rage for the Palladian style in the mid-eighteenth century and was in some ways a prototype for Monticello, Jefferson considered that its octagonal dome had an ‘ill effect, both within and without.’ He complained that William Kent’s garden about the villa showed ‘too much artifice,’ that one of its two obelisks was ‘of very ill effect,’ and that the other, ‘in the middle of a pond,’ was ‘useless.’”[15]

[15] Shackelford. 51.

On 5 April 1786, Jefferson and his traveling companion, John Adam, traveled to Wallingford to visit the estate of Lord Cobham. "After approaching the mansion [Stowe] along a mile-long avenue, one reached a Corinthian arched gateway sixty feet high and sixty feet across, which Jefferson disliked because the avenue did not pass through the 'useless' arch, which thus became only 'an obstacle to a very pleasing prospect.'"[16]

These comments suggest to me that Jefferson did not view the "artifices" in the gardens of either estate in terms of their Masonic significance. In France as in England, he showed himself to be more interested in a building's classical form than in it Masonic meanings.

The Beautification of Paris

It was no accident that the city of Paris was an architectural showcase. This had been a royal objective for over one-hundred years when Jefferson reached the French capital.

The enterprise traces back to the 1630s when Louis XIII enlarged the wall Charles V built in the 1370s. Louis XIII's addition, which encompassed growth that took place in the first half of the 17th century, was supposed to prevent the city from growing further. By the beginning of the 18th century, however, the population of Paris had risen another 25% (toward 450,000) and had spread well beyond Louis XIII's perimeter.

Fearing continued growth would undermine the balance he perceived between the city's physical beauty and its social order, Louis XIII's son developed of another plan to curtail expansion. As Louis XIV moved to limit the size of his capital, he also initiated an ambitious urban beautification program. This program began early in the 1700s with the removal of Louis XIII's barrier. The wall-builder's son did this in the belief that his military successes had made the city safe from invasion. When Jefferson reached Paris in the fall of 1784, a commodious boulevard, known as le Cours ou le Boulevard, filled the space that Louis XIII's wall formerly occupied. Louis

[16] Shackelford. 54.

XIV's urban renewal included spacious thoroughfares, an abundance of public gardens populated with artistically enriching statuary, and memorials highlighting the nation's cultural heritage.

Building done during the three decades prior Jefferson's arrival and during his time in the city was a continuation of Louis XIV's far-sighted plan. The aesthetics, however, were different. Instead of the Baroque and Rococo styles featured in the earlier phases of the renovation, the city's new director of planning, the marquis de Marigny (1727–1781), favored Neoclassicism.

Marigny was not a Freemason, but the man he appointed as the King's chief architectural advisor, Jacques-Germain Soufflot, was. And the network of architects Marigny used to implement his beautification program was dominated by Freemasons.

This was understandable since the principles of Neoclassical Architecture correspond to the principles of civic virtue that underpin Masonic Fellowcraft. Neoclassicism in architecture features ideal forms presented in harmonic unities, which it achieves through simplicity, symmetry, and proportion. The civic virtues that underpin Masonic Fellowcraft, including Benevolence, Charity, Justice, Morality, and Truth, are symbolized with geometrical forms (like circles, triangles, and octagons), classical structures (temples and columns), and icons that express universality and unity (building instruments, pagodas, and all-seeing eyes).

Concepts essential to neoclassical architects and Masonic craftmen were incorporated into texts published by Vitruvius Pollio, writing in 1st century, BC, Rome, Leon Battista Alberti, writing in 15th Florence, Andrea Palladio, writing in 16th century Venice, and Antoine Babuty Desgodetz, writing in 17th century Paris.

The neoclassical architecture endorsed by the marquis de Marigny and the Fellowcraft practiced by Jacques-Germain Soufflot were conceptual cousins and went hand in hand.

Masonic Architects who Beautified Paris

Jacques-Germain Soufflot (1713–1780) Freemason:

Soufflot did not win a scholarship to attend the French Academy in Rome, but he studied there in the mid-1730s. During these studies, he received his introductions to classical design and the neoclassical concepts of Palladio.

In 1749, King Louis XV's mistress, Madame de Pompadour, arranged for her brother, the future marquis de Marigny, to take "the Grand Tour" of Italy. For his companions, she chose three art connoisseurs, being engraver and art aficionado Charles-Nicolas Cochin, art critic Jean-Bernard abbé Le Blanc, and Soufflot. After touring for two years, the entourage returned to Paris. The marquis, assuming the post of director of the King's Buildings, then launched the era of Neoclassicism in French art and architecture.

