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**Masonic networks, material culture and international trade : the participation of Dutch Freemasons in the commercial and cultural exchange with Southeast Asia (1735-1853)**

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*Fig. 1: Façade of Fluwelen Burgwal 22, The Hague. The building was in use as Freemasons' Hall from 1846 until 1993. Photograph: Kroon & Wagtberg Hansen, The Hague.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Point of departure

Every book is the result of a journey, taken by foot, train, plane or clicks on a computer screen. This one started in a museum which is both world-famous and unknown at the same time. Contradictory as it may sound, that really is the case with the Cultural Masonic Centre 'Prins Frederik' in The Hague, CMC for short, which houses the historical archives, library and object collection of the *Orde van Vrijmetselaren onder het Grootoosten der Nederlanden* (Order of Freemasons under the Grand East of the Netherlands). While this exceptional heritage collection is studied, visited and cherished by a steadily growing number of international scholars, the Dutch public, most Dutch scholars and even a good deal of freemasons are still unfamiliar with its many treasures. So let's start this book by revealing one of the best kept 'secrets' of The Hague and see where the journey leads from there.

#### ◆ *A well-kept secret: the CMC collection*

As will become clear in chapter 2, freemasonry is an initiation society that founded a first Dutch *loge* (= local branch or lodge<sup>1</sup>) in The Hague in 1734, followed by a *Grootloge* (= national board or Grand Lodge) in 1735. While there is little documentation on the first masonic (= freemasons') activities in the Netherlands, detailed records were kept from the reorganisation of the Grand Lodge in 1756 onwards. The CMC archive not only documents the development of freemasonry, Dutch lodges and their complex rituals; it has a much wider relevance to the social, religious, political and cultural history of the Netherlands and its international relationships. Not in the least because the leaders of the Order had ties with the government, the Royal family and the West and East India Companies, and had worldwide contacts through which ideas were disseminated and influence was extended. The surviving membership records now provide an insight into a significant slice of the population over a prolonged period of time, as some 70.000 members joined a lodge before 1900.<sup>2</sup> Amongst them were both ordinary and extraordinary men - as well as women who, contrary to popular misconception participated as early as the 1750s.<sup>3</sup> They came from different religious backgrounds and all walks of life: from merchants to politicians, from royalty to writers, from actors to artists. Within the lodges a colourful mix of people was introduced to masonic ideals, encompassing universal moral values such as tolerance and brotherhood-of-man, which were still a rarity in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

Once familiarized with such concepts, individual members applied them to their daily life and work on both a conscious and a subconscious level. Their political and social decisions, as well as literary and artistic works, were often inspired by masonic ideals or symbolism. Friendships first cemented within the Order could form the foundation for a successful enterprise outside the lodge. Expressed through the lives and works of so many members, the intellectual heritage of freemasonry filtered down into society and influenced various aspects of modern western culture.<sup>5</sup> The minute books, personal correspondence, financial records and membership lists preserved in the CMC document this development. They also reveal the genealogical ties and social stratification of members, as well as their engagement with social debates on topics ranging from emancipation to slavery. As such the CMC is a relevant yet largely untapped source of information for various disciplines within the Humanities, including gender studies, art history, social anthropology and the history of western expansion to name but a few.

Although it contains much older titles, the CMC library was formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of two extraordinary men involved in freemasonry in that era was Prince Frederik of the Netherlands (1797-1881). He held the office of *Grootmeester* (national chairman or Grand Master) of the Order from 1816 until his death. The other was Jan Jacobus Frederik Noordziek (1811-1886), deputy librarian at the National Library in The Hague and also a member of the Order. The latter probably encouraged the prince to buy the *Bibliotheca Klossiana*, which Frederik did in 1854. This famous historical library encompasses 7.000 printed titles and 2.000 manuscripts on freemasonry worldwide collected by Georg Burkhard Kloss (1757-1854). The next 150 years, the Kloss library was expanded through legates and purchases into a much larger collection.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, Frederik bought a house at Fluwelen Burgwal 22 in The Hague in 1846 (fig. 2).<sup>7</sup> He offered the use of this building to three local lodges in 1847, on the condition that they would merge with



Fig. 2: Façade of Fluwelen Burgwal 22 in The Hague before 1910. Reproduced from: 'Het gebouw' 1911, p. 8.

