

FREEMASONRY'S CONTRIBUTION TO SOUTH AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE – A FACTUAL APPROACH

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The Accepted View of Francisco de Miranda

ACCORDING TO THE PREVAILING view, Francisco de Miranda (1749–1816) has the honour of having initiated an entire generation of Latin-American liberators in his London Lodge, known as the *Gran Reunión Americana* (Grand American Union) or the *Sociedad de Caballeros Racionales* (Society of Rational Gentlemen). Latin-American patriots coming from Chile, Argentina, Venezuela (then part of the area known as Gran Colombia) and other colonial regions propagated masonic ideals in their countries, creating subsidiary Lodges (known as *Logias Lautarinas* or *Lautaro Lodges*), first in Cádiz (Spain), then in Buenos Aires, Mendoza, Santiago and other places. These Lodges, the accepted opinion goes, played a crucial role in the liberation struggles of South America. The conclusion drawn tacitly, if not explicitly stated, is that the independence of the South-American nations was to a large extent the result of Freemasonry's intervention.

This, in brief, is the theory that appears in the general histories of Chile, Argentina and other countries, and this theory has been warmly accepted by the great majority of historians, both freemasons and non-masons, in those countries.

New Opinions

There are, however, other voices, and particularly in recent years differing opinions have been presented, both by general historians and by masonic researchers.

Perhaps the best masonic exponent of this new approach was F.W. Seal-Coon. In two articles published in *AQC* in 1978 and 1982,¹ he took apart the generally-accepted view systematically and showed that it is based fundamentally on unconfirmed verbal declarations, sometimes made many years after the event, repeated, quoted and 'embellished' in the course of time, until they become axiomatic truths that nobody can question. This paper makes extensive use of Seal-Coon's research and in fact it could not have been written in the absence of his pioneering effort.

Other sceptical historians are the Venezuelan Antonio Egea Lopez and the Chilean Jaime Eyzaguirre.

It is necessary to approach the subject beginning with the figure of Miranda, since the masonic activities of the leaders of the independence wars of South America, were intimately linked with him.

Miranda's Background

Let me stress that Miranda's resolute and courageous struggle for the emancipation of American colonial lands from Spanish rule is not in question, nor is his exemplary and tireless devotion to that end. I am questioning only his masonic credentials.

To start with, I shall examine briefly the activities of the 'Precursor', Francisco de Miranda, this extraordinary figure in Latin-American history, from his birth in Venezuela on 24 April 1749 until his death in the Cádiz prison on 14 July 1816.

Miranda arrived in Europe on 1 March 1771. After travelling in Spain, he enlisted in the Princess Regiment in December of 1772. He visited Gibraltar in 1775, took part in the War of Independence of the North-American colonies (1780–2), followed by a journey visiting several cities in the newly-created United States (1783–4), then sojourned in London for the first time.

After that, Miranda embarked on an extensive journey in Europe, visiting Holland and Prussia (where he met again the Marquis de Lafayette, whom he detested – as recorded in his journal) and also meeting King Frederick II shortly before his death. He then continued his journey through Saxony, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Greece and Russia – where he was received by Gregory Potemkin, the favourite of the Empress Catherine II.

On 25 February 1787 Miranda was presented at court in Kiev, and the empress took an immediate liking to the dashing South-American. After Miranda revealed to her his revolutionary plans, Catherine promised to be the first to support the independence of the Spanish colonies in America. From Kiev, Miranda went to Moscow and Saint Petersburg, where he remained for three months, meeting again with the empress. In October of 1787 Miranda was in Stockholm, where he was received by King Gustavus III. He continued to Copenhagen, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Zurich and other Swiss cities, then to Marseilles, Paris and finally, in June 1789, back to London where he rented a flat in Jermyn Street.

Miranda did not remain in London for long. On 19 March 1792 he travelled to Paris, where he was at first well received by the Girondists, who offered him a military command. This stage of his military career, however, was very short. In June 1793 he was living peacefully in a Paris suburb when Robespierre took power and placed him under surveillance. The next month he was arrested and his imprisonment lasted until January 1795. After several adventures, Miranda escaped in disguise and returned to London in January 1798.

In London, Miranda presented himself before the Prime Minister William Pitt, whom he already knew. He declared that he represented a group of delegates from Nueva Granada (Colombia), Venezuela, México, Perú, La Plata (Argentina and Uruguay) and Chile,² in order to secure British support for the organization of a liberating expedition to South America, where a constitutional monarchy on the British model would be set up. Miranda was also received by the American ambassador, but could get no commitment from either one.

Miranda's economic situation deteriorated and he was forced to tutor some private students. One of these students was a young Chilean, with very little money, but of notable intelligence and resolution. He was then using his mother's maiden name and was known as Bernardo Riquelme. Later on he reverted to his father's name and history knows him as Bernardo O'Higgins.

A frustrated negotiation with Napoleon – who was then First Consul – concluded with Miranda's arrest as a presumptive spy, and his expulsion from France. He returned to London on 21 April 1801. Finally, after several more years of entreaties, negotiations, promises and unfulfilled expectations, Miranda departed for the United States on 2 September 1805. From New York he went on to Philadelphia and Washington, where he was received by President Jefferson and the Secretary of State Madison,³ who warned him that as long as Spain and the United States were at peace, any action against Spain initiated from American territory would be repressed by force.

Despite everything, Miranda persisted in his efforts and eventually gathered around

him a group of followers ready to fight, making a landing in Venezuela which resulted in a complete military rout. In November 1807 Miranda departed from the West Indies returning to London. Again he presented his projects to Lord Castlereagh,⁴ but in that same year Napoleon invaded Spain, whose government appealed for British assistance against the common enemy. The forces being readied to invade Venezuela were instead diverted to Spain, and Miranda's hopes were shattered again.

After this, Miranda lived peacefully in London. In 1802 he had entered into a romantic relationship with an English lady, Sara Andrew, and in 1803 they purchased a house, 28 Grafton Street (at present, No. 58, Grafton Way), where Miranda lived for four years, until his final departure in 1810. Since 1808, he had published a newspaper in London, *El Colombiano*, and through the years his home served as a meeting point for all the Latin-American patriots who visited the British capital.

Invited by Simón Bolívar, Miranda returned to Venezuela, arriving at the port of La Guaira on 11 December 1810. The Venezuelan revolution, however, was incomplete and under attack. The royalist faction was gaining ground. An earthquake complicated matters even more. There is no need to go into the details but in 1812 there took place what is known as the surrender of San Mateo, following which Miranda was accused of treason to the republic.

On 30 July Miranda arrived at La Guaira to embark on the British naval vessel *Sapphire*, which would take him to England. However, he made the mistake of spending the night ashore. Some of his followers, believing him to be a traitor, seized him and delivered him to the royalist commander Monteverde. Miranda was sent in June 1813 to Havana, and from there to Cádiz, in Spain, where he remained in prison until his death, three years later.

The reason for this narration of Miranda's life is to demonstrate that there is documentary evidence of his activities. Miranda kept a detailed diary from his arrival in Spain, describing the places he visited, detailing the buildings that drew his attention and naming the people he met, not forgetting to characterize the women.

Was Miranda a Freemason?

Turning to the masonic credentials of Miranda, it is important to note that in all his voluminous writings, there is almost no mention of Freemasonry. Here is what can be found: In October 1787, in Stockholm he visited an orphan's asylum supported by freemasons. A month after that, he visited a masonic Temple in Christiania (Oslo), and another one in Mastrand. That is all. Miranda's writings make no mention of having participated in any masonic meeting, so his visits to the two Lodge buildings could have been simply the fruit of curiosity.

These, for instance, are Miranda's own words concerning his visit in Oslo: '... at 10 we went in his [Mr. Hall's] carriage to see the hall of the Freemasons [*Frac-masones* in the original] – the proprietor of the House, Mr. J. P. Holberman, came to show the room with great politeness ... this room is very simple, of good proportions, and in very good taste, its architect Mr. Carlberg who has seen the best of Italy, England, etc. The lighting is solemn in the cornice, and some lamps must produce a very good effect – from there we passed to the house of Mr. Dorn, Director of the Customs...'⁵

The other visits, likewise, give no indication of Miranda being a freemason. They were probably a manifestation of his limitless curiosity. In his diaries Miranda relates a visit to a printing shop in Cologne, port installations in Sweden, a mine, a prison, hospitals in Paris, factories, etc. His is 'a fantastic encyclopedic spirit that ignores neither archaeology nor art works, who admires both Roman ruins and the Sistine Chapel or Prague's gothic Castle,' wrote a biographer who will be mentioned again later.⁶

Another important fact is that during his extensive tour of the United States (1783–4), in the course of which he stayed at Charleston, Philadelphia and New York, Miranda did not make any effort to visit the Lodges operating there.⁷

The theories about Miranda's Initiation are many. Some maintain that he was initiated in Gibraltar in 1775–6. At the time, there was, in fact, an English Lodge founded about 1726 – Saint John of Jerusalem No. 51, and another founded in 1767 – Saint John No. 148. However, the little documentation surviving from those lodges, which have both disappeared, does not mention Miranda's name. To sum up, 'All in all, whilst it is not an impossibility that Miranda was made a mason in Gibraltar at the time, there is no extant evidence thereof and in view of the brevity of his stay and of the fact that he was a foreigner serving in a foreign army it would seem extremely unlikely.'⁸

In other words, while it is an established fact that Miranda was often in the company of known freemasons, from whom he may have received a great deal of information about Freemasonry and its organization, there is no proof whatsoever that he was ever initiated in a masonic lodge, and although Miranda lived for long periods of time in London, adding up to some 13 years,⁹ in the records of the UGLE no mention of his name has been discovered, not even as a visitor. Moreover, in all of his voluminous correspondence and diaries, Miranda himself never claims to be a freemason.

