

A sketch of today's Hungarian Freemasonry

First draft

In Hungary today there are several Masonic Grand Lodges and constituent lodges with a total of 4-600 members. This is hardly comparable to almost a hundred lodges with 7500 members of the end of the 1886-1914 period of Hungarian Freemasonry or a short time after 1945, when about a thousand people worked in nineteen lodges. The number of Hungarian Masons is considerably lower than in the neighbouring countries, e.g. in Romania, the number of Freemasons currently exceeds ten thousand.

Organizations of the contemporary Hungarian Freemasonry

The *Symbolic Grand Lodge of Hungary*, boasts of a membership of more than 300, who work in the following lodges: "Árpád, a Testvériséghez" (Árpád, to the Brotherhood) in Szeged, "Deák Ferenc, a Testvériséghez" (Ferenc Deák, to the Brotherhood), "Egyenlőség" (Equality), the "Európa Akáca a Mátraalján" (Acacia of Europe at the Mátraalja) in Gyöngyös, the "Fény Oszlopai" (Columns of Light), "France", "Franz Liszt" "Galilei", "Nyugati Kapu" (Western Gate), "Quadrum Leonardi", "Reform", "Sas" (Eagle), "Testvériség" (Brotherhood) in Sopron, "St. Stephen". Apart from Szeged, Gyöngyös and Sopron, all the other lodges are based in Budapest. The "France" lodge works in French, "Franz Liszt" in German, "St. Stephen" in English and the others in Hungarian.

Freemasons from different lodges, who have been highly interested in the history of Freemasonry, established the regular Hungarian Quatuor Coronati research circle working within the framework of the international network of the QC on exploring the history of Hungarian Freemasonry. Their work is based on the collection and processing of forgotten Hungarian masonic records and relics.

The *Grand Orient of Hungary* has more than 200 members, including lodges "Egyesüléshez" (To Union), "A Felvilágosodáshoz" (To Enlightenment)", "Humanitas", "Jászi Oszkár" (Oszkár Jászi), "Leonardo da Vinci", "Magnanimitas", "Martinovics", "II. Rákóczi Ferenc", "Universum" in Szeged, "Zsolnay" in Pécs. Apart from Szeged, and Pécs, all the others are in Budapest. "II. Rákóczi Ferenc" works in French, the rest in Hungarian. Two of them, "To Union" and "Magnanimitas", are dormant (do not work) because most of their members transferred into the Symbolic Grand Lodge of Hungary. The "Brotherhood" lodge in Sopron, which was formed in the framework of Grand Orient, later joined the other Grand Lodge. Of the members of "Leonardo" lodge, the symbolic "Quadrum Leonardi" lodge was formed, and the remaining people now work with the members of "Martinovics" lodge.

The ex-members of the Grand Orient have formed the *Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Grand Lodge of Hungary*, which operates with three lodges and a total membership of about 30 souls. These are "Igaz testvériség" (True Brotherhood), "Önzetlenséghez" (To Unselfishness) and "Vízöntő" (Aquarius) lodges.

The *Droit Humain* (Human Rights) mixed order (both men and women) was formed in France but is now widely diffused throughout the world. In Hungary, there is "Tolerancia és Testvériség" (Tolerance and Brotherhood)" lodge with 30-35 active members. The Paris-based organization is a cross-border, unified whole working on a federal basis in separate countries.

Finally, the "Napraforgó" (Sunflower) (about 25 members) working under the protection of the *Grande Loge Féminine de France* (Grand Lodge Feminine of France) should be mentioned.

All these lodges were formed on the base of the law regulating non-governmental organizations, enacted during the 1990's political detour. The Masonic constitutions clearly contain the compliance with the laws of the country in which they work and conducting their activities within the legal framework. Cases of circumvention of the law have been exceptionally rare.

The rebuilding of the first lodges was assisted by the old Freemasons still living in Hungary and the organizations of Hungarian emigrants as well as by the foreign Grand Lodges supporting them. In the beginning, the elected leaders of the Symbolic Grand Lodge of Hungary, which had been formed jointly by all the existing lodges, linked it to the United Grand Lodge of England, so the supporters of the French, so-called Latin orientation left to establish the Grand Orient of Hungary.