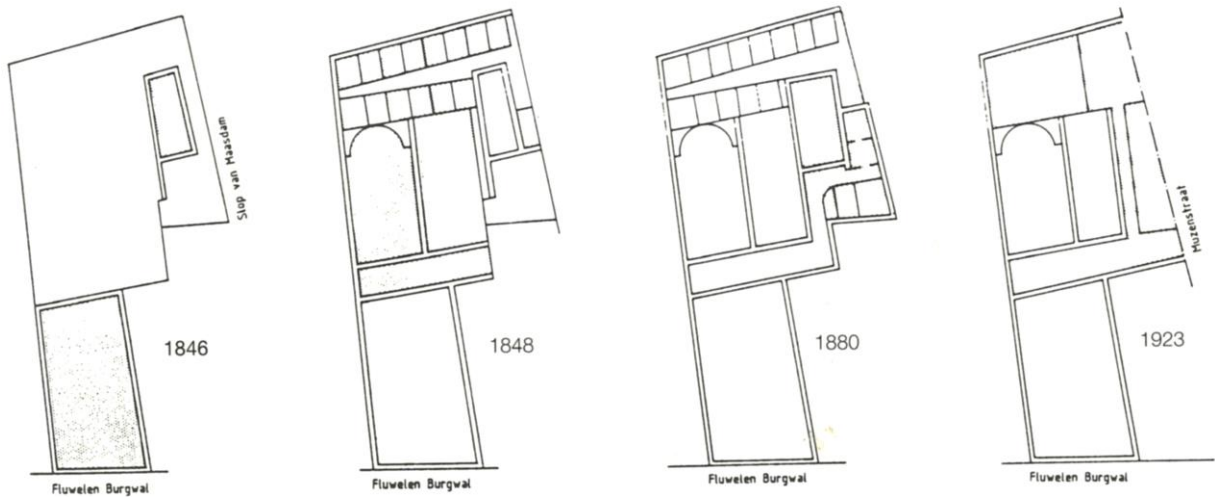


Fig. 3: Development of the floorplan of the Freemasons' Hall at Fluwelen Burgwal 22 in The Hague, 1846-1923. Reproduced from: Dielemans 1993, p. 31.

one another. The history of the Order, this building and the collection which kept expanding within it, would be inextricably linked for the next 150 years. A temple and banqueting hall were built in the former garden in 1848. Several small houses were also built on the plot, including one for a caretaker. Over time these were demolished again and the building was extended further to include more temples, meeting rooms and offices so it could accommodate all the local lodges and the Grand Lodge, as such becoming a proper, multifunctional Freemasons' Hall for the Netherlands (figs. 3-4). In 1856 the prince donated the building to 'his' Order at the occasion of its 100<sup>th</sup> jubilee, in 1866 followed by his donation of the Kloss collection and lastly by his own substantial masonic estate, including his regalia, which the Order received as a legate upon his death in 1881. So the Freemasons' Hall came to house both the historical archives and library, as well as a large collection of ritual and decorative objects, which were displayed on the premises from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first printed catalogues of exhibitions, which included both highlights from the collection and loans from lodges, were written by Noordziek and date back as far as 1859, but the display function may well go back further. This makes the CMC one of the oldest surviving (private) museums in The Hague, if not the Netherlands. For comparison, the oldest museum in The Hague is Museum Meermanno Westreenianum (1852) and the oldest on a national level is the Teylers Museum in Haarlem (1783).

In 1909-1910 the building was renovated by the architect and freemason Machiel Antonie de Zwart, when a reading room for visitors of the collection and a permanent exhibition room were realised (figs. 5a-b). The façade was given a new neo-Louis XVI look (fig. 1). In 1926 a large temple in Art Deco style was realized by freemason Salomon Franko (1872-1931) (fig. 6). These decades of prosperity were unfortunately followed by devastation. During World War II the building, its furnishings and historical collections were confiscated by the Nazis, as were the possessions of individual lodges all over the country. Regalia and ritual objects were looted, sold, melted down or destroyed, depending on their value and the ease with which any masonic symbolism could be removed from them. Luckily, around 80% of the looted archives and 95% of the library were retrieved and returned by the Allied Forces after the war. However, around 90% of the object collection remains missing until this day.<sup>8</sup> From the 1950s onwards, the surviving collections were inventoried and expanded (and the object collection rebuilt) under guidance of curator Beïtj Croiset van Uchelen (1925-1997) (fig. 10a). He also encouraged the study of the collection, for the first time allowing access to students and scholars who were non-members.<sup>9</sup> When the regime of Sukarno forced lodges in Indonesia into closure in 1960, several lodge archives were transferred to the Netherlands and added to the collection.

