

NILS G. HOLM

Freemasonry and Its Social Position in Finland

Introduction

Minorities throughout the world have often been the object of suspicion and even persecution. Best known in the European context is the treatment the Jews had to withstand over the centuries. It ranged from segregation and defamation to persecution and the threat of total extermination. Many other minorities such as the Romanies (gypsies) and, more recently, immigrants of different kinds have been subjected to negative treatment, which is often referred to as segregation.

Freemasonry, with its roots in the seventeenth century, also had to suffer insults and sometimes even attacks from society (MacNulty 2007: 22–6). In the following I shall look more closely at Freemasonry in Finland, where it first appeared in the mid-eighteenth century, in the light of the suspicion and negative treatment it had to suffer. The deprecatory attitude of individuals and various social organisations towards Freemasonry varied over time, but there was often an underlying suspicion among the general public. This was expressed in the form of legends and folk tales of a more or less dramatic nature (Bergstrand 1956).

Sociologists and psychologists have sought explanations for the defamation and persecution of minorities. Many theories have been put forward. Among the most important is perhaps the scapegoat reaction, the projection of aggressions and envy. When groups in a community experience threats and stress, they naturally seek an outlet for their aggressions by projecting them onto groups with a lower status. If, moreover, the minorities are successful culturally or economically, envy may be seen as the underlying cause of this. This can lead to direct persecution. If the group that is the focus of suspicion also has characteristics that the community links with secretiveness, then the suspicions and rumours are even more easily sustained (Eitinger 1985: 132–46).

Finnish Freemasonry in Brief

Freemasonry came to Sweden in the eighteenth century, primarily from France. At this time Sweden and Finland formed a single state. As early as 1756 the first lodge intended for Finland, the St Augustine Lodge, was set up in Stockholm. In 1762 the Lodge transferred its activities to Helsinki. This was because most of its members were officers posted at the fortress of Sveaborg (Fi. Viapori, now Suomenlinna) outside the city. The Lodge's activities continued for several decades with little variation in the degree of activity. In the members' roll for the years 1762–1808, 460 names are listed. All belonged to the Swedish-speaking section of the population and some held a high social standing in Finland. The Freemasonry that flourished among the higher ranks of the organisation also reached Finland during the Swedish era. The Finnish chapter was set up in Turku in 1778 and the Andrew Lodge Phoenix started its activities in 1790. However, in both cases the activity was modest (Nyberg 2005: 10–35; Bergroth 2006: 29–42; Ahtokari 2000: 75–100).

After the war of 1808–9 between Sweden and Russia, Finland's more than 600-year-long association with Sweden was broken and Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy under the Russian Tsar. It was decided that the Freemasons should cease their activities because contacts with Stockholm were broken. In 1822 the Tsar gave the order that Freemasonry was to be forbidden in the Russian Empire. Additions to the ban were made in 1826 and 1848 (Ahtokari 2000: 95–112).

Following Finland's independence at the end of 1917, it was not long before Freemasonry was resurrected. The development led to Finland having two Masonic organisations. The one that operates mainly in Finnish has its source of inspiration in New York, USA, and follows a Scottish-American system. Its first lodge, Suomi Lodge No. 1, was set up in 1922. More lodges were soon established in the Finnish system and consequently it was possible to found a Grand Lodge for Finland in 1924 (Ekman 1997: 15–40; Ahtokari 2000: 113–32; Bergroth 2006: 34–42).

The other Masonic organisation works along the lines of the Swedish Order of Freemasons and is really a revival of the eighteenth-century Freemason tradition. The St Augustine Lodge was revived in 1923. The Swedish system developed quickly and many brother organisations and lodges were founded in the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland: in Turku (Swe. Åbo), Vaasa (Swe. Vasa), Pietarsaari (Swe. Jakobstad) and Mariehamn (Bergroth 1987: 10–16; Bergroth 2000: 49–100).

The 1930s proved to be a time of ordeal for Freemasons in Finland. I will return to this point later. During the Second World War activities

among the two Masonic organisations in Finland were discontinued more or less voluntarily. It was only in the early 1950s that activities were seriously resumed. Freemasonry flourished during the decades that followed even though certain negative reactions could be observed, especially in the 1980s. A study made at the Tampere Research Centre of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Finland showed that Freemasons respect Christian values and social institutions more highly than Finnish men of the same generation generally do (Heino 1986; Heino 1995; Ahtokari 2000: 135 ff.).