Another masonic author, Christian Charlet, adds many details expressing his admiration for the great Venezuelan but even he has to admit that 'where and when was he initiated, is ignored to this day'.¹⁰

The weight of evidence demonstrates that Miranda was not a freemason, and therefore the society he founded was not a masonic Lodge.

The Liberation Ideology

If Miranda did not acquire from Freemasonry his liberation ideology and his burning desire to emancipate the Spanish colonies, what then was his source?

We must look for an explanation both in his restless character and his inquisitive mind. On the one hand, the influence of the Enlightenment, the *philosophes* like Rousseau and the encyclopedists, whose ideas Miranda embraced with enthusiasm, and on the other the experience of the War of Independence of the North-American colonies, in which he took an active part.

The same libertarian, fraternal and egalitarian spirit that contributed to the development of masonic Lodges and gave them a philosophic underpinning, likewise influenced the leaders of the South-American independence movements, without necessarily implying their membership in masonic bodies.

There is no doubt whatsoever that Miranda had numerous and direct contacts with well-known freemasons, such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and King Frederick II of Prussia. It cannot surprise us then that Miranda chose to give a quasi-masonic character to the organization he created in London to carry forward his projects.

The *Gran Reunión Americana*

The vehicle created by Miranda to enlist followers and put into effect his revolutionary plans was the organization known as *Gran Reunión Americana*, also known as *Gran Logia Regional Americana*, *Gran Oriente de Londres*, and other similar names.

The enthusiastic imaginations of some masonic authors attribute to this association a masonic character that in all probability never existed. Let us see, as a single example to avoid redundancy, what Fernando Pinto Lagarrigue writes: 'The *Gran Reunión Americana* started, since its installation as a lodge dependent from the Grand Lodge of England, planning the independence of the Spanish colonies'.¹¹

While the *Gran Reunión Americana* may have assumed the name of a lodge, it does not appear in the registers of either of the Grand Lodges existing in England at the time (not a single one, as Pinto Lagarrigue apparently believes. Unification was achieved only in 1813).

By the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, when the organization of Grand Lodges and their dependent Lodges was already clearly established and codified, particularly in England, where the remaining 'irregular' Lodges had practically disappeared by the end of the 18th century.

Pinto Lagarrigue continues: 'One of the first decisions of the *Gran Reunión Americana* was to create agencies, which were called "Lautaro Lodges", a name apparently inspired by O'Higgins ...' (my emphasis, L.Z.).

We can observe here the typical confusion of terms, indiscriminate use of the word 'Lodge' and an 'explanation' gratuitously imagined by the masonic author who, unencumbered by any documentary evidence, decides that the use of the name 'Lautaro' must have been the work of Bernardo O'Higgins, since he came from Chile.¹²

The Lautaro Lodges

It is only in Santiago, Chile, after the arrival of San Martín and O'Higgins at the head of the Army of the Andes (which crossed the Andes mountains in order to fight for Chile's independence) and after the victory at Chacabuco against the royalists, that for the first time we find the name Lautaro in connection with a Lodge. According to Fernando Pinto Lagarrigue,¹³ it was founded on 13 March 1817 and it assembled in the same house where, 20 years later, would be born the illustrious freemason and educator Eduardo de la Barra.

Many historians, including Pinto Lagarrigue, have claimed that before that time Lautaro lodges had been created in Buenos Aires, Mendoza and other places, but the analysis made by Bro. Seal-Coon, based to a large extent on the work of Dr. Alcibiades Lappas¹⁴ and Dr. Enrique de Gandía¹⁵ is conclusive: the other 'Lodges' mentioned were based on the model of the *Caballeros Racionales* but did not carry the designation of *Lautaro*. As Seal-Coon points out (1982, p. 103) it would have been highly unlikely to give the name of an Araucanian (Chilean) chieftain to an Argentinean Lodge, but this is absolutely understandable in the case of a Chilean organization formed in Santiago to fight for the independence of Chile.

As further related by Lagarrigue,¹⁶ the renowned Chilean historian Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna (not a freemason), while in exile in Lima befriended the son of Bernardo O'Higgins, Demetrio O'Higgins Puga, who granted him access to his father's personal papers. Among these documents Vicuña Mackenna found an autograph copy of the constitution of the Lautaro Lodges, 'emanating from the *Gran Reunión Americana*', and which he reproduced in his book *El Ostracismo del General O'Higgins*, published by the El Mercurio press of Valparaíso in 1860.

Pinto Lagarrigue transcribed this 'constitution'¹⁷. I shall quote some of its relevant articles and examine them from a masonic point of view, in order to see if we can reach a conclusion about the masonic character of the *Lautaro* lodges.

I shall not translate the full text, which is not necessary for my purpose, but rather I shall pick some of the more relevant clauses.

The Preamble is simply an impassioned condemnation of the Spanish colonial regime, and a lamentation about the deplorable conditions of the American colonies. Now, finally – the text continues – an opportune moment has come when the Spanish government has been dissolved, its king imprisoned, and so the yoke can be thrown away. The new Association will be composed of American gentlemen distinguished by their liberal ideas, who will methodically work towards the independence of America.

Note that there is not a word about the GAOTU, or the ancient obligations, in fact, nothing that can be regarded as having a masonic meaning.

We shall now consider briefly some of the 23 articles comprising this 'constitution' – apart from five penal clauses, which I shall describe later.

Article 1: The headquarters¹⁸ Lodge will be composed of thirteen gentlemen, apart from the president, vice-president, two secretaries, one for North America and the other for South America, an orator and a master of ceremonies.

Article 2: This number may not be increased, but if one of the brethren goes out of the province, [his place] may be filled if circumstances so require.

Note the inconsistency in the use of the name 'brother', which appears in the second article but not in the first. The triple Lodge leadership (WM, SW, JW) which is an essential part of the masonic lodge structure, intimately linked with its symbols, is missing. Instead, we have two secretaries assigned on a geographical basis, obviously to handle overseas communications. The limit placed on the number of Brethren is also surprising and more appropriate to the cell of an underground organization than to a masonic Lodge.

Article 3 determines that the President will serve in perpetuity, while the other officers will serve one year. Article 4 indicates that the president and other members of the lodge will be addressed 'simply as brothers, except in those cases when the presence of others, public usage and decorum, demand the corresponding treatment.'

Article 7 is of the greatest importance for the present study. I shall translate it in full:

Article 7: Whenever a brother is appointed by the government as first or second in command of an army or governor of a province, he will be empowered to create a subsidiary association depending from the headquarters, whose numbers may not exceed five individuals, and conducting proper correspondence, by means of established signs to communicate all the news and important matters that take place.

Of course, for a masonic Lodge to meet regularly it must have at least seven officers. Having only five members in the group makes this impossible and demonstrates *ipso facto* that the association had no masonic character. Note also that the text deliberately avoids using the word lodge in this case, speaking only of a 'subsidiary association' ('sociedad subalterna'), although elsewhere the word 'Lodge' is used freely.

A corollary of the above is that all the 'Brethren' who were admitted to the subsidiary branches of the *Gran Reunión Americana* – by whatever name they may have been known at the time – were not initiated as we understand the term.

Article 21, discussing the matter of a complaint against a Brother who has disclosed the existence of the lodge by word or sign, establishes that 'the lodge will appoint a committee composed of six individuals, etc.' The use of the word 'individuals' is surprising – not brothers or members. This also happens in Article 7 which refers to 'five individuals'.

There are five penal clauses. The second sets down that 'any brother who reveals the secret of the existence of the Lodge, whether by word or by signs, will be punishable by death, by the means that may be found more convenient.' Obviously, no such penalty, real or symbolic, has ever been invoked in a masonic Lodge for revealing its existence.