In January of 1755, Marigny selected Soufflot to draw the plans for a shrine to honor the city's patron saint, Saint Genevieve. Shortly after that, Marigny named Soufflet Premier Architecte de Paris, which made him the foremost designer/builder in the French capital. About this time, Soufflet was also honored by selection into the Royal Academy of Architecture. He soon became a sought-after guest in the leading salons of Paris. The *lumieres* who gathered in these conclaves welcomed his views on how Neoclassicism would improve the aesthetics of their city. As bolstering support among the Parisian intelligentsia for Marigny's program, Soufflot began work on le Abbaye Sainte-Geneviève. Construction on this massive project continued from the late-1750s until two decades after Jefferson's departure from France.

Soufflot's student and fellow Freemason, Jean-Baptiste Rondelet (1743–1829), became chief architect for the project after Soufflot's death in 1780.

Thomas Jefferson could probably see the abbaye's towering dome from his residence on the Champs-Élysées. Willian Howard Adams reports that

he visited the breathtaking shrine with Mrs. Cosway in September of 1786.

Victor Louis (1731–1800) Freemason:

The Palais Royal was one of the first architectural marvels Jefferson visited during his stay in France. He did not need to seek it out, because he spent his first two weeks in Paris at l'Hôtel d'Orléans on the Rue de Richelieu, which Howard Rice says "adjoined" the Palais Royal.[17] In this accidental way, Jefferson became acquainted with Victor Louis's greatest work.

The transformation of the gardens behind the duc d'Orléans' palace into a commercial center began a few years before Jefferson reached Paris. Its cafes, shops, and entertainments opened to the public in 1784. Shopping and dining in the teaming emporium gave Jefferson many of his rare opportunities to inter-mingled with the city's underclasses. Two other things Jefferson did at the Palais Royal were to visit the celebrated wax works of Dr. Curtius and examine the ingenious automated serving devices used in the Café Mechanic.

As work was approaching completion on the three garden galleries, the duc commissioned Louis to design two theatres. The first, which opened on 23 October 1784, was a small puppet theatre in the northwest corner of the mall where the Galerie de Montpensier meets the Galerie de Beaujolais. First called Théâtre des Beaujolais, it later became known as le Théâtre Montansier.

The second theatre was on rue de Richelieu near the southwest corner of the complex. Intended originally to house the Paris Opera, it became home to the company of le Théâtre des Variétés-Amusantes. Jefferson could have observed construction of this pavilion. But by the time the Théâtre du Palais-Royal opened on 15 December 1789, Jefferson had returned home.

[17] Rice, Howard C. *Thomas Jefferson's Paris*. Princeton University Press. 1976. 13.

Jean-François-Thérèse Chalgrin (1739–1811) Freemason:

Jefferson moved his residence from l'Hôtel de Landron to l'Hôtel de Langeac in October 1785. It may have been about then that he received word from the capitol construction committee to consult an architect and draw the plans for the new Capital in Richmond. Being a strong advocate for the simple elegance of classical architecture, the design and physical appearance of l'Hôtel de Langeac must have pleased him.

Its architect, Jean-François-Thérèse Chalgrin, "became one of the earliest of [Étienne-Louis] Boullée's pupils, and he seems to have known Soufflot well before he went to Rome."[18] He won the Prix de Rome competition in 1758 and received his gold medal from the hand of the marquis de Marigny. In November 1759, he moved to Rome where he studied classical and neoclassical architecture until 1763.

"It may have been through Soufflot," Allan Braham suggests, "that Chalgrin was recommended to the comte de Saint-Florentin." For the comte, "Chalgrin brought to completion the famous hose begun by Gabriel beside the Place Louis XV (later the home of Talleyrand."[19] "Having an isolated and particular wife, [the comte] dined every evening with his mistress. The mistress in question was Mme de Langeac and Chalgrin was also employed to build a house for he on the Champs-Élysées."[20] Chalgrin drew the plans in 1767. Several changes in the property's ownership delayed completion of the building was not completed until around 1779.

In addition to its elegance, which Jefferson no doubt enjoyed, he benefitted from the hôtel's indoor plumbing, its English garden where he planted vegetables for his kitchen, and its stable where he parked his wheeled vehicles and horses.

