

Neo-Palladianism and Freemasonry

SIR, John Harris in a letter published in the June issue referring to my review of Joseph Rykwert's *The First Moderns* denied that there are any links of importance between neo-Palladianism and speculative Freemasonry. This, I believe, is a question of methodology and interpretation. Neither the author nor myself pretended that neo-Palladianism was *invented* by Freemasons. I agree that there are early indications and later examples of the new style that would not fit into such a pattern. I doubt, however, that neo-Palladianism would have had the same success within the English and continental élite (not only aristocracy) without the diffusion of architectural and moral ideas through the lodges.

The lodges, where Shaftesbury's idea of a 'moral architecture' had been connected with a revived interest in Vitruvian theory and architectural knowledge among gentlemen (for instance through reading Palladio's *Quattro Libri*), formed an important social base for this style. Of course, it is difficult to prove early memberships. But not only does the first edition of the Anderson Constitutions (1723, when Palladians were still a minority) culminate in an apotheosis of Campbell and the then relatively unimportant young Burlington (and this was the support I adduced for the author's argument); there is also a Fellow-Crafts-Song in the 1734 edition (Philadelphia) which praises those 'who have enriched the Art, from Jabal down to Burlington', interpreting Adam's descendant (the tent-builder) and Burlington as the alpha and omega of the 'Royal Art', understood throughout masonic literature as both an ethical and physical domain.

Burlington is included among prominent freemasons subscribing to Désaguliers's *Experimental Philosophy* (1734), was painted in a group portrait by W. Dandridge together with the Grandmasters the Dukes of Montague and Richmond and ridiculed by Lord Hervey to Lady Burlington as her 'mason-husband'. Friends, patrons and dilettantes like Sir Andrew Fountaine, the Earl of Pembroke, Thomas Coke, Alexander Pope, Viscount Cobham and possibly Ralph Allen were masons. Freemasonry – and this is the point – provided a new ideology for the Palladian Revival as an expression of 'inner form' and the moral concept of the 'man of taste' instead of the earlier 'scientific' pretension. It is this, which made for its success on the continent, as Rykwert intimates, and I think this is true for Germany, too: Frederick the Great and his architect Knobelsdorff, the Princess of Anhalt-Dessau and Weimar, who imported Palladianism and the landscape-garden from England to Potsdam, Berlin, Wörlitz and Weimar, were Freemasons. As Dr Hella Reelfs (Berlin) will shortly demonstrate, Freemasonry was a major stimulus to the later classicism of Friedrich Gilly and his circle at Berlin in the last decade of the century, later connected with Fichte's – a freemason's – *Moral- und Staatsphilosophie*. The validity of the argument depends on whether you look at architecture as an autonomous, artistic phenomenon, or also as a social one.

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