Despite the fact that the St. John order lodges recognize, in principle, only the first three degrees, the Scottish and other high-degree rites spread in many countries. For example, the Royal Arch (Királyi boltív) was also created within the framework of today's Symbolic Grand Lodge.

The domestic England-oriented Symbolic Grand Lodge and the Latin-oriented Grand Orient have their own Scottish Rite organizations. In Hungary, these two Scottish Rite organizations operate under their own Supreme Councils, both of them practically accept Master-degree members from their "own" Grand Lodge, although the Supreme Council of the Grand Orient would be willing to cooperate with the other Scottish Rite organization, contrary to the Supreme Council of the Symbolic Grand Lodge. It is interesting to note that both Scottish Rite orders derive themselves from the *Suprême Conseil* of the old Grand Orient of Hungary, founded in 1871.

Following the UGLE, many of the Grand Lodges, including the Hungarian Symbolic Grand Lodge, define Freemasonry differently from the Hungarian Grand Orient. They accept its existence, but they do not consider it to be Freemasonic. Consequently, they will not allow members of the Grand Orient into the tyled meetings of symbolic lodges and "symbolic" Freemasons will not be allowed to participate in the works of the Grand Orient, otherwise they will be excluded. However, they also could be together in the Hungarian public life, radio and television. Outside the lodge, even cooperation is possible.

According to the requirements of the United Grand Lodge of England issued in 1929 - but tacitly long-established -, the most important conditions for the regularity of grand lodges are the following: a grand lodge could be established only by an other grand lodge or at least three constituent lodges; a condition of Masonic membership is the belief in the Great Architect of the Universe; the members of a grand lodge and its constituent lodges may only be men; it is strictly forbidden to discuss religious and political issues within the lodge. The Latin (adogmatic) Freemasonry denies the right of any grand lodge to make other grand lodges adopt a dogma by issuing such standards, insisting on the paragraph of their constitution that entrusts metaphysical opinions to individual judgment.

In 1877, the Grand Orient of France removed from its constitution the principles of God's existence and the immortality of the soul, or more precisely after that they did not require their members to accept it. (It is a misconception that the new constitution would have included the freedom of political debate and the recognition of women's Freemasonry.) This event caused a break between Anglo-Saxon and Latin Freemasonry, which is still going on today.

Self-Determination of Freemasonry (or Freemasonries)

The Constitutions of all grand lodges are based on the so-called "Anderson Constitution", whose first article reads:

“A *Mason* is oblig'd by his Tenure, to obey the moral Law; and if he rightly understands the Art, he will never be a stupid Atheist nor an irreligious **Libertine**. But though in ancient Times Masons were charg'd in every Country to be of the Religion of that Country or Nation, whatever it was, yet 'tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that Religion in which all Men agree, leaving their particular Opinions to themselves; that is, to be *good Men¹ and true*, or Men of Honour and Honesty, by whatever Denominations or Persuasions they may be distinguish'd; whereby Masonry becomes the *Center of Union*, and the Means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must have remain'd at a perpetual Distance.”

i.e. a believer, but of any religion (in the age of Anderson, of course, it meant only Christian religions!) male and non-political. This and other articles have developed more or less with modifications of these requirements to the present-day constitutions, from which Latin-oriented lodges omit religious requirements and replace them with humanist ones.

The current constitution of the Symbolic Grand Lodge, dating back to 1886, which has been slightly reworded this definition, says:

„Freemasonry is a philosophical, philanthropic and progressive institution. Its purpose is to disseminate public morality, culture and affection, and to exercise

¹ According to some beliefs, not "men" but "people" are the correct meaning of the English "men". This is especially the standpoint of women's and mixed orders.

charity. Freemasonry excludes all political and religious issues and obliges its members to respect the laws of the homeland.”

According to the guidelines published by the Symbolic Grand Lodge of Hungary in 1990:

„Masonry is a traditional, esoteric institution based on initiation. It is a union of free men of good report, irrespective of their faith, national affiliation, race, or political party, who consider each other as a brother and their duty to act similarly to their fellow human beings.”