---

[18] Braham, Allan. *The Architecture of the French Enlightenment*. University of California Press, 1989. 129.
[19] Braham. 129.
[20] Braham. 129.

Under the Directory, Chalgrin was commissioned to transform the Luxembourg Palace into the government building it is today. Chalgrin's final project was to design the Arc de Triomphe to commemorate Napoleon's victorious battles. Construction of this monument began in 1806. The architect died prior to its completion.

Chalgrin was elected to the Académie royale d'architecture in 1770. He succeeded Charles de Wailly in the Institut de France in 1798.

Charles De Wailly (1730–1798) Freemason:

Charles de Wailly began his training in 1749 at l'École des Arts under Jacques-François Blondel (1705–1774). In 1752, he and fellow Freemason, Pierre-Louis Moreau-Desproux, were awarded the Prix de Rome for architecture. The following year the two men began their studies at the French Academy in Rome. While in Rome, de Wailly met his future partner, Marie-Joseph Peyre (1730–1785), another Freemason. Their training in the classical style of the Romans and in Palladian neoclassicism recommended them to the marquis de Marigny when they returned to Paris.

Marigny selected de Wailly to design the park at his estate on the bank of the Loire River at Menars. He later awarded de Wailly and Peyre the commission to design the theatre that was to be built on the grounds of Prince de Condé's hotel. What is known today as la Théâtre de l'Odéon became de Wailly's most celebrated work.

On 4 August 1786, Jefferson attended the 90th performance of *The Marriage of Figaro* in this theatre. The farce proved to be wildly popular with bourgeoisie and working class audiences because the story was about a low-born but cleaver servant who made his aristocratic master seem simple-minded. Jefferson did not comment on the performance, but given the theme, he was probably amused. Whether Jefferson was accompanied to the performance is not known. Whether the author of the play, Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, a Freemason, is not known.

<u>Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières</u> (1721–c. 1790) Freemason:

Allan Braham reports that "little is known of the life or character of Le Camus de Mézières, who practiced as 'architecte expert-bourgeois' for over forty years (1751–1792), without ever apparently aspiring to join the Academy and become of Architecte du Roi. He was the architect attached to the University of Paris."[21]

Le Camus built his most celebrated work, the circular Halle aux Blés, between 1763 and 1767. William Howard Adams reports that John Trumbull "has first introduced [Jefferson] to the Cosways beneath the Renaissance column that still stands next to the 'noble dome . . . he later said he had visited the new grain market not for his own pleasure but for the sake of 'public utility.'"[22]

"Between 1775 and 1778," Martha Langford reports, Le Camus "built for the Duc de Choiseul an eccentric affectation of an Oriental model, l' Pagode de Chanteloup, a layering of five polygons on top of two cylinders. The seven levels are suggestive of the tower of Babel; they also allude to the seven steps of the Winding Stairs, a sacred theme of Symbolic Freemasonry which shifted in the eighteenth century from the First to the Second Degree."[23]

Jefferson visited Chanteloup during his return from his tour of northern Italy in the spring of 1787. As he did at other estates, he inspected the duc's chateau and grounds alone and said nothing of either. Nor did he comment on Le Camus' 120-foot pagoda.

<u>Pierre Rousseau</u> (1751–1829) Freemason:

Martha Langford describes Pierre Rousseau as "the young architect of a notorious project for Prince Frederick of Salm-Kyrberg, a domestic

---

[21] Braham. 109.

[22] William Howard Adams. *The Paris Years of Thomas Jefferson.* New Haven. Yale University Press. 1997. 105.

[23] Martha Langford. *An Expression of Freemasonry in Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's Propylaea for Paris?* Department of Art History. McGill University. Montreal. 1991.45.

amalgam of palace, hospital and church, that eventually became the Légion d' Honneur."[24] Rousseau began designing the l'Hôtel de Salm in 1782. Construction was completed under Jefferson's watchful, approving gaze in 1787.

As construction was advancing along the Seine, Rousseau joined his father-in-law, Nicolas Marie Potain, as an architect of the royal palace of Fontainebleau sixty kilometers southeast of Paris. While attending a royal levy there in the summer of 1789, Jefferson met the only peasant he seems to have spoken with during his five years in France.