Beyond all these particulars, what may be troubling to a mason is the coercive spirit that permeates the entire document. Imperative expressions abound: '... will not be allowed to deliberate on anything of great importance without consulting the opinion of the Lodge ...', 'no employment of importance will be given within the capital or outside ...', 'every brother must support even at the risk of death the decisions of the Lodge', 'All the brethren are obliged to inform the Lodge ...', etc. All this is in open contradiction with the masonic principles of tolerance, freedom, equity and justice.

Finally, consider the oath that the members of the association had to pronounce, as included by Bartolomé Mitre in his *Historia de San Martín y de la Emancipación Sudamericana*, and reproduced by Pinto Lagarrigue (op. cit., p. 47):

'I shall never recognize as the legitimate government of my fatherland any except that elected by the free and spontaneous will of the people; and the republican system [of government] being the most suitable to govern the Americas, I shall encourage, by all the means that I have available, the people to choose it.'

This forceful statement, unobjectionable to our ears, sounds however slightly extemporaneous for the times. We know very well, in fact, that among the leaders of the independence movement in the various regions of Spanish America there were not a few who supported some sort of constitutional monarchy.

How can we reconcile the above declaration of principles, for example, with San Martín's negotiations tending to set up in Perú a monarchy, going so far as proposing that a descendant of the Incas should assume the throne?¹⁹

Taking into consideration all these factors, the only conclusion we can draw is that the secret organization known as *Caballeros Racionales* and its offshoot the *Lautaro* Lodge had no masonic character, apart from the use (or misuse) of some masonic titles. The most that we can accept on the basis of the facts known to us at present is that some of its members had been initiated in masonic Lodges, and that they used some of the terminology of Freemasonry, leading many historians to error through the years. The organization's constitution and oath are clearly appropriate to a secret political association organized in small cells (up to five members each), and not to masonic Lodges, despite what some authors may claim to the contrary.²⁰

The Masonic Affiliation of Bolívar

Many individual independence fighters were freemasons. I shall restrict myself to one: Simón Bolívar, known as 'the Liberator', who was, without question, the greatest military and political figure active in South American independence.²¹

The Supreme Council of the 33° (Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite) of Venezuela has in its archives three documents, whose authenticity has been verified by expert paleographers. One of the documents is the minutes of passing to the FC degree of Simón Bolívar in the *Mother Lodge of Saint Alexander of Scotland*, in Paris, on the eleventh day of the 11th month of the masonic year 5805, which corresponds to 11 January 1806. This demonstrates that Bolívar had been initiated before that date, probably in the same lodge (and not in a Cádiz lodge in 1803, as claimed by some authors). In another document, a list of lodge members covering the masonic years 5804 and 5805 (which stretch from March 1804 until February 1806) Simón Bolívar appears as a Master Mason.

Later, on 21 April 1824, Bolívar was one of 84 freemasons who were awarded the 33° Degree in the AASR by Joseph Cernau, then Sovereign Grand Commander of a Supreme Council based in New York. We have no proof that Bolívar solicited such honour, nor even that he in fact received it. In any event, Bolívar's masonic credentials are unquestionable. However, and this is a point often forgotten when discussing such matters, it appears that Freemasonry played no role in his writings and activities. There is no evidence, for example, that he ever affiliated to any of the 30 Lodges then existing in Venezuela, Gran Colombia (then including Panama), and Ecuador. To give just two instances, *Protectora de las virtudes Lodge No. 1*, was founded in Barcelona, Venezuela, on 1 July 1810 by Diego Bautista Valero, and *Orden y Libertad Lodge No. 2*, was founded in Lima, Perú, by General Antonio Valero. Both Lodges exist to this day, but neither pretends that the Liberator was ever one of its members.²²

Finally, after uncovering a plot against his person (in which apparently Freemasonry was not involved), on 8 November 1828 Bolívar outlawed all secret societies, including *Freemasonry*. It falls beyond our scope to examine the reasons Bolívar may have had to take this step. What is significant is that he took it. Not every day do you find a freemason closing down an institution with whose ideals he was presumably in full agreement.

The Masonic Affiliation of San Martín

The Argentinean historian Alcibíades Lappas claims that José de San Martín was

initiated in *Integridad No. 7* Lodge in Cádiz, whose Master was General Francisco María Solano, Marquis of Socorro. Américo Carnicelli, on the other hand, gives the name of the lodge as *Legalidad*, without adducing any evidence.

Unfortunately, we have no proof of the existence of such a Lodge, under either name. What is certain is that San Martín entered Lodge No. 3 of the *Caballeros Racionales*, when this was established in Cádiz.²³ It is also confirmed that he established branches of this Association in several places, and finally was the instigator of the creation of the *Lautaro* Lodge in Santiago which, as we have seen, was the Chilean branch of the *Caballeros Racionales* and not a masonic Lodge.

More significant, perhaps, is the statement made by San Martín himself, in a letter sent to General Castilla in 1848, after living long years in exile (and only two years before his death), as quoted by Francisco A. Encina in his *History of Chile*: 'In a meeting of Americans in Cádiz, learning of the first movements that had occurred in Caracas, Buenos Aires, etc., we resolved to return each to his own country of birth, in order to offer our services in the struggle which we estimated would have to take place.'²⁴

Note that San Martín has not a word to say about Lodges or Freemasonry. This he writes when he was living peacefully in a land where Freemasonry operated openly and without impediment. He would have risked nothing in recognizing his masonic affiliation, or the masonic character of the Association he had helped to found, if such had existed.

There is yet another historical fact often brought up as proof of San Martín's Freemasonry.

The Medal of the *La Parfaite Amitié* Lodge

In his work *San Martín, la Logia Lautaro y la Francmasonería*,²⁵ Fabián Onsari referred to the medal struck by *La Parfaite Amitié* lodge of Brussels to honour San Martín (photographs of the obverse and reverse of the medal are reproduced in a plate facing page 65),²⁶ taking this medal as irrefutable proof of San Martín's masonic quality. Onsari quoted a letter from Bro. W. E. Carpens, Lieutenant Sovereign Grand Commander of Belgium, who wrote to him 'the lodge would not have ordered this medal to be struck with the portrait of General San Martín if he had not been an active member of this lodge.'²⁷

However, Bro. Jacques Litvine, in a letter to the present writer dated 6 October 1997, stated the following:

'We still have the minutes of the Chapter annexed to the [Parfaite Amitié] lodge until 1846. The archives have been dispersed, but a part is in the archives of the Louvain library. I have also consulted the archives of the meridional Province of the Low Countries (1814–30) written by de Wargnies, but nowhere is found a mention of this General San Martín ... Generally, engraved medals are awarded only to masons that one wants to honour, never to illustrious profanes, if the person is important, the medal is engraved on the reverse with the compulsory designation M.:., this is "mandatory".'

In another communication (dated 2 April 1997), Bro. Jacques Huyghebaert informed me of the following:

'Brother Georges Deny, the foremost Belgian antiquarian [bookseller], states that San Martín's presence in Brussels is not established ... Brother Deny also states that issuing medals, even to non-masons, was done in Belgium throughout the 19th century. Belgian Brethren in 1825 were already dreaming of obtaining their independence from Holland (Belgium was created in 1831). It is quite possible, according to him, that General San Martín may have caused considerable enthusiasm and admiration among masons in Brussels and that this may have

resulted in the issue of the said medal. The medal still according to him cannot be considered as evidence of his masonic membership’.

Alcibiades Lappas claims that ‘in the list of the month of December 1824, he [San Martín] appears in the lodge *La Parfaite Amitié*’.²⁸ However, he offers no sources for this statement and all my efforts to discover independent corroboration have been fruitless.

In the first place, it is surprising that the only title given San Martín is that of General, both on the obverse and reverse of the medal. We might have expected something like Fr.: (Bro.) or M.:, since all the rest of the text follows all masonic conventions studiously. The abbreviations are represented with three dots .:, the word ‘Lodge’ is symbolized by a rectangle, the masonic year is used instead of the Gregorian, and yet San Martín is shown in full military dress complete with decoration, but without any masonic symbol whatsoever.

There is a different plausible explanation for the medal. We know that at the time it was struck, the Belgian movement for independence (separation from the Netherlands) was gaining momentum. Many of the leaders involved were freemasons. Alcibiades Lappas mentions the names of Charles Rogier, Joseph Lebeau, Félix de Merode and 28 other names, which I shall not list here because they are not relevant to this study.²⁹

Further, we know that the Belgian patriots did not have among them a military leader with the experience to organize their armed forces. They offered this command to San Martín, who refused with well-chosen words: ‘when I retired from the American struggle, I swore not to unsheathe my sword except if needed for the freedom of my fatherland’.³⁰ Not wishing to get involved in the coming revolution, San Martín moved to France, where he spent his last years.