Unintentionally, what was once a private club archive expanded in both proportion and contents into a national heritage collection of international importance. Recognition as such came in the 1990s, when an effort was made to update conservation standards and study facilities under the next curator, drs. Evert Kwaadgras (1945-2014). Under the *Deltaplan voor Cultuurbehoud*, a national conservation scheme also inventorying the cultural value of Dutch collections, the CMC was awarded the highest possible status (A-status). It was the first time its value was formally recognized by non-members and the heritage sector. That makes what happened next especially painful. The Order sold its Freemasons' Hall in advance of plans for city renewal. Full demolition was avoided only because the façade at the Fluwelen Burgwal turned out to have a protected status as part of the historical inner city scape, but this did not protect the interior of the building. Without any notable protest from either freemasons or heritage organizations the unique masonic temples, the most representative examples of Dutch masonic heritage, were torn down. On their location now stands a modern high-rise tower which, ironically, houses the offices of the Dutch Inspection of Cultural Heritage.

From that moment on, the administrative headquarters of the Order, the temples and meeting rooms of the local lodges, and the collection would be housed on three different locations in The Hague. In 1993-1996 the Order moved to Prinsessegracht 27, the lodges to 2<sup>e</sup> Sweelinckstraat 131 and the collection to the newly named Cultural Masonic Centre 'Prins Frederik' in Jan Evertstraat 9. In order to fit into the smaller depots at this new location a part of the collection containing duplicates and non-masonic literature was auctioned. Besides such losses, there were also gains: a part of the archive, presumed lost in World War II, was returned from archive depots in Russia in 2002 following diplomatic negotiations. By 2007 the collection encompassed no less than 220 meters of archive materials, circa 40.000 book and manuscript titles, and circa 20.000 objects. By the time this book is published the collection will have