Touring with Maria Cosway

Jean-Rodolphe Perronet (1708–1794) Freemason:

Perronet distinguished himself as bridge builder. Jefferson crossed "the most beautiful bridge ever built," being Pont de Neuilly (1768–1772), which spans the Seine at the western end of Avenue de Neuilly, on a morning in mid-September 1786. On that day, he took second excursion with Maria Cosway. They would spend the afternoon gazing at the rainbow that hovered in the midst above le Machine de Marly. Perhaps it was after they had dreamed their daydreams that It seems the two sightseers stopped to admire the Palladian music pavilion Claude-Nicolas Ledoux had built for Madame de Barry beside her château in Louveciennes.

Jefferson was in residence at the Hôtel de Langeac when Perronet began work on a bridge to replace the ferry at Place de Louis XV. This span was completed in 1791. Two years later, after the beheading of Louis's grandson, the name of the bridge was changed from Pont Louis XVI to Pont de la Concorde. This busy thoroughfare crossed the Seine a few dozen yards from Jefferson's favorite French building, l'Hôtel de Salm.

Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1736–1806) Freemason:

[24] Langford. 51.

While visiting England in 1769, Ledoux encountered works in the neoclassical style of Andrea Palladio. Returned to France in 1771, he incorporated the Palladian design into his plan for a new music pavilion at the Château de Louveciennes, the regal home of the King's mistress, Madame du Berry. Jefferson and Maria Cosway stopped to admire the striking pavilion during their excursion to Marly in the fall of 1786.

While Jefferson was in Paris, Ledoux designed and built dozens neoclassical pavilions for the tax barrier of the Farmers-General. Tardieu's 1787 Plan de Ville de Paris identifies the partition as the "Louis XVI Cloture." Ledoux's commission directed him to create sixty offices to collect customs taxes on the goods coming into Paris. Ledoux called his unpopular wall "*les Propylées de Paris."* Jefferson would have passed through its gate at Chaillot when he visited Franklin in Passy. Whether he ever saw the pavilion known as la Barrière de la Villette at the intersection of the Canal de l'Ourcq and the Canal Saint-Martin in the city's northeast corner is not known. This is one of the barrier's four surviving towers.

François-Joseph Bélanger (1744–1818):

François-Joseph Bélanger was born in Paris and studied at the Académie Royale d'Architecture in the mid-1760s. Unlike de Wailly and Peyre, he failed to win the Prix de Rome and was therefore not able to study in Rome. But his teacher Julien-David Le Roy (1724–1803) did, and while Charles-Louis Clérisseau (1721–1820) was not a prize winner, he also studied many years in Rome. Bélanger became Clérisseau's protégé when Clérisseau returned to Paris in 1767. Under the tutelage of Clérisseau, Bélanger became well-versed in the neoclassical style.

After working ten years planning royal events at the Menus Plaisirs du Roi, Bélanger purchased the position of chief architect to the comte d'Artois, who was the King's brother. In this position, Bélanger produced his best known work, being the party pavilion known as the Château de Bagatelle on the western edge of the Bois de Boulogne. During Jefferson's

first excursion with Maria Cosway, which took place in the second week of September 1786, they toured the gardens and the pavilion.

François Barbier (1768–1826) Freemason(?):

Denise Costanzo reports that François Barbier was a student of visionary neoclassical architect Étienne-Louis Boullée (1728–1799) and that through Boullée he received his most famous commission. This was the column house and its Masonic dependencies, which he built in the forêt de Marly two miles west of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Whether Barbier was a Mason is not known, but the owner of the property, Racine de Monville, seems to have been. Working toegether, the two men created a Masonic-themed retreat on the western edge of the forest. Project designs were completed in the late-1770s. Construction was completed in the early-1780s.

On their third excursion into the countryside west of Paris, Jefferson and Maria Cosway toured M. Monville's gardens, viewed their Masonic ornaments, and visited the pavilion known then as la Colonne detruite. Ronald Kenyon reports that "Thomas Jefferson, whose presence in various Masonic lodges in Paris is well-documented, was friendly with Monville and was welcomed by Monville to the Desert de Retz on 16 September 1786."[25]

A later work by M. Barbier is probably more familiar us today, being the illustration of the Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), which features the all-seeing eye, the defining symbol of Fellowcraft.

The Influence of Masonic Reformers on Jefferson

Jefferson arrived in France in time to become involved in one of history's most significant social upheavals. It began on 14 July 1789 when an angry mob stormed the Bastille in Paris. Jefferson spent that evening listening to an account of the violence given by his friend, Ethis de Corny, who had been a participant in the day's events.