It is not far-fetched to assume that the Belgian freemasons, anxious to gain for their cause the cooperation of San Martín, struck this medal to win his favour. The absence of any masonic reference concerning San Martín, either in the text or iconographically, can be explained in one of two ways: perhaps the Belgian freemasons were not sure of San Martín’s masonic credentials, or perhaps he himself requested that no masonic attribution be made to him.

If, as it appears probable, San Martín was in fact ‘initiated’ only in the *Sociedad de Caballeros Racionales*, and not in a masonic Lodge, his undeniable intellectual honesty would have prevented him from claiming a distinction to which he was not entitled. Of course, all this is speculation.

Upon his death, San Martín’s papers were supposed to go to his friend Guido (a freemason) but it is not clear if the latter did in fact receive them. The Chilean historian Vicuña Mackenna relates that he repeatedly approached San Martín’s son-in-law, Mariano Balcarce, requesting information about San Martín’s masonic affiliation, but Balcarce finally answered that ‘faithfully following the ideas of my venerated father-in-law, who during his lifetime did not want to discuss his links with Freemasonry and other secret societies [my emphasis, L.Z.], I consider that I must abstain from making use of the documents I have on this matter.’³¹ Lappas takes this to mean that Balcarce had documents linking San Martín with Freemasonry, but it is clear that Balcarce – and presumably San Martín – made a distinction between Freemasonry and ‘other secret societies’ which could refer to the *Caballeros Racionales*, the *Lautaro* Lodge, etc. In other words, San Martín’s connections may well have been not with Freemasonry, but with these ‘other secret societies’.

The Masonic Affiliation of Bernardo O’Higgins

When examining the question of whether Bernardo O’Higgins was ever initiated in a masonic lodge or not, there is a significant fact to remember. Through the entire period of the ‘Patria Vieja’ (1810–14), until the retreat of the Chilean patriots across the Andes cordillera to Mendoza, there is no mention whatsoever of any masonic or pseudo-

masonic organization operating in Chile, either created by O'Higgins or anybody else. Only upon the arrival of San Martín, at the head of the liberation army (Army of Los Andes), accompanied by Argentinean officers who had joined the 'lodge' in Buenos Aires or Mendoza, could the Chilean branch be established.

Another highly suggestive fact in this connection is the attitude of Joel Poinsett towards O'Higgins and José Miguel Carrera.

The Poinsett Mission

In 1811, during the government of José Miguel Carrera, a North-American 'General commercial agent' arrived in Chile, Joel Robert Poinsett, who was in fact a confidential envoy of the United States government. Poinsett was an active mason, and a friend of President Monroe, himself also a freemason.³²

In Chile, Poinsett became a close friend of José Miguel Carrera and collaborated in the writing of the Constitution of 1812, which gained him 'the hatred of Chilean aristocracy ... and turned against him the church and the people', as expressed by Mario Barros³³ in his *Diplomatic History of Chile*.

Poinsett returned to his country in 1814, was elected to Congress (1821–5) and later served as the first ambassador of the United States in México (1825–9). He was later Minister of War under president Martin Van Buren and was one of the promoters of the independence of Texas. It should be remembered that he also played an important role in masonic activities in Mexico at the time.

In the United States, Poinsett is better remembered as the man who introduced into his country the red flower that has become one of the most popular symbols of Christmas, the Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*).³⁴

It is significant that while in Chile, Poinsett would become a close friend of Carrera and not of O'Higgins (the two were most of the time rivals). As we know from his own diary, José Miguel Carrera had been affiliated in *Saint John Lodge No. 1* in New York on 24 April 1816,³⁵ receiving the Third Degree. In other words, he was already a regular mason before that date, although it appears that later he distanced himself from Freemasonry. Whatever the case, his masonic credentials are beyond question.

The 'Initiation' of O'Higgins

Jaime Eyzaguirre claims that O'Higgins was initiated in the Lautaro Lodge of Buenos Aires in 1815, by his friends from Cádiz, the Canon Juan Pablo Fretes and his nephew Colonel Juan Florencio Terrada.³⁶ However, there is no documentary proof about this. O'Higgins could also have been initiated in the *Lautaro* Lodge of Mendoza in 1816 but once again, we have no proof. All these are simple suppositions.

Furthermore, and this is very important, even if he was 'initiated' in a branch of the *Caballeros Racionales*, this was not – as we have already shown – a masonic Lodge, so even in that eventuality he would still not be a freemason.

A last particular that may throw some light on our discussion is the letter quoted by the historian Francisco A. Encina, sent by O'Higgins to San Martín and dated 9 October 1832, when, in Encina's words, both former comrades at arms 'were eating the bread of the exiled', O'Higgins addresses San Martín with great warmth, calling him 'Liberator of my country, and my great friend to the grave.'³⁷

Is it credible that in such circumstances, when the two old leaders shared the bitter fate of exile, O'Higgins would address such a personal letter to his old comrade without calling him 'brother' if that had been the case?

For all the facts described above, in my opinion O'Higgins was not a freemason.

The Reason for the Myth

While some of the leaders of the armed struggle against Spanish rule in South America were freemasons, they acted as individuals, and not within a masonic structure. If we have raised a question concerning the masonic affiliation of others, such as Miranda, O'Higgins and San Martín, this does not in any way diminish the validity and bravery of their emancipating struggle, which resulted in the independence of over a dozen sovereign nations.

A legitimate question is, how is it possible that erroneous views have been created and maintained stubbornly by generations of historians, on matters so close to the heart of any South-American?

I can only advance a theory, certainly not original, which simply put is that people who ardently want to find something to support their opinions on a subject where documents are lacking or are subject to different interpretations, usually do find what they are looking for.

In our specific case, there has been a curious conjunction of 'interests'. On the one hand, some historians, mostly masonic, are interested in underlining the role played by Freemasonry and masons in the crucial period of independence of their respective countries. It is pleasant to claim so many important historical figures as our brethren, it helps the image of our Order and strengthens the admiration and loyalty of newly-initiated members in particular. There can be no doubt that some of the leaders involved were masons, and the masonic writers who adopt this position defend it passionately, precluding further discussion of the subject to a large extent.

On the other hand, and this may be something of a paradox, the historians whose *weltanschauung* is non-masonic or even anti-masonic (and there is a wide spectrum of positions on this side, from the snide remark to the open and brutal attack), are also interested in stressing the role of Freemasonry and of masonic Lodges in the independence struggle, because in that way they can excuse, as it were, the failures of the Spanish government, and the fanatical support it received from the high hierarchy of the Catholic church. It is easier to blame a 'conspiracy', the 'dark forces within the Lodges' and all the rest.

The fact that some freemasons acted at complete variance with recognized masonic principles does not seem to faze either party described in the previous two paragraphs. For instance, Bolívar's decree banning all masonic Lodges and activity, as part of his struggle against local political enemies. Let us remember also that fratricidal fights erupted quite often between the 'Liberators' themselves, such as the struggle between O'Higgins and the Carrera brothers. I could go on giving examples, but these should suffice.

The myth was created and maintained by the desire of historians, both masonic and non-masonic, to highlight the role played by Freemasonry. To this end the fiction that the *Caballeros Racionales*, or the *Lautaro* Lodges, were masonic in character, has been kept alive, though some historians, to their credit, recognize in some part or other of their work that this was not so, or has not been proven.

The masonic authors who defend the 'masonic role' are in the majority, so I will be excused from listing them. Most of their works appear in the notes at the end of this paper, or are included in Seal-Coon's bibliography.

As for the non-masonic historians, supporting the 'masonic conspiracy' theory, I shall give just one example, the excellent biography of Bernardo O'Higgins, written by the Chilean Jaime Eyzaguirre, who received for it in 1946 first prize in the National O'Higgins Competition, organized by the Government of Chile. The work is very well written, easy to read, and at the same time is based on a copious bibliography. This work is highly recommended for all those interested in the history of Chile.³⁸

Reading it through masonic eyes, one finds some shocking expressions. Eyzaguirre attributes to the *Lautaro* Lodge a sinister and domineering influence over O'Higgins, accusing it also of following a pro-Argentinean policy. (In Chilean eyes, this is a grave accusation).

Let me quote some sentences to justify my judgment:

‘No matter how many precautions were taken, the people’s instinct then began to perceive a hidden and mysterious power acting behind its back, which in assemblies that imagination pictured as shadowy made decisions about the person and property of the citizens.’ (p. 170)

‘Day by day the aristocracy was feeling its subjugation to a military caste ruled by a sinister organism.’ (ibid)

‘O’Higgins is in favor of delegating power on Colonel Luis de la Cruz, but the brethren of the lodge, inclined to favor Argentinean influence, want it given to Colonel Hilarión de la Quintana, relative of San Martín’. (p. 173)

‘The lodge wants everything for Quintana and, as a submissive brother, O’Higgins must blindly obey this opinion.’ (ibid.)

