The Politics of Sociability

Freemasonry and German Civil Society 1840–1918

Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

To Reinhart Koselleck (1923–2006)

Contents

Preface

This book grew out of my dissertation, completed at the University of Bielefeld in 1999 and published by Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht in 2000. The German edition was received by and large as a contribution to the expanding literature on nineteenth-century bourgeois culture. My primary motivation in writing this book, however, was actually somewhat different. It was the unexpected renewal in the 1990s of a preoccupation with notions like civility, civil society, a cosmopolitan ethos, and moral justifications for war that spurred my interest in writing on nineteenth-century Freemasonry. I wanted to explore the unintended political consequences of Enlightenment ideas and practices in an age characterized by the advent of nationalism, anti-Semitism, and social discord. The self-image of Freemasons as civilizing agents, acting in good faith to promote the idea of universal brotherhood, was contradicted not only by their sense of exclusivity. For it is my contention that Freemasons also unintentionally exacerbated nineteenth-century political conflicts—for example, between liberals and Catholics, or the Germans and the French—by what I call moral universalism: the grounding of political arguments on universalist pretensions that obscure the legitimate norms and interests of their contenders.

The book appeared simultaneously with other critical accounts of the actual workings of civil society in nineteenth-century Europe, notably by Frank Trentmann and Philip Nord, both of whom shared their insights with me. However, this edition includes studies published after 2000 only in those cases where the German edition referred to earlier versions of the argument by the same author, for example, in an unpublished paper. I do discuss much of the more recent literature in what has now become a growing concern among historians with the cultural context and content of the political in my book *Civil Society, 1750–1914,* published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2006.

I wish to thank the editors of this series, in particular Geoff Eley, and three anonymous readers for their valuable suggestions. I did, for example, remove most of the statistics, which, however, can be consulted in the German edition. I also benefited from comments by colleagues, particularly at the Johns Hopkins University, where I submitted my first paper on the subject as an MA thesis, and Bielefeld, where I had the privilege of working with Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Reinhart Koselleck, and conversing with Svenja Goltermann, Christian Geulen, and Till van Rahden. In the end, of course, I alone assume responsibility for any errors in statements of fact or argument.

The translation of a book always takes more time than expected, and I thank my editors at the University of Michigan Press, initially Chris Collins and later Jim Reische, for their patience and support. The Stiftung zur Förderung der Masonischen Forschung kindly sponsored the translation of a sample chapter. Finally, I owe my greatest debt to Tom Lampert, a meticulous translator and keen writer, for working so closely with me on a book that is very much concerned with language.

Parts of this book draw on materials that I have published earlier: passages in chapters 2 and 3 were included in "Brothers or Strangers? Jews and Freemasons in Nineteenth-Century Germany," *German History* 18 (2000): 143–61; chapter 5 is essentially the same essay that was published as "Civility, Male Friendship, and Masonic Sociability in Nineteenth-Century Germany," *Gender and History* 13 (2001): 224–48; the argument of chapter 8 was first presented in *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to World War I,* ed. Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Cambridge, Mass., May 2006