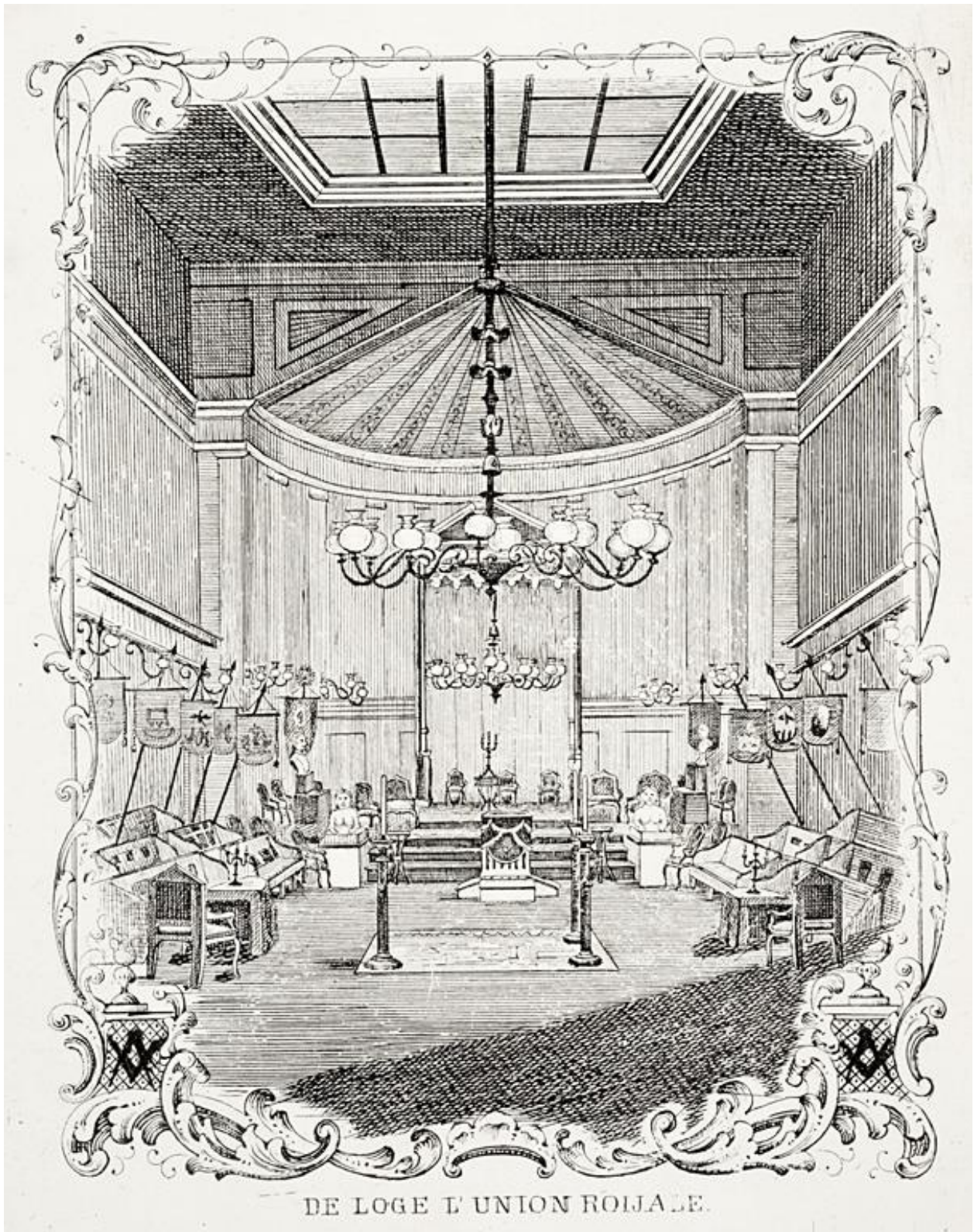
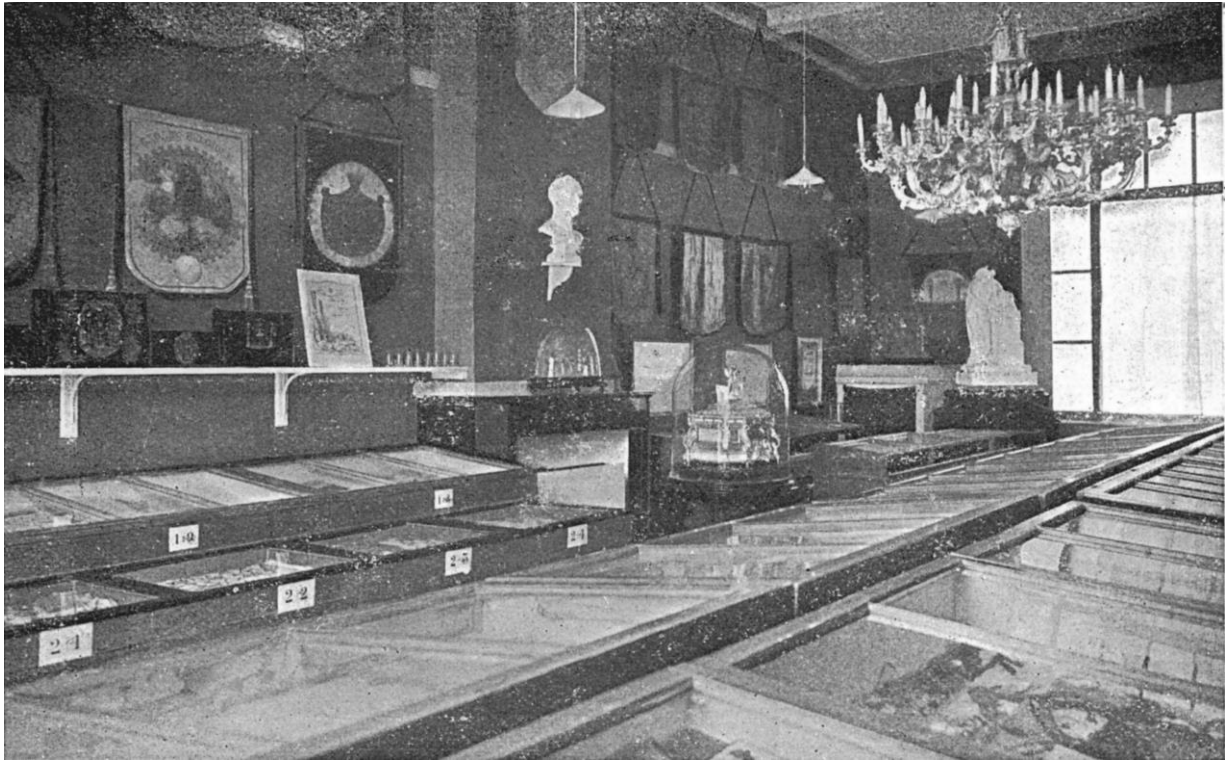