‘O’Higgins has departed with the war minister, José Ignacio Zenteno, trusted by the lodge and, above all, San Martín’. (ibid.)

‘In the meantime, somebody was moving resolutely in order to achieve by sinister means what he could not by the clear ways of justice ... Monteagudo ... ruminated in the shadows another elimination, and friends of the lodge assisted him to consummate his plan.’ (p. 206)

‘Again the Lautaro lodge’s tentacles appeared in action and O’Higgins, as the pusillanimous instrument of their obscure designs.’ (p. 212)

‘Miguel Zañartu ... on 23 July 1829 participated [to O’Higgins] that the masons of Buenos Aires had thrown their support behind the leader José Miguel Carrera, because they wanted to avenge the death of his brother Luis, who was of the brotherhood. And he added to be very careful about these ramifications. “You know how widespread is Freemasonry in the army”.’ (p. 272)

However, a few pages later, Jaime Eyzaguirre indulges in a bit of outright fiction, imagining the thoughts of José Miguel Carrera:

‘O’Higgins, always O’Higgins ... He is the man without a will that bends to the appetites of San Martín and the Lodge and submits abjectly to Argentinean hegemony.’ (p. 278).

In all these passages, and others, the Lautaro Lodge is portrayed with sinister characteristics, operating in the shadows, and O’Higgins is portrayed as ‘submissive’ or ‘pusillanimous’ towards the Lodge which, of course, is proclaimed categorically as masonic. It is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile this image of Bernardo O’Higgins with the sturdy and resolute character shown by him throughout his life. His personality was forged in his youth by economic penury and the imperative need to overcome the handicap of being the illegitimate son of a Spanish Viceroy who wanted to have nothing to do with him. His feelings of injured pride for his birth and his lack of opportunity as a ‘criollo’ (native) under the Spanish colonial regime served to strengthen his natural ability and character. His bravery in the field of battle, his refusal to surrender, to give up even under the most trying circumstances, and his resilience in recovery after defeat are amply documented. Categorizing O’Higgins as submissive or pusillanimous is nothing less than grotesque.

The cases of the Carrera brothers and of Manuel Rodríguez are too well known to go over them again. Let me give just one example of his unbending nature when he felt his honour was in question. Mrs. Manuela Warnes, the wife of a colonel in the Chilean army (Joaquín Prieto) had been insulted by a priest who attempted to expel her from the cathedral because in his opinion her dress was immodest. In the course of an angry meeting with the priest, José Alejo de Eyzaguirre (a well-known family of Santiago’s high society), O’Higgins felt his authority was put in question. He had the priest arrested and later exiled to Argentina. All the pleas of the aristocracy and church were fruitless. ‘The supreme ruler [O’Higgins] remained inflexible and despite the priest’s failing health and an epidemic that at the time raged in the city of Mendoza, he forced him to cross the mountains.’³⁹

A much more rational and credible explanation for the relations between O'Higgins and the *Lautaro* lodge is that O'Higgins consented to carry out Lodge decisions only when these coincided with his own wishes. An illuminating occurrence in this connection is the reaction of O'Higgins when Pueyrredón, Director [i.e. President] of the Buenos Aires government, suggested to him granting a pension to José Miguel Carrera, who had arrived at the Argentinean capital with several ships loaded with weapons and munitions, anxious to set out on an expedition to reconquer Chile. Pueyrredón forced Carrera to hand over his ships and weapons, after promising that he would negotiate with the Chilean government a pension for himself and his two brothers. O'Higgins answered with the following words: 'Chile's honour rather demands their [the Carrera brothers] punishment, and not granting them benefits of which they are unworthy.'

There can be no doubt that from his point of view, the indignation of O'Higgins was fully justified by the constant plots and revolts planned and initiated by the Carrera brothers. On the other hand, such attitude would be inexplicable if O'Higgins had been truly dominated by the *Lautaro* lodge, since we know that the Buenos Aires lodge supported Carrera.

In O'Higgins' actions one cannot see the hidden and sinister hand of the *Lautaro* Lodge, but rather the expression of a consensus in which the voice of O'Higgins was decisive.

The First Masonic Lodge in Chile: *La Filantropía Chilena*

On 15 March 1827 – only four years after the abdication of O'Higgins, the first documented masonic lodge known to us appears in Chile: the *Filantropía Chilena* Lodge. Its founder and first Master was Admiral Manuel Blanco Encalada, holder at the time of the 18th Degree in the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

In 1825, while Blanco Encalada commanded the Chilean fleet that blockaded the Peruvian port of Callao, he worked in close co-ordination with the Venezuelan General Antonio Valero, fighting with Bolívar's troops on the ground side of the blockade. We know that Valero was a 33° freemason.

It is very probable, states Edmundo Pérez Sánchez in an article discussing the origins of Freemasonry in Chile,⁴⁰ that from this meeting of Blanco and Valero was born the initiative to create the *Filantropía Chilena* lodge, and that is why in its foundation minutes (a document currently owned by the Grand Lodge of Chile) Brother Encalada declares that when the *Regeneración* Rose Croix Chapter of Lima conferred upon him the 18° Degree, it entrusted him with establishing Lodges and masonic temples in the territory of the Republic of Chile. Further down in the same document, the Lodge is put under the jurisdiction of the *Gran Oriente N. Colombiano*.

Among the members of the *Filantropía Chilena* Lodge were some of the most relevant figures in the first decades of Chile's independent life, such as Manuel José Gandarillas, Minister of Foreign Relations in 1826,⁴¹ Manuel Rengifo, who was later Minister of Finance at the time of Portales, introducing fiscal order instead of the existing chaos; Tomás Ovejero and Victorino Garrido, both intimate collaborators of minister Portales. Though Portales himself was not a freemason, he was well informed of the prohibition about political and religious debates within the Lodge. In a letter to his friend Garfías, Portales complains that 'masonic lodges are being organized in Santiago and Valparaíso ... with the purpose of using them for political and electoral business ... deviating from their institute [i.e. their principles].'⁴²

Brother Blanco Encalada, the first Master of the Lodge, was head of state *ad-interim* of Chile in 1826, after the resignation of General Freire, and he was the first to use the title President of Chile.

Filantropía Chilena disappeared without leaving heirs. There are vague rumours concerning other Lodges that may have operated in secret in the years that followed, but

in all probability they were rather secret political clubs, perhaps using masonic terminology, on the lines of the *Lautaro* Lodge and the *Caballeros Racionales*.

Returning to the Myth

Paradoxically then, the interests of masonic and non-masonic authors have coincided in trying to exaggerate and enlarge the role played by Freemasonry in the independence of Chile and other South-American countries. Wishful thinking replaced the critical apparatus of the historian, and the indiscriminate use of the word 'Lodge', without distinguishing between masonic and non-masonic organizations, has compounded the confusion.

The documentary evidence as well, has often been of a sort that raises serious doubts about its validity. Seal-Coon offers as a possible reason for the existing confusion between *Lautaro* lodges, *Caballeros Racionales* and masonic lodges the fact that the Argentinean historian Bartolomé Mitre, one of the earlier historians who attempted to study this subject, obtained some of his information from General José Matías Zapiola when the latter was a nonagenarian who tried to recall events that occurred 70 years earlier relying only on his memory.⁴³

Spanish historians, some of whom are inclined to discover the hidden hand of Freemasonry in any place where Spanish interests have been affected (it's not superfluous to bring up here the obsessive preoccupation of the dictator Francisco Franco with the so-called 'Jewish-masonic-communist collusion') enthusiastically embraced the theory that the *Lautaro* lodges (which, for them, were regular masonic Lodges in all respects) were the root and soul of the Latin-American independence movements.

This simplistic view ignores, of course, the other factors operating at the time, such as the growing antagonism between 'criollos' and 'peninsulares', the weakness of the Spanish crown at the time, the profound influence of the ideas of philosophers such as Rousseau, Saint-Simon, Locke and Hume and the example of the North-American colonies who gained their independence from England.

The True Role of Freemasonry

Did Freemasonry then play no role in the independence of Latin-America? The answer depends, to a large extent, on what we mean by independence. If we refer only to the military actions that led to the final defeat of royalist Spanish armies and their expulsion from the continent, we must admit that the direct influence of Freemasonry was minimal. This does not mean, of course, that we should adopt a radical scepticism on this subject. There is a well-documented participation of individual freemasons in the independence struggles of all American regions, north, centre and south. For some of them, their masonic background and experience was a determining factor in their libertarian efforts. For others, masonic membership was only a minor component of their personal history and view of the world. Since we cannot enter into the hearts of men, we have no way of evaluating the true importance that 'being a mason' held for men such as Bolívar.

