

James Burnes (1801-1862): Scottish Freemason and Empire Builder.

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Abstract:

James Burnes (1801-1862) was one of the most charismatic and polarizing figures of nineteenth century Scottish best remembered for his work on the history of the Knight Templars and as the primary mover of the first India designed to welcome native candidates. In the Indian presidency of Bombay, he became an enthusiastic promoter and a zealous political agent defending British colonial interests wherever his travels took him. Although much about his masonic career in India, there is no extensive biography of James Burnes, or at least no satisfactory biographical approach that would seek to situate his masonic career within the more general frame of his career as an empire-builder. This study is therefore meant both as a biographical approach that seeks to attempt to offer a new insight into the life and works of this fascinating character, and as an insight into the intricate relationship between free masonry and imperialism.

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