According to the Grand Orient of Hungary:

“Today's Freemasonry is an order inherent in the building art and it depicts its ancient symbolism through inauguration ceremonies, whose cornerstones are laid down in Anderson's Constitution, published in 1723. The purpose of the Order from the very beginning is to become the centre of the unity and a tools of establishing true friendship between persons who would ever have remained in perpetual distance without it.”

Definition of the Droit Humain mixed Masonic Order:

“The community of freemasons is a society in which the members enter by initiation, which primarily formulates what it teaches in symbols, works to seek truth, and aims at moral and spiritual improvement of its members. It is a progressive, philosophical and philanthropic institution, which is also universal because it follows the principle of tolerance and solidarity and the triple ideal of »freedom, equality and brotherhood«.”

The “Napraforgó” (Sunflower) lodge, taking over the definition of the European Masonic Conference says:

“It is humanistic: Independent of all political, economic, religious and group power.”
 “It cares for all aspects of human life, and in the search for truth it cannot tolerate any shackles.”

“It is human-friendly: exercising mutual responsibility between its members and all people irrespective of nationality, religion, political or any other distinction.”

“It is progressive: Its members work individually and collectively for the continuous improvement of man and society, in their temples and in the world.”

“It is Humane: Does not oblige his members to accept any dogma.”

“Its spirituality is expressed by its triple maxim: Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood.”

Women's Freemasonry

In Hungary, after the change of the regime, women's and mixed lodges were formed only in recent times, more precisely one of each, the women's "Napraforgó" (Sunflower) lodge and the "Tolerancia és Testvériség" (Tolerance and Brotherhood) mixed lodge.

According to the traditional view, recalling the Anderson Constitution, women cannot be Freemasons. Although Freemasonic constitutions declare the brotherhood of lodge members and exclude all forms of discrimination, today's situation is the result of a lengthy, development in which step-by-step modification were made, though not in all Masonic organizations.

According to the tradition, the UGLE and the regular lodges following its spirituality are locked up from admission of women.

Establishing the exclusively feminine lodges can be interpreted as a reaction to the stubborn rejection of women's Freemasonry, which also represents the same intolerance, as some may say, although the diffusion of such lodges may cause dissolution of the exclusive masculinity of Masonry.

The real resolution of the conflict can be the creation of mixed (i.e. men and women together) lodges and grand lodges, but it would be even more progressive if the traditional Masonic organizations were to open their doors to women. This is already the case, up to a point. Namely, in 2010, the Grand Orient of France left it to each of its constituent lodge to decide whether to admit women or keep the homogeneity of men's lodges. As a result of this decision, 80% of the lodges accepted, in principle, the possibility of women initiations, but only a few hundred women were admitted compared to the total of ca. 50,000 Grand Orient members.

The Grand Orient of Hungary's position is mixed: the members of the women's and mixed lodges are recognized as Freemasons, they are involved in common tyled work, but some of their own ceremonial gatherings cannot be visited by female masons.

Today's women's and mixed Masonic lodges in Hungary are of foreign origin but there have been a few examples of initiations in the country.

Lodge Halls

Apart from the interpretation of the lodge as an organizational unit, there is another meaning as the room in which the works are being carried out. In the beginning, it might have been an inn or a hotel room, or even a private room. With the consolidation of the framework of Masonic organizations, the creation and possession of an own, well-formed building, suitable for tyled meetings had become a must.

Today, the Symbolic Grand Lodge and its constituent lodges perform their works in a lodge hall converted from a flat in Budapest. Their country lodges do not possess their own lodge halls.

The Grand Orient also owns a suitable lodge hall and complementary premises where lodge works are held and may be rented to the women's and mixed lodges. The Grand Orient's country lodges do not have their own lodge halls.

The Tolerance and Fraternity mixed lodge has furnished a lodge hall recently in its own right and moved there from the rented Grand Orient's Hall.

The concept of the work in the lodge

It has been said many times that Freemasons "work" in the lodge. What does it mean? Masonic words and symbols originate from the operative, actual masonry and their organizations, although they do not work with stones now but wish to transform and educate themselves and their peers. Therefore, it is called speculative or symbolic Freemasonry.