What is particularly characteristic of the mainly Finnish-speaking organisation is that the three first grades—those referred to as Blue or Johannes Lodges—are supplemented by several independent, associated Freemason systems. Most of these—following the British pattern—belong to the York rite. They include, for example, Markmaster Masons, Royal Ark Mariner Masons, Royal Arch, Knights Templar, Knights of Malta, Red Cross of Constantine, Knights of the Holy Sepulchre and Knights of St. John the Evangelist. In addition to this there is the triple Scottish rite, which is Christian by nature. Furthermore, in the Finnish system there is a research lodge known as the Minerva Lodge No. 27. The Freemason magazine published in Finland is called *Koilliskulma* (Northeast Corner) (Huovinen 1990; Ahtokari 1998; Ahtokari & Ekman 2004). The Finnish Grand Lodge was recognised by Britain in 1927 and by the Swedish Order of Freemasons in 1948. In 2006, the Finnish system had more than 6,000 members.

The Swedish Order of Freemasons has also developed strongly in Finland, although it is considerably smaller than the Finnish-language system. The Swedish order has a uniform system where members advance from grade I to grade X (with grade XI for the highest ranking officials). The main centre in Finland is situated in Helsinki where the Grand Chapter operates. It is led by a Chapter Master. There is also the Scottish St Andrew's Lodge Phoenix with members of grades IV–VI. In 2003 the Steward's Lodge Österbotten was founded in Vaasa, with grades VII–VIII. The St Andrew's Lodge Henrik Tavast in Pietarsaari operates according to the St Andrew rite. Brother organisations are to be found in two places: Erasmus (grades IV–IX) in Turku and Morgonstjärnan (Morning Star) (grades IV–XI) in Mariehamn. Further Johannes Lodges in addition to St Augustine in Helsinki exist in towns such as Turku, Mariehamn, Vaasa, Pietarsaari, Kokkola (Swe. Karleby), Espoo–Kauaiainen (Swe. Esbo–Grankulla), Porvoo (Swe. Borgå), Tammisaari (Swe. Ekenäs) and Tampere (Swe. Tammerfors). Their joint magazine is *Föreningsbandet* (Bond of Union), which was first published in 1993.

Membership in 2006 numbered just over 1,100 (cf. *Matrikel över Svenska Frimurare Orden*. . . 2006).

Negative Attitudes towards Freemasonry

It is well-known that Freemasons have been the object of negative attitudes among the general public. There are many legends and stories about the Freemasons' dreadful rites and behaviour. It is quite common to hear that they indulged in the defilement of corpses and used babies in their bloody rituals. A widely entertained idea is that members of the brotherhood are closely bonded and that individual brothers would be helped in difficult times even if this involved contravening the law of the land. It has also been thought that the Freemasons' network has ties sometimes with the political far right, sometimes with the far left. In dictatorships, in particular, Freemasonry has been an object of suspicion (Bergstrand 1956; Ahtokari 2000: 135 ff.).

There is evidence that the Lutheran church was suspicious of Freemasonry from the time when it was first introduced into Finland. In 1769 the diocesan chapter of Borgå expressed its doubts about Freemasonry and its ideas. We may note that these suspicions existed on an ideological level (Ahtokari 2000: 172).

During the time when Finland was an autonomous Grand Duchy, Freemasonry, as I have already noted, was banned. The Russian central authorities in St Petersburg were very careful to ensure that no revolutionary or secessionist groups should gain a foothold in the Russian Empire. Individuals nevertheless engaged in Freemasonry outside the country's borders. Furthermore, legends about the Freemasons were widespread during this period even though there was probably little direct contact with Freemasonry.

The following period during which Freemasonry became the object of revilement was the 1930s. The ideology of National Socialism that emerged in Germany sought expression for its repressed needs and aggressions. This meant that Freemasons and Jews became objects of hate in Nazi Germany. It has been suggested that the reasons for this in the case of Germany was the humiliating treatment to which it was subjected following the First World War and the economic depression of the 1920s. Scapegoats were sought for the deprivations the Germans had had to undergo. Active Nazism in the 1930s was totally negative towards Freemasonry and banned it when it saw an opportunity to do so. Erich Ludendorff's vicious attacks on Freemasonry in Germany

in his books also spread to Finland (Ahtokari 2000: 193–215; cf. also Ludendorff 1928).