[25] Ronald W. Kenyon. *Monville – Forgotten Luminary of the French Enlightenment*. CeateSpace. 2013. 69.

By the time the Bastille fell, Jefferson had been working with the duc de la Rochefoucauld, the marquis de Condorect, and the marquis de Lafayette, all of whom were Freemasons, for more than three years to create a constitutional government in France. As they worked in their salons, a legion of frustrated radicals were laying plans in the political clubs of Paris to overthrow France's hated monarchy. Many of the key men in this legion were also Freemasons.

Most of Jefferson's other close associates were also Freemasons. While communing with these luminaries, Jefferson absorbed the essential concept of the French Enlightenment. This was the idea that applying knowledge to solve the problems of Man in society would allow mankind to live in ever more perfect states. The core of this idea had been framed by Anne Robert Jacques Turgot in 1750. Turgot's protégé, the marquis de Condorcet, transformed his mentor's idea into a Law of Nature, which he characterized as the Doctrine of Progress. As Jefferson digested it, he became himself a *progressive*.

Although social progress was an essential element of 18th century Masonic Fellowcraft, its progressive vision did not lead Jefferson to become a Freemason. To understand why not, we can refer to the letter he wrote Francis Hopkinson on 13 March 1789. "If I could not go to heaven but with a party," Jefferson announced, "I would not go there at all." He might have said the same for being a lodge member. He appreciated the Masonic missions of self-improvement and social reform, but it better suited him to improve himself and to decide for himself how to solve the problems of man in society.

The Influence of Masonic Architecture on Jefferson

Existing evidence shows that Jefferson was a devoted admirer of neoclassical architecture before he departed for France. Two questions therefore arise:

1) What did Jefferson learn about Architecture and its neoclassical style while he was in France?

2) Was Jefferson influenced by the Masonic themes embedded in the principles of neoclassical architecture?

Regarding the first question:

Several of the architects whose buildings Jefferson admired and visited in Paris were in the city while Jefferson lived there. Among these were Chalgrin, de Wailly, Le Camus de Mézières, Ledoux, Perronet, and Rousseau.

Jefferson might, for example, have crossed the Seine one afternoon and introduced himself to Pierre Rousseau on the construction site of l'Hôtel de Salm. There is, however, no record that he did this. Nor are there records showing that he interacted with any of the other architects named above.

If these Masonic architects did not share their thoughts with Jefferson about Neoclassicism, perhaps Charles-Louis Clérisseau did. Jefferson conferred with Clérisseau during the spring of 1786. The two men probably discussed architectural theory while they were revising Jefferson's plans for Virginia's new capital. One hint in respect to what Clérisseau may have shared with Jefferson may be Jefferson's later reliance on Antoine Desgodetz's *Les edifices antiques de Rome*. Jack McLaughlin reports that Jefferson purchased a copy of this book while he was in Paris. The 1830 Catalogue of the Library of Congress indicates that he purchased a copy in 1779.

Regarding the second question:

Since Clérisseau was not a Freemason, it seems unlikely he would have ventured to explain its mysteries to Jefferson. Since there are no other records that show Jefferson conferred with any architect who was a Freemason, it seems unlikely that he gained any special insight into the parallels between the tenets of Masonic Fellowcraft and the principles of neoclassical architecture.

> His dismissive comments about the “artifices” in the gardens of Chiswick and Stowe together with his failure to comment at all on Le Camus’s 120-foot Masonic pagoda at Chanteloup suggest to me that neither Masonic symbolism not the principles of Fellowcraft resonated with him.

In conclusion, I think it is clear that Thomas Jefferson was enlightened by his Masonic friends. I mean by this that associating with the duc de la Rochefoucauld, the marquis de Condorcet, and the marquis de Lafayette strengthened his conviction that republican government is the essential condition for human progress.

Jefferson probably encountered the idea that the neoclassical style of Palladio was an expression of the enlightened social vision of Fellowcraft, but it strikes me as doubtful that he cared to know about the mysterious connections that linked the Masonic creed and the principles of neoclassical architecture. After he returned from France, Jefferson demonstrated his progressive political vision by guiding the formation of the Republican Party, running as its nominee for President, and serving two terms as President of the United States of America. He demonstrated his inherent genius as an neoclassical architect by designing several distinguished residences and the incomparable academical village that forms the core of our University of Virginia.