Although Anglo-Saxon Freemasonry has always claimed that it “does not do politics,” Latin Freemasonries in Europe or South America have in fact helped to promote new, liberal, and progressive ideas. Historians must look beyond the official discourse and study the interactions between the often important organizations of the Grand Lodges and the societies to which they belong.

Building on the works of Margaret Jacob, our first two articles examine the political ideas implemented and promoted by the Grand Orient in France in the eighteenth century. We will see very clearly how Masonic dignitaries applied the liberal and predemocratic principles of Enlightenment thinkers in the management of the Lodges under their leadership, even if this often meant going against the opinions and prejudices of “ordinary” Masons. What makes this even more interesting is its occurrence at a time when the leadership of the Grand Orient belonged to the country’s ruling classes, and when France was highly influential throughout Europe. Moreover, Masonry was an effective network for exchange in Enlightenment Europe, as shown by the study on the Masons Knights of Malta. We can perceive a new sociability (Freemasonry) relaying and challenging an old sociability (the Order of Malta). It is therefore appropriate to examine the existence of a true geopolitics of Freemasonry in the eighteenth century.

What makes the eighteenth century so interesting to us is that it was one of the key periods in Western culture in terms of literature and the arts, as well as the time when the ideas and values that many still consider to be ours today took shape. Modern man looks to the eighteenth century as a reference point in a similar way to how men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries looked to antiquity. This makes it particularly important to examine the role of Freemasonry in this process.

Finally, after a look at these essentially very “European” issues, we include Carter Charles’ fascinating study on a very “American” subject: the “Masonic” sources of certain aspects of the Mormon religion.

Welcome to our third issue—a number of great symbolic significance for Freemasons! It shows that Ritual, Secrecy, and Civil Society has now fully secured its place among academic journals on Freemasonry and fraternalism.

Pierre Mollier
Editor-in-Chief