Fig. 4: Temple of lodge L'Union Royale in the Freemasons' Hall at the Fluwelen Burgwal in The Hague, as illustrated in *Maçonnieke Schatkamer. Album voor Vrijmetselaren, 1866*. Reproduced from: [vrijmetselarij.nl](http://vrijmetselarij.nl).



*Fig. 5a-b: Exhibition room in the Freemasons' Hall at the Fluwelen Burgwal 22 in The Hague, ca. 1911.  
Reproduced from: 'Het gebouw' 1911, p. 20.*



Fig. 6: Temple in the Freemasons' Hall at the Fluwelen Burgwal 22 in The Hague, before 1940. Collection: Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam. Reproduced from: Kroon/Wagtberg Hansen 2011, p. 28.

moved for the second time in 20 years, this time to Javastraat 2B in The Hague. Again, in order to fit into ever smaller depots, a part of the collection considered non-essential will have been *ontzamd* or de-collected. None the less, the CMC remains one of the most important Dutch heritage collections. It is not only historically, but also in a practical sense bound to the city of The Hague, where it is optimally imbedded in the academic infrastructure created by the proximity of the National Library, the National Archive, the Archive of the Royal Family, the Municipal Archive, Museum Meermanno and the Hague Historical Museum, which collections all closely tie into that of the CMC. Inclusion into recent digitalisation projects of the National Library and the national *Metamorfoze* scheme do not only underline its cultural importance, they also promise that parts of the collection will soon be publicly accessible online. This well-kept 'secret' museum may soon become a digital hot spot for professional researchers as well as a wider public interested in history.

#### ◆ *Motivation for research*

The CMC was where the journey started, but what was my excursion into history about? When I was a student of art history in Leiden in 1993 gaining museum work experience seemed a good preparation for a later career. After the Order circulated a call for volunteers for its museum I became involved in the care for the object collection for the next three years. Curator Croiset van Uchelen had just retired, but was still a daily presence in the reading room. He had a gift of very gently hooking visitors' interest in the collection and got me fascinated too. My final paper explored the iconography of the masonic apron (1996). As this was some years before chairs for the history of western esotericism and freemasonry would be founded at

Dutch universities, colleagues and professors did not hide the fact that they considered freemasonry completely irrelevant to art history.<sup>10</sup> Others just assumed I was a member of a masonic organization (which to date is not the case) and that my research was somehow manipulated by the Order. Sadly, most scholars in the field of study have encountered such prejudice at some time or other.

After graduation, some of the objects I had seen in the CMC kept intriguing me, such as an oriental style embroidered apron (chapter 7, fig. 7.168a-b), Chinese porcelain bowls (figs. 7-9) and beautiful Japanese lacquer boxes (chapter 6, figs. 6.12-6.13, 6.15, 6.17, 6.20-6.21, 6.23, 6.25-6.26 and 6.32). The fact that these were all covered with masonic symbols, made me wonder if the Asian artists had understood their complex and 'secret' meaning. What extraordinary exchange between men of different cultures must have taken place to result in the production of such beautiful objects? How would a freemason acquire and use such a bowl or box? Were such objects common commercial goods or rarities in their time?