Complete independence is a long and complicated process, involving many aspects that may take many decades to come to fruition. In this sense, the contribution of freemasons towards expanding and completing the independence process of which political independence is but the first stage cannot be overstated.

Each of the young nations would follow a different path. I shall restrict myself to the case of Chile, with which I am most familiar. In Chile, freemasons – belonging to recognizable masonic Lodges – would play a leading role throughout the 19th and 20th centuries in the fight for equality, personal freedoms (starting with religious freedom),

public non-sectarian education, public health, and all the other principles that constitute the foundations of today's democratic and egalitarian society.

Notes

¹'Simón Bolívar, freemason', *AQC* vol. 90 (1977), pp. 231–48 and 'Spanish-American Revolutionary Masonry', *AQC*, vol. 94 (1981), pp. 83–106, quoted hereinafter as Seal-Coon (1978) and (1982), respectively. See also Bro. E. E. Stolper's comments (More light on Simon Bolívar, freemason'), *AQC*, vol. 92 (1979), p. 202.

²This is the so-called Paris Convention of 22 December 1797, whose authenticity has been questioned.

³Both of whom, incidentally, were long proclaimed to be masons, although no proof could be presented. Current opinion is that neither was ever initiated. In Madison's case, the 'proof' advanced was that after his death three lodges held memorial services in his honour (*Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia*, New York 1961, p. 403).

⁴Robert Stewart, Marquis of Londonderry and Viscount Castlereagh, Foreign Secretary of Great Britain between 1812 and 1822. During the 1807–9 period he was War Secretary in Pitt's government.

⁵*Archivo del General Miranda – Viajes – Diarios 1787–1788*, vol. 3, Caracas, 1929, pp. 61, 81, 87, 335.

⁶*Francisco de Miranda*, paper submitted by Christian Charlet to Simon Bolívar Lodge of Paris on 16 February 1993. MS in the hands of the author.

⁷cf. *The Diary of Francisco de Miranda – Tour of the United States 1783–1784*, The Hispanic Society of America, New York, 1928.

⁸Seal-Coon, (1982), p. 89.

⁹op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁰Op. cit.

¹¹*La Masonería – su Influencia en Chile*, Santiago, 1965, p. 46.

¹²Lautaro was an indian chieftain who fought against the conquest of Chile by the Spaniards.

¹³Op. cit., p. 74.

¹⁴*La Masonería Argentina a Través de sus Hombres*, Buenos Aires, 1966.

¹⁵*La Política Secreta de la Gran Logia de Londres*, Buenos Aires, 1976.

¹⁶Op. cit., p. 61 et seq.

¹⁷Op. cit., pp. 62–6. It was also reproduced by Jaime Eyzaguirre in his biography of O'Higgins (see note 19), and by the historian Francisco Antonio Encina in vol. VII of his monumental *General History of Chile*.

¹⁸The original Spanish – *Logia Matriz* – could also be translated as *Mother Lodge*.

¹⁹See Jaime Eyzaguirre, *O'Higgins*, Zig-Zag, Santiago de Chile, 1982, pp. 305–11.

²⁰Enrique de Gandía, for example, in *La Independencia de América y las sociedades secretas*, Santa Fe, 1994, returns time and again – like a mantra – to his claim that the *Caballeros Racionales* were masonic Lodges. All his arguments, however, are based on his wishes rather than on the facts.

²¹Seal-Coon, (1978), p. 233.

²²op. cit., p. 238.

²³Seal-Coon, (1982), p. 99.

²⁴Francisco A. Encina, op. cit., p. 604.

²⁵Buenos Aires, 1964 (published by the Supreme Council 33rd Degree and the Grand Lodge of Argentina).

²⁶It has been reproduced in many other works as well, including the front and back cover of *San Martín y su ideario liberal*, by Alcibiades Lappas, Buenos Aires, 1982.

²⁷Fabián Onsari, *San Martín, la logia Lautaro y la Francmasonería*, Buenos Aires, 1964, p. 171.

²⁸Alcibiades Lappas, *San Martín y su ideario liberal*, Buenos Aires, 1982, p. 55.

²⁹The entire list appears in Alcibiades Lappas, op. cit., pp. 56–7.

³⁰Alcibiades Lappas, op. cit., p. 57.

³¹op. cit., p. 60.

³²Initiated on 9.11.1775 in Williamsburg No. 6 Lodge of Virginia, *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia*, Macoy Publishing, New York, 1961, p. 403.

³³Mario Barros, *Historia Diplomática de Chile 1541–1938*, Barcelona, 1970, p. 42.

³⁴'On the Cover', *The Philalethes*, vol. XLII No. 6, p. 2.

³⁵Fernando Pinto Lagarrigue, op. cit., p.69. The Diary kept by Carrera from 9 November 1815 to 25 October 1816 (during his stay in the United States) is found in the National Archive of Chile.

³⁶Op. cit., p.148.

³⁷Op. cit., p. 641.

³⁸Jaime Eyzaguirre, *O'Higgins*, Zig-Zag, Santiago de Chile, 1982. The first edition is dated 1946.

³⁹op. cit., p. 297.

⁴⁰'Consideraciones sobre el Origen de la Francmasonería en Chile', *Revista Masónica de Chile*, 3–4, May–June 1989, pp. 2 et seq.

⁴¹Mario Barros, op. cit., pp. 88 & 779.

⁴²Edmundo Pérez Sánchez, op. cit., p. 6.

⁴³Op. cit. (1982), p. 93.

Comments on the Paper

Bro. Yasha Beresiner, WM, said:

It is my privilege, as Master of the Lodge, to be the first today to thank and congratulate my good friend, Bro. Leon Zeldis, on his most stimulating paper. This has been a subject close to his heart as Brethren will have noted from the bibliographical note on our Summons.

However, I must confess that I felt disappointed as I read the paper, not – let me add quickly – at its quality or its academic depths but at such long-standing myths of South American masonic heroism being dismissed by him with such finality.

The references to the attributions of masonic affiliations among those patriots involved in the struggle for independence in South America are reminiscent of many such unfounded attributions in a long line of famous individuals throughout history. Men like Christopher Wren, Horatio Nelson, Baden Powell, Guiseppe Mazzini, Walt Disney and a number of Presidents of the USA, among many others, come readily to mind. It is usually the hope of better promoting the cause of the fraternity that induces such founded claims to membership of the Craft of well-known personalities.

Bro. Zeldis points out, towards the end of his paper, that the reason for the exaggeration of the role by Freemasonry in that struggle for independence from Spain lies with freemasons themselves. He points out, as an alternative, that anti-masonic historians may have been at fault in promoting the involvement of freemasons because now they could blame the fraternity for the failure of Spain with regard to South American independence.

There is, however, a further alternative in the case of those patriots named in this paper: *viz*, here we have an identification of good men with Freemasonry as a good cause.

Freemasonry in Latin America, during the period in question, was seen as a positive and beneficial force. Men of consequence, who enjoyed high social standing, would have necessarily embraced the moral precepts of Freemasonry and if they were not practising freemasons one would presume that they had been previously. As has been pointed out by Bro. Zeldis, many historians, who were not freemasons themselves, promoted the myths of these patriots' masonic membership.

Unlike in Europe, or even in the USA, Freemasonry in the Latin American sub-continent is still judged on its merits as an honourable and benevolent institution. In Mexico, for example, the general public perceive masonic membership as an important qualification, one that is indicative of strong moral standards, when men seek higher office in political or other circles. That is an attractive, albeit sadly now an alien proposition to European freemasons.

I congratulate Bro. Zeldis, wish him good health and thank him for taking the long journey from Israel to present his very interesting paper. I am pleased to propose formally a Vote of Thanks to him.

Bro. Aubrey Newman, SW, said:

It is with pleasure that I second the Vote of Thanks to Bro. Zeldis for his paper. There has been a great deal of research on the subject of the involvement of freemasons in the fight for the independence of the various Latin American republics and indeed there is also a substantial amount of publication – much of it scattered in the pages of these Transactions. It is, therefore, very helpful to have it brought together into this one paper and we must be grateful for this work of summation.

It is, indeed, very interesting to have a discussion of the ways in which non-masons will obviously assume a masonic conspiracy under the most unpromising circumstances. By their very nature revolutionary movements have to be highly secretive. Inevitably,

they will have to acquire a substantial degree of organisation with a strong element of secrecy. Many members would have no idea as to who was a fellow-conspirator in good standing or who was a governmental spy or an infiltrator. In consequence, the movement would have to organise a system involving secret signs or recognition. It is not uncommon for individual units even to term themselves as 'lodges'. Not only revolutionary movements organise themselves in this manner and history is full of instances of societies composed of individuals who prefer to keep themselves to themselves.