Today, it means that lodge meetings are held within ceremonial frameworks, with fixed texts and activities that use ancient symbols (today's term: drama play). Traditional activities are initiating an apprentice, passing a fellowcraft, raising a master. Higher degrees also have separate, often very complicated rituals. Also during ritual work, regular arrangements for the operation of every organization are performed ritually, for example, the Grand Master usually remains in office for three years. But here they decide on issues about the lodge, collecting funds and making donations for charitable purposes. In Hungary, many charities have been founded and supported by Freemasons, although not hundreds of these like in the old, glorious days.

In continental Freemasonry, there is a habit of lecturing and discussing them. This is missing in the Anglo-Saxon Freemasonry. Special-purpose work is teaching work, lodge of sorrow ceremony, ornamental or festive work and joint work (with members of other lodges).

Some interesting lectures:

K.V.L., *The Black Swan*, „A Fény Oszlopai” lodge
 Schiller, Róbert, *We always Speak one Language*, „Galilei” lodge
 Kétes, András, *Progression, Regression, Frustration, Aggression*, „Sas” lodge
Oszkár Jászi and His Masonic Counterparts, „Jászi Oszkár” lodge
I Do not Like Professional Atheists, „Universum” lodge
Internet and Ethics, „Zsolnay” lodge
Women's Freedom, „Napralforgó” lodge

A common, more or less solemn meal after the work is called plastering work. They often have a special order of rituals.

Profanes (not masons) are invited for white works, and nurse works may be attended with female relatives. They are often organized today as well; some lodges are also sending invitations by the Internet, after notifying their friends.

Some interesting white work:

The Social Effects of Child Protection and Child Rearing Problems, „Egyenlőség” lodge, 2002.04.22.

Lighting, Magyarországi Symbolikus Nagypáholy, 2005.02.05.

Exploratory Freemasonry, Magyarországi Nagyoriens, 2005.03.05.

White Work on Mathematics and Music, „Tolerancia és Testvériség” lodge, 2008.04.05.

Remembrance of the 100's Anniversary of the Martinovics lodge, Magyarországi Nagyoriens, 2008.05.23.

Masonic Picnic in Dég, Magyarországi Nagyoriens, 2009.06.20.

Golden Ratio - Is It Really a Universal Rule? „Tolerancia és Testvériség” lodge, 2011.01.27.

Freemason Ferenc Liszt - commemorative celebration, Magyarországi Nagyoriens and the „Tolerancia és Testvériség” lodge, 2011.09.23.

The Esoteric Knowledge of the Initiates (ancient symbols) „Tolerancia és Testvériség” lodge, 2017.05.05.

It is worth mentioning here the “Galilei Forum” public lecture and debate series, held annually and supported by the Scottish Rite of the Symbolic Grand Lodge at the Óbuda Social Circle’s cellar club.

The most recent and welcoming opportunity for the rapprochement is the series of seminars running in Hungary under the name “Inaslépés” (Apprentice step). These non-ritual gatherings reflect the idea of Freemasonry on history, symbols, comparison of rituals, and philosophical questions discussed by the members of any Masonic order. This initiative may be unique in the whole world.

The Future of Freemasonry in Hungary

The free and legal operation of lodges is a litmus test for a country's democracy and peaceful life of its citizens. It is always prohibited in dictatorships; in crises, the steps taken to suppress freedom are reinforced by the voice of the supporters of Masonic conspiracy theories, from the tsarist Russia all through the example of the 20th-century European dictatorships, to Pinochet's Chile.

Periods of ban divide the operation of Hungarian Freemasonry into separate stages. In the 18th century between 1749-1795, then 1869-1920, 1945-1950 and finally, from 1989 onwards, the major Hungarian grand lodges continued to work. If we look at the length of these periods, we see rounds of operation lasting ca. 45, 50, 5 and 28, still ongoing, years interrupted by 75, 25 and 40 years of “roaming the desert” - in Masonic terms - exceeding the total operative time.

The currently growing number of attacks do not seem to be good signs neither for Hungarian Freemasonry nor the entire Hungarian society.