In Finland, which was allied with Germany, some people were quick to accept these fascist and Nazi ideas. In the Lutheran church and the military forces Freemasonry was seriously frowned upon and there were efforts to forbid it. Certain newspapers—*Tapparamies* in Finnish and *Nationen* in Swedish—published propaganda against Freemasonry. In general, opinion at this time turned not only against Freemasonry but also against other organisations, for example the Odd Fellows. Models for these ideas were taken from Germany. A most tragic event in the early 1930s served to strongly reinforce the antagonism towards Freemasonry in Finland (Ahtokari 2000: 149–58).

In 1930 the mutilated corpses of a score of persons were found in Tattarisuo at the outskirts of Helsinki. In the public's imagination and also in the mass media this was linked to the conception that Freemasons needed parts of corpses for their ceremonies. It was only in 1932 that it emerged that four mentally disturbed and religiously highly-strung persons were the perpetrators of the mutilations. They were sentenced to imprisonment. Nonetheless, the affair cast dark shadows over Freemasonry for a long time to come, in practice right up to the present day (Ahtokari 2000: 139–43.)

Freemasonry and its dangers were discussed in army officer circles at the beginning of the 1930s. The whole matter took so many turns that in the end the commander-in-chief, Hugo Österman forbade his men to belong to Masonic Lodges (Ahtokari 2000: 160–71).

In the Evangelical-Lutheran church, Freemasonry was also a topic of much discussion. At the Synod in Viipuri (Swe. Viborg) in 1932 the subject was dealt with as a matter of serious debate. It was proposed that it should be forbidden for clergymen to become Freemasons. The proposal was voted on and remitted to the Church Assembly in Finland, which met in May 1933. The question was raised there and opinions for and against Freemasonry put forward. The St Augustine Lodge in Helsinki had sent a letter to the Archbishopric in Finland, in which it explained the attitude of Freemasonry towards Christianity and society (*Frimureriets inställning. . .* 1933). At the Assembly it was above all Otto Andersson, Professor of Musicology and Folklore at Åbo Akademi University, who spoke against such a ban. His relatively long address, which presented the history of Freemasonry, its ideology and extent, was criticised because he was himself a Freemason. His speech led, however, to the fact that no measures were taken against Freemasonry (Ahtokari 2000: 172–82; Bergroth 2006: 81–2).

Finland had a number of political movements with extreme ideas in the 1930s. These included the Academic Karelia Society (Fi. Akateeminen Karjala-Seura, AKS), the Viitasaari Patriotic Society (Fi. Viitasaaren Isänmaallinen Seura) and the Finnish Patriotic People's Movement (Fi. Isänmaallinen kansanliike, IKL). These and other groups repeatedly brought up the topic of Freemasonry, published lists of Freemasons and issued publications with negative propaganda about Freemasonry. In 1939 a Finnish member of parliament, Paavo Susitaival, put a motion to parliament aimed at banning all Freemasonry in Finland. This did not, however, lead to any measures (Ahtokari 2000: 144–72).

All the tribulations that Freemasonry had to suffer in the 1930s meant that the number of its members fell dramatically. From being just under a thousand in each of the organisations it dropped to almost half of that.

After Freemasonry in Finland had recovered during the decades after the Second World War, the 1980s were a time when once again Freemasonry came under public attack. The infamous P2 Lodge in Italy, a lodge that was never officially recognised in Italy, or elsewhere, created a scandal by reason of its economic irregularities and this cast a shadow on Freemasonry in general. Defamations of Freemasonry began to arise in many countries, including Finland (cf. Setterlind 1986; Lenhammar 1985). The furnace negative opinions expressed in the mass media were stoked in Finland by the fact that a number of economic irregularities became the subject of lawsuits. These pertained to the building of the underground in Helsinki and the operations of the Salora TV factory in Turku. A few Freemasons were involved in these affairs and this led to generalisations that any irregularity was due to Freemasonry. Furthermore, the mass media also complained that the membership lists of the Masonic Lodges were not made public. They therefore published their own lists of members' names, a move designed to be revelatory. There was also discussion of the Freemasons' oath in relation to the oath of allegiance to the state demanded of civil servants and to the church and religion as a whole (Ahtokari 2000: 238–42).

In his doctoral thesis *Salat ja valat* (Secrets and Oaths, 2000), Reijo Ahtokari analysed the articles on Freemasonry published in the daily press during the years 1981–90. He came to a total of 595 negative reports, 633 with merely news value, and 127 favourable articles. Furthermore, there were 56 which he assigned to a miscellaneous group; thus totalling, in all, 1,411. This is quite a large number of articles published on one topic over a ten-year period. The most unfavourable articles are to be found in the large dailies in Helsinki, in the left-wing press and in

certain newspapers associated with religious groups (Ahtokari 2000: 257).