It is, however, a feature of many historical analyses that there are often two approaches to the development of events, one of which is best characterised as 'the conspiracy theory' of history. There are historians who are always prepared to see past events as having been caused by secret conspirators and that without such conspiracy these events would never have occurred. For example, there is a vast literature suggesting that the French Revolution was the result of the activities of leading French freemasons. The story of the revolutions in Spanish America has become another example of this tendency. Being disposed to regard any sort of secret organisation as being almost inevitably masonic or quasi-masonic, in consequence it becomes very difficult to disprove that claim. Occasionally, there are other complications. Sometimes freemasons themselves obfuscate the issues by being quick to claim such links even when they do not really exist.

The only way in which such problems can be solved with any degree of satisfaction is by a considerable amount of research by those who are in a position to understand the evidence. While in no way suggesting that only historians who are themselves freemasons can deal with these matters, it does remain true that those who wish to discuss them must have enough knowledge of the background for them to be able to make reasoned judgements. Bro. Zeldis has shown us how such confusions can arise, especially when the events have taken place at a distance. He has brought together the details of the struggle for South American independence and has laid to rest the myth of masonic involvement in it. Even though I am sure that in the future other such claims will reappear, at least we have now a succinct summary of the evidence to which such claims can be referred.

Bro. Michel Brodsky wrote:

Bro. Zeldis' paper raises indirectly two very important subjects which have been forgotten systematically by nearly all masonic authors from whichever country they originate and in whatever language they write.

1. Granting imaginary masonic membership to individuals who never really joined the Craft, or whose temporary membership proved to be a mere socially convenient whim, were only attempts to extend public admiration both inside and outside of Freemasonry. Unfortunately, nobody has yet tried to deflate those 'balloons' and to compile a comprehensive list of such supposed freemasons. The South American politicians described by Bro. Zeldis may prove to be a good starting point for such a list. Many names come to mind, especially on the Continent. The French refer frequently to 'freemasons with an apron', meaning thereby those men who never actually joined the Craft but who are considered to have been worthy of being regarded as such. Thus they claim them as ornaments to a list of worthies of the Craft. Some are simply denounced as freemasons by anti-masonic writers and newspapers simply because anyone not sharing their opinions of the Craft must be a freemason! Before 1960, when I was in the then Belgian Congo, there were about 300 freemasons in that country but the list established by the State Security Service contained more than 3000 names (i.e., all of the white adult males who were known not to attend the Roman Catholic mass). Other famous persons are added to a list of

supposed freemasons for more remarkable reasons. For example, I possess a tape recording (about 20 years old) of a French Radio music programme presented by a very competent musician. He explains that the proof that Beethoven was a freemason (actually untrue!) is to be found in the fact that in one of his string quartets he employed a certain rhythm and a certain combination of notes that are used supposedly by masonic composers. Thus, he was a freemason! Other examples abound, such as HRH Prince Leopold (1790–1865), son of Francis Duke of Sax-Coberg and later elected king of Belgium, who was initiated in the field on behalf of the Lodge ‘The Hope’ in Bern in curious and dubious circumstances in 1813. Yet Leopold never attended any recorded Lodge meeting at any time later in his life.

2. Less anecdotal is the important question of the relationship between Freemasonry and politics. I believe that at one time or another that relationship has existed everywhere. Sometimes it was openly as in France or Belgium at the height of the savage attacks on the Craft by the Catholic Church during the 1840–1940 period. At other times, in other circumstances and in more discrete ways it also existed. It is questionable that the freemasons who participated in the drafting of the American Constitution did so because they were members of the Craft or not. The former possibility is very much liked by present-day American freemasons. The same Brethren delight in emphasising the ‘masonic’ way men such as US President Harry S. Truman (1884–1972) acted in a truly masonic fashion. Needless to say, the confusion between politics and Freemasonry which existed exists still in the Grand Orients in France and in Belgium where much inter-visitation between interested Lodges occurs before any local and general elections.

One is left wondering how such important political figures such as Lord Carnarvon could undertake simultaneously the duties of Pro-Grand Master and the equally important functions of Under Secretary of State for the Colonies at a time when the UGLE was expanding rapidly overseas. Did any interference ever occur between his two roles or those of the Labour politician Ramsay MacDonald (1866–1937) who became Prime Minister of the UK for the first time in 1924 when still a member for some years of a Lodge that was composed almost entirely of Labour MPs?

Freemasonry as such has never been, and could never be, a part of a political *mouvement*, but an in-depth study would show obviously that in many countries the Grand Lodges were often *volens nolens*, involved indirectly or even directly in politics.

Bro. Zeldis has unearthed a fascinating subject indeed.

Bro. Litvine wrote:

It seems that in 1825 the Belgian revolutionaries needed money – lots of money. General San Martin was, at the time, one of the desired leaders of a Belgian army that would never exist in fact. To raise some funds, a medal with his effigy was proposed to would-be sponsors. In return, their names would be engraved on the reverse of the medals.

‘La Parfaite Amitié was a Lodge eradicated by the French Revolution. It started up again in 1807 under the leadership of a Bro. Olbrechts during Napoleon I’s reign (therefore under the Grand Orient de France). Under the peace treaty after the Napoleonic Wars, the Belgian Provinces had been allocated to the Netherlands – one of the victorious allies. The listing of the Lodges published in 1820 by the Grand Orient des Pays-Bas does not mention ‘La Parfaite Amitié’ anymore.

Was the Lodge still meeting unofficially? Surely not! It is most probable that some Brethren, desiring to get rid of what they called ‘the invaders’, paid in the name of the Lodge (by them closed officially) for those medals to contribute towards the raising of funds.

I think that very medal, since it does not bear any recognisable masonic emblems and bears the name of a Lodge that did not work any longer, cannot be a proof of San

Martin's membership of the Craft. The Lodge's minutes of this precise period do not exist simply because, by that time, 'La Parfaite Amitié' had ended its workings.

Bro. Roeinton Khambatta wrote:

Not only has Bro. Zeldis effectively expounded the contribution of Freemasonry but he has provided a brilliant bird's-eye view of South American history.

It has not been unusual for enthusiasts in Freemasonry always to put forward the names of national leaders as members – some inactive (like Sir Winston Churchill) and some active (like President Harry Truman).

'Liberators' are a class by themselves. They have a point to make, a goal to achieve, even by revolutionary means, and to this class must belong men like Garibaldi in Italy and Miranda, Bolivar and O'Higgins in Latin America, amongst many others. If they were dedicated freemasons, how could they have equated their actions with their Obligation to be obedient to the laws of the land? Freemasonry and its principles would deny any credit to itself for such 'liberation'.

Other factors must be invoked, as suggested by Bro. Zeldis, mainly the changes in the political system at that period in North America and Europe. Whilst John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (1859) was indeed a guiding beacon to the colonists of North America in their struggle for independence, I very much doubt that the Latin American peasants would have heard of Mill or his political philosophy. Would Bro. Zeldis like to give his thoughts on this?

Bro. Valentine Heines wrote:

The myth of San Martin's affiliation to Freemasonry caused even the burial of his ashes in his homeland to be a contentious issue. Following a bitter dispute, his ashes were laid down finally in the outside of the cathedral in Buenos Aires.

San Martin died in Boulogne-sur-Mer (France) on 17 August 1850. In 1862, during the presidency of Bartolomé Mitre (1821–1906), who was a freemason, there took place the inauguration of a memorial monument in San Martin Square in Buenos Aires. It was only in 1878, during the presidency of Nicolás Avellaneda (1836–1885), that the remains of San Martin were brought to his native Argentine and the dispute began.

If San Martin was a freemason, how could the Catholic Church possibly permit his interment in the very interior of the cathedral? A 'Solomonic' solution determined that one of the side walls of the building could be used and the burial of his ashes took place in a kind of niche there.

Bro. Francis Delon wrote:

I want to add some further information about the way Bolivar is appreciated in the latest French historiography.

Pierre Vayssiere places Bolivar's Initiation in Cadiz¹ whereas his stay in Paris gave him the opportunity to acquire knowledge of the revolutionary rites through his contacts with officers in the Revolutionary wars and by frequenting the fashionable literary and political salons of the Baroness Germaine de Stael (1766–1817) and Madame Jeanne Recamier (1777–1849).

In fact, Bolivar was fascinated by the strong personality of Napoleon. On several occasions he denied that fact by affirming that only 'the hero of the Republic' was worthy of admiration and not the 'tyrant and the hypocrite'. Nevertheless, he attended both of Napoleon's coronations: that as Emperor of France in Paris (2 December 1804) and that as King of Italy in Milan (17 March 1805).

During the two following decades, 'the Liberator' did behave indeed as an 'emperor' though he refused to carry such a title. His dictatorial concept of government was far removed from the masonic ideals espoused by the Fathers of American Independence such as Bros. Benjamin Franklin and George Washington.