Asian export porcelain and lacquer made for the European market in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries had already been well researched and frequently exhibited. Such beautiful objects represent both artistic skill and commercial commodities. We now associate this type of goods with wealthy families, eager to display such exotic luxury goods in their homes, to have a porcelain service adorned with their family crest or a lacquer box on display as a sign of status, intellect, taste and fashion. One learned all about that at university, but not that objects like those in the CMC were aimed at a less likely audience: freemasons. How come I had not heard about these objects during my studies, nor seen them in a public museum?

A search for similar items in Dutch public collections found none on display. Some museums did own one or two masonic items, but these were regarded as mere curiosities, not examples of a material culture which deserved to be included in their collection, research or display policies. The absence of an academic research tradition into the relationship between Dutch freemasonry and art, despite the abundance of sources, seemed incomprehensible to me. Such an oversight made the subject all the more challenging and this led to the PhD-project of which this book is a result. As Dutch museums and art historical literature lacked information on the subject, I looked to collections abroad and encountered similar problems. I had to turn to a territory largely unknown to art historians: the various Grand Lodge collections in Europe and America. As expected it proved difficult to trace the provenance of the individual objects in the CMC to particular owners. However, this route of enquiry did provide many unexpected riches.

The research project uncovered a socio-economical network for travellers along the shipping routes to Southeast Asia. This early modern network contributed considerably to the cultural and commercial exchange between East and West in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The project also highlighted a rich material culture resulting from this exchange, which stood out because of its ritual aspects and decorative symbolism. It became possible to place the production of the export wares from the CMC collection within an artistic and economical context, and explain their decoration and function. Indirectly, it also made a large amount of previously unpublished archive material on Dutch lodges in Asia accessible for the first time.

#### ◆ *Acknowledgements*

It has been a mixed blessing to undertake the project as an independent PhD-student. Although it took more time than any university tenure would have, it also allowed me to simultaneously work on relevant heritage and museum projects, such as *Sporen van Smaragd*<sup>11</sup>, which broadened my view. Another huge benefit was that as time progressed online research tools and newly digitalized collections became available, allowing me to eventually include information that was still inaccessible in the earlier stages of the project. Every effort has been made to seek permission for the use of photographs. Omissions are unintentional, and some owners could no longer be traced.

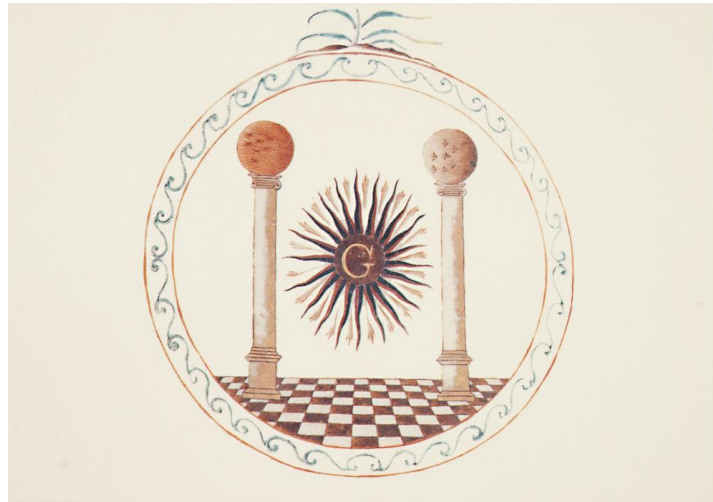
A large number of colleagues, curators, museum staff, private collectors and lodge members was kind enough to provide me with information, assistance and encouragement along the way. As the project lasted several years, it is impossible to list every single helpful encounter here, but please be assured none have been forgotten. I am especially grateful to Jac. Piepenbrock, Marijke de Vries and the staff members and volunteers of the Cultural Masonic Centre 'Prins Frederik' in The Hague for their help and patience. I would also like to thank the following people for kindly sharing their insights and knowledge: Jan Ariëns, dr. Marijo Ariëns-Volker, dr. Marty Bax, Olaf P. Berg, dr. Henrik Bogdan (University of Göteborg), Tom C. Bergroth (Turku Provincial Museum), Peter Bijleveld, prof. dr. Ulbe Bosma (IISG, Amsterdam), dr. Jan van



Fig. 7: Chinese export porcelain punch bowl, ca. 1790-1800, polychrome decoration with gilding and blue vine leaf border, diam. 29 cm, h. 11.5 cm. Collection: CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, inv.no. 6318. Reproduced from: vrijmetselarij.nl.