The matter was also raised in the Finnish Parliament, albeit without any real steps being taken. The Government noted, quite matter-of-factly, that Freemasonry was a supervised civic activity that followed the customs and laws of the land. There was nothing to indicate the need for any intervention, on the part of the government, that is (Ahtokari 2000: 226–56).

During the past two decades, Freemasonry has reacted by becoming more open than before about what its activities involve, what ideals the movement holds and what it strives to achieve. In the Freemasons' magazine *Frimuraren*, published in Sweden and also distributed to all active Freemasons in the Swedish system in Finland, and in *Föreningsbandet*, Freemason activities are described in word and illustration in quite a detailed way. An outsider therefore gets quite a different image than earlier of what Freemasonry is all about. The only thing that Freemasonry seeks to keep secret is the rite of initiation to the different grades. This is for didactic reasons, since initiation is intended to be experienced as something new and fresh for candidates. Nevertheless, it must be said that anyone who really wants to obtain all the possible information about Freemasonry can indeed find out about these rituals. A ritual read about in book form, however, never gives the same insight as something experienced in an active lodge (cf. Mogstad 1995).

Conclusion

If we look at the relation between society and Freemasonry over the last 250 years, we can note that a major change has taken place in the way new members are recruited. In the eighteenth century it was only Swedish-speaking persons, often officers and other high officials, who were admitted to the order. During the post-war period recruitment changed dramatically. Today it is mainly middle-class people, often with a certain academic education, that form the core of the Freemasons. Since Freemasonry, especially within the Swedish system, is a Christian movement, it means that people with sympathies for Christian values and rather conservative norms are recruited to Freemasonry. It has become a kind of leisure interest where men in rather closed circles can get an outlet for their religious needs. Freemasonry does not seek to be any kind of substitute for churches or congregations, however (cf. Heino 1995: 26–32).

If we look at the complaints levelled against Freemasonry over the centuries, we find many different motives. The quick reaction of the Lutheran church is linked to the fact that Freemasonry was seen as a rival on a spiritual level. It might lead to the authority of the church being questioned, which the church reacted against. Later it has been said that Freemasonry only concentrates on the Old Testament and does not take New Testament ideas into account. It is, in other words, 'legalistic' (Ahtokari 2000: 173–83). During the period of Russian rule, Freemasonry was banned by the Tsar. The justification for this was, as I have pointed out above, fear among the authorities of revolutionary and secessionist movements.

The violent propaganda against Freemasonry in the 1930s inspired by Nazi Germany meant that Freemasons themselves ceased their activities during the war years. The scandal with the corpses at Tattarisuo in Helsinki strengthened prejudices against Freemasonry drastically. Here people's ideas were united with fear that something improper might infiltrate church circles and the armed forces. The secrecy surrounding Freemasonry and the suspicions of a worldwide network for the exercise of power contributed to the decline in Masonic activities during the dramatic decades of the 1930s and 1940s.

The tribulations faced by Freemasonry in the 1980s were milder than the prior attacks. What the press now wanted to do was to unveil Freemasonry, reveal its secret rites, point out financial irregularities and seek some form of worldwide dubious activity, something that the attention aroused by the P2 affair in Italy served to underline. This inculcated in people a feeling that here was a doubtful organisation with unimagined economic and human resources that could overturn the existing social order. A number of religious minority groups were active in pointing out Freemasonry as something improper.

As far as Finland is concerned, Harri Heino's study at the Church Research Centre in Tampere came to show that Freemasons respect Christian values and social institutions to a much greater extent than what Finnish men of the same age in comparative groups do (Heino 1986, 1995).

Another aspect is that Freemasonry has become open to outside perusal in a completely different way from before. In the 1990s, Freemasons even invited bishops to attend information and discussion meetings. Newspapers and the internet today offer an opportunity to read a lot about the ideals and activities of Freemasonry. Exhibitions about Freemasonry and publicity on their aid activities today reach

the general public in a much more direct way than earlier (cf. Bergroth 1991). The secrecy surrounding Freemasonry has, in other words, decreased markedly. It will be interesting to see whether the criticism of Freemasonry will change character or perhaps even cease altogether. Freemasonry today is comparable to any other social activity for men in their prime and also for retired people.