Note

¹ Vayssiere, P.: 'Bolivar, le mythe du liberateur', *L'Histoire*, num. 128 (Decembre, 1989), p. 10.

Bro. Touvia ('Teddy') Goldstein wrote:

In my view the poor documentation, or even the lack of any such evidence, to prove the masonic affiliations of the Latin American heroes could possibly (and even probably) be due to the fact that to be a freemason there in those days was very dangerous. To underline this view, may I quote first some freely translated extracts from *Manuel de Lima – Fundador de la Masoneria Chilena* ['Manuel de Lima – Founder of Chilean Freemasonry'] (1979) by Gunther Bohm, Director of the Jewish Studies Academy of the University of Chile.

1. From the 'Prologue': 'It is difficult, almost impossible, to determine the exact date when Freemasonry showed signs of existing in Latin America. Curiously, it was the Spanish monarchy that was one of the contributory factors in reviving the weak flame of masonic life in the second half of the 18th century in the Iberian colonies by sending into exile there a group of revolutionary freemasons having commuted their death sentences for conspiracy.

'Naturally, foreigners had greater prominence, especially the French who were already living in the American territories and who, in the words of Vallejos (a priest of Mexico City's Cathedral, 1772), looked for "the new Freemasons' Sect". Fear of this 'heretical' idea, coupled with the search by the inquisition for prohibited books that had been introduced secretly by these people, provoked royal commands to watch all strangers very strictly in all Spanish overseas territories.

'One circular, apparently the first related to Freemasonry, was despatched from Madrid to Lima in August 1751 ordering the return as soon as possible all lists of 'military and political subjects residing in the kingdom' in order for them to confess their sympathy for, or affiliation to, Freemasonry and to denounce other freemasons. It promised them secrecy and clemency if they recognised their error and, at the same time, if they did not do so then it threatened them with great harm through participation in the juridical processes of the Court of the Inquisition.

One of the accused was no less than the Governor of Valdivia (Chile), Ambrosio Saez Bustamante, which proves that many of the high officers were not only religious sceptics but also liberal in their political outlook, in direct opposition to the Spanish government...'

2. To describe the difficult situation for Freemasonry developing in Chile then, which can certainly be an example of other Latin American countries, I quote from Chapter I which deals with 'The First Masonic Lodges in Chile' thus;

'The attempts to establish the masonic Order in Chile in a permanent and definitive form were studied by Benjamin Oviedo... There is no doubt of the historic moment which Chile lived through in those years, when the predominating sentiments of religious fanaticism in many sections of society, especially in Santiago, were an impediment for these masonic groups continuing their activities. Even a quarter of a century later, Jose Victorina Lastarria described the ambience in Santiago in vehement form thus: "Alas to independent individuals! It does not matter how much talent or how much virtue they have displayed; they only

accomplished their own self-sacrifice because if they saved themselves from the anger of the authorities, they did not save themselves from social disdain...”’

Continuing this theme further, I quote the following two extracts from Fernando Pint Lagarrigue's *Masonry and its Influence in Chile* (Grand Lodge of Chile, 6th edn., 1997):

- Preface, p. 14 – ‘The independence of Chile was a fight of Titans. If it is not judged with the perspective of that time, it would seem very simple and normal [which is] sufficient reason to induce us to give an ample series of antecedents that will allow us to evaluate the efforts of those visionaries (the great majority of freemasons) who gave their whole lives to such a noble ideal.

‘The prejudices and opposition which it was necessary to overcome in Spain as well as in the colonies during the 18th century can be better appreciated by examining the domination of the Jesuits, the papal *Encyclicals* and the persecution by the Inquisition that was aimed at punishing liberal thinking and its expression...’

- Chapter III, p. 62 – ‘In the North American British colonies during the first half of the 18th century, Freemasonry was introduced in an open and tolerant form under the auspices of the Grand Lodge of England. In the second half of the same century, certain influences of the masonic Orders were brought into Spanish colonies by valiant British, Spanish and French citizens. Nevertheless, in the southern continent which was dominated by the Holy Inquisition and where all expression of liberal thinking was watched severely, such thinking became difficult and even dangerous to externalise.

In the northern colonies, masonic Lodges were not persecuted. On the contrary, they were propagated in tranquillity from New Jersey where the first one was established...’

What is more Richardo Tripoli, in his investigation of the masonic origins of Francisco de Miranda, reminds us that ‘Gouchon observed that this precautionary discretion was essential for it is known that any thoughts of American independence had serious dangers. Therefore, the names of affiliates [he means freemasons] were memorised and the work was done verbally being careful not to leave any written evidence. The slightest imprudence revealing anything could end by jeopardising the work and putting the lives of the affiliates in danger’. Tripoli adds that generally the masonic meetings were held with rarely more than seven Brethren being present and in different places so as not to draw attention from the formidable and terrible enemies of the Order.

In view of these circumstances, is there any wonder that masonic documentation is not to be found?

Bro. Zeldis replied:

I am grateful for the remarks of **Bro. Beresiner**. As he rightly pointed out, in Latin America Freemasonry is regarded generally with admiration and in some countries, particularly in Mexico and Chile, many politicians – from ‘the left’ to ‘the centre’ – are members of the Craft. In Chile, in fact, a common nickname for a politician was *Radical, Bombero y Mason* [‘Radical, Fire fighter and Freemason’]. I hasten to explain that the Radical Party in Chile is on the centre-left of the political spectrum and fire fighters are all volunteers and belonging to a fire brigade is considered to be a positive sign of active involvement in communal affairs.

Bro. Newman rightly remarks that revolutionary movements, by their very nature, have to be highly secretive. This would be all the more so in South America where the Inquisition was still operating at the time under review. However, enough documentary

evidence has been preserved – mainly diaries and memories of those involved – that enable us to draw some conclusions, as I hope I have demonstrated.

Bro. Brodsky provided additional examples of famous people wrongly acclaimed (or accused) as freemasons. An interesting issue, which he raises and which is touched on but only tangentially by me, is the involvement of Freemasonry in politics. As he commented: this is a fascinating subject and worthy of further examination at an academic level.

Bro. Litvine contributed enlightening information regarding the masonic medal of General San Martin and confirms the fact that it cannot be considered as proof of San Martin's membership of the Craft. This is particularly important because the medal has constituted the linchpin of the claim that San Martin was a freemason. The fact that the Lodge 'La Parfaite Amitié' did not exist at the time when the medal was struck gives irrefutable evidence to the contrary.

Bro. Khambatta expressed doubt that the Latin American peasants would have heard of John Stuart Mill or of his political philosophy. However, we must keep in mind that the revolutionary struggle of South American patriots was led by well-educated men, many of whom had travelled abroad and some of them (like Miranda and O'Higgins) stayed in England for long periods of time. They were under the influence not only of Mill and Hume but also of Rousseau, the French *Encyclopedists* and, particularly, the revolution in North America. To give an example: the library of Francisco Miranda was so large that one of his contemporaries wrote that 'few persons in Europe own such a complete library in all kinds of writings'¹.

Bro. Heines mentioned the fact that San Martin's ashes, when returned to Argentina, were buried in a niche in one of the side walls of the cathedral in Buenos Aires and not inside – because he was believed to have been a freemason. Generally, Argentine historians have supported the assumption about San Martin's membership of the Craft. However, recently some historians have begun to take an opposing stand so that this opinion is no longer unanimous.

Note

¹ letter from Jose Maria Salazar to the Vice-President of Colombia, Santander, quoted in Uzcategui, G.H.: *The Papers of Francisco de Miranda*, (Caracas: Library, Nat. Academy of History, 1984), p. 85.

² Charlet: op. cit.

³ Uzcategui, G.H.: *Los Papeles de Francisco de Miranda*, Caracas, 1984.

Bro. Delon added some opinions on Bolivar from French historiographers. In connection with Bolivar's admiration for Napoleon, it is interesting to note the latter's regard for Miranda. He is reported to have said about Miranda: 'He is Don Quixote, with the difference that he is not mad... he carried the sacred fire in his soul'². (Charlet, op. cit.).

Bro. Goldstein points out that, during the Spanish colonial regime, being a freemason was a dangerous avocation. While this is true, the fact is that some colonials who travelled abroad did join masonic Lodges, and while organized Freemasonry did not exist during the colonial period, these freemasons constituted the core for the creation of the first Lodges in South America, joined by immigrants from countries where Freemasonry operated unhindered.

As for the lack of documentation, the situation is not so extreme as would appear from the quotations presented by Bro. Goldstein. The fact is that we have memoirs, letters and proclamations on which to base historic research. Miranda alone left us 14,740 folios of his documents, comprising 5,833 about his travels, 5,171 about his negotiations and 3,736 about the French Revolution³. Bolivar, also, left his memoirs, and other figures active in the Independence wars left numerous letters and other documents which have provided the information needed by historians of the period.