To sum up, it may be noted that the scapegoat mentality appeared clearly in the suspicion towards Freemasonry of the 1930s, at a time when even the mutilation of corpses flourished at its worst. The projection of aggressions was also evident in this decade. The political thumb-screws were tightened and the threat of war could be clearly discerned, which meant that attempts were made to cleanse society of what were seen as destructive tendencies. In later years, especially the 1980s, it was perhaps most of all the need for sensation and *Schadenfreude* that flourished in the mass media. To put it mildly, the aim was to demonstrate that Freemasonry was something dangerous. Certain religious minorities were involved in the spreading of this negative attitude. On the whole Freemasonry has withstood defamation quite well and today Freemasonry in Finland is more widespread and active than ever before.

References

Ahtokari, Reijo

- 1998 *Muinainen ja oikeutettu. Suomen muinainen ja oikeutetun riitin korkein neuvosto 33° 1973–1998*. Jyväskylä: Suomen R. C. yhdistys.
- 2000 *Salat ja valat. Vapaamuurarit suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa ja julkisuudessa 1756–1996*. Dissertation. Dept. of History, University of Helsinki.

Ahtokari, Reijo & Eero Ekman (eds.)

- 2004 *Näkymättömän temppelin rakentajat. Suomalaisen vapaamuurariuden historia*. Helsinki: Otava.

Bergroth, Tom C.

- 1987 *Frimurare S:t Andreasföreningen Erasmus 1938–1988. Brödraföreningen Erasmus i Åbo. Åbo: Föreningen S:t Henrik. (Föreningen S:t Henriks skriftserie, 2)*
- 1991 (ed.) *Kultaa ja taivaansinistä. Vapaamuurarius, aate ajassa. Turun maakuntamuseo, näyttelyluettelo 15 / I guld och himmelsblått. Frimureri, ett ideal i tiden. Åbo landskapsmuseum, utställningskatalog 15, Turku. Turku: Turun maakuntamuseo*
- 2006 *Med det himmelska ljuset som ledare. S:t Johannes logen S:t Henrik i Åbo 1931–2006. Åbo: Föreningen S:t Henrik.*

Bergstrand, Carl-Martin

1956 *Frimurarna och hundturken. Vad folk trott om frimurarna.* Göteborg: Gumpert.

Eitinger, Leo

1985 *Mennesker blant mennesker. En bok om antisemittisme og frammedhat.* Oslo: J. W. Cappelens forlag AS.

Ekman, Eero, L.

1997 *Phoenix loosi no 3:n 75-vuotisjuhlakirja. Phoenix loosin 75-vuotta 1923–1998. Ruotsin vapaamuurariuden historia "kuninkaallista taidetta" vuodesta 1935 nykypäivään.* Turku: Turun Sanomat.

Frimureriets inställning. . .

1933 *Frimureriets inställning till kristendomen och samhället. Skrivelse av Logen St Augustin till domkapitlen i Finland.* Helsingfors: Logen St Augustin.

Heino, Harri

1986 *Vapaamuurarius ja kristinuskko. Suomalaisen vapaamuurariliikkeen uskonnollisuuden ja etiikan tarkastelua.* Tampere: Kirkon tutkimuskeskus. (Kirkon tutkimuskeskus, Sarja A N:o 46)

1995 *Mihin vapaamuurari uskoo? Suomalaisten vapaamuurarien arvot, etiikka ja uskonnollisuus.* Tampere: Kirkon tutkimuskeskus. (Kirkon tutkimuskeskus, sarja A N:o 65)

Huovinen, Kalevi

1990 *Kuusikymmentä vuotta 1930-1990 merkkimestarimuurariutta Suomessa.* Oulu: Ultima Thule.

Lenhammar, Harry

1985 *Med murslev och svärd. Svenska Frimurarorden under 250.* Uppsala: Åsak.

Ludendorff, E.

1928 *Frimureriets tillintetgörande genom avslöjandet av dess hemligheter. Del I.* Stockholm: E. P. Holmwall.

MacNulty, W. Kirk

2007 *Vapaamuurarit. Symbolit, salaisuudet, merkitys.* Helsinki: Tammi.

Matrikel över Svenska Frimurare Orden. . .

2006 *Matrikel över Svenska Frimurare Orden i Finland, arbetsåret 2006–2007.* Helsingfors: Svenska frimurare orden.

Mogstad, Sverre Dag

1995 *Frimureri. Mysterier, fellesskap, personlighetsdannelse.* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Nyberg, Folke

2005 *S:t Johannes Logen S:t Augustin 1756–2006. [Frimureriet i Finland 250 år, Helsingfors.]*

Setterlind, Bo

1986 *Frimurarmålet. Demokratins dödgrävare angriper Jesu vänner Frimurarna i svenska maktmedia 1985.* Borås: Norma.