Fig. 8: Chinese export porcelain punch bowl, ca. 1790-1800, polychrome decoration with gilding and scroll border, diam. 35.9 cm, h. 14.7 cm. Collection: CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, inv.no. 7411. Reproduced from: vrijmetselarij.nl.



*Fig. 9: Detail of the inside of one of the punch bowls above. Postcard published by the CMC 'Prince Frederik', The Hague (copy in collection of the author).*

Campen (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), Martin Cherry (Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London), Diane Clements (Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London), Beïtj Croiset van Uchelen (CMC, †), prof. dr. Malcolm Davies (Leiden University, †), drs. Catrien Deys, prof. dr. T.M. Eliëns (Leiden University), drs. Menno Fitski (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), Ronald W. Fuchs II (Winterthur Museum), François Geissmann (Musée de la Maison des Maçons/Grande Loge Nationale Française, Paris), prof. dr. Anne T. Gerritsen (Leiden University), Christopher Haffner, prof.dr. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (University of Amsterdam), prof.dr. André Hanou (University of Amsterdam, †), mrs. G.N. Houben-Barten (†), prof.dr. Christiaan J.A. Jörg (Leiden University), Roland Kaehr (Musée d'Ethnographie de Neuchatel), Diederik Kortlang (National Archive, The Hague), emerit. prof. dr. Lammert Leertouwer (Leiden University), Laura Libert, Ad van de Meent, Pierre Mollier (Musée du Grand Orient de France, Paris), Ed Mullan, drs. Elise Mutter (Monumentenzorg & Welstand, The Hague), Aimee Newell (National Heritage Museum, Lexington), dr. Andreas Önnarfors (University of Göteborg), prof. dr. Andrew Prescott (University of Glasgow), prof. dr. Cécile Révauger (Université Michel de Montaigne Bordeaux III), François Rognon (Musée-Archives-Bibliothèque de la Grande Loge de France, Paris), William R. Sargent, Matthew Scanlan MA (Leiden University), Harmen Snel (Stadsarchief Amsterdam), dr. Jan A.M. Snoek (Heidelberg University), Mark Tabbart (George Washington Masonic Memorial, Washington D.C.), Jan Treffers and Erik Westengaard (Det Nationalhistoriske Museum Frederiksborg Slot).

'We are all standing on the shoulders of giants' is a phrase often used to honour those, whose views one considers important to one's own achievements. During my studies I have been lucky enough to meet Jan, Christiaan and Wouter, who all deserve this title of 'giants'. Thank you for allowing me to see 'clearer and further'. I would like to thank my parents and my sister Audrey for their continued support, patience with every little crisis a PhD-student inevitably encounters and the tedious aspects of manuscript preparation. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this book to my grandmother, Margaretha van Oijen-Koerten, who has supported everything I have ever wanted to do with the same boundless enthusiasm and at 91 is still cheering me on.

## 1.2. Outline of the research project

### ◆ *Freemasonry, trade and material culture*

The Netherlands commemorated the voyages of its East India Company in 2002 and celebrated 400 years of trade with Japan in 2009. The fruitful exchange between East and West has been extensively studied by scholars from various disciplines. Art historians have focused on the trade in furniture and decorative objects. As money could be made by catering to western tastes, all sorts of export wares were produced in Asia in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In turn, western objects which reached eastern shores influenced the work of local artists, resulting in a beautiful material culture incorporating a mixture of styles, shapes and techniques. Exhibitions and publications such as *Wonen op de Kaap en in Batavia 1602-1798* (The Hague 2002), *Japanese Export Lacquer: 1580-1850* (2005), *Fine and Curious: Japanese Export Porcelain in Dutch Collections* (Groningen 2003), *Silver in Batavia* (2012) and *Asian Art and Dutch taste* (2014) have highlighted this internationally shared heritage.<sup>12</sup>

The memory of the Netherlands' participation in this process of cultural exchange and mediation through the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) is famed and remains part of the Dutch national pride, despite the obvious negative connotations attached to colonial exploitation. Previous studies by Theo H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, Christiaan Jörg, Jochem Kroes, Oliver Impey and many others have discussed how Chinese porcelain and Japanese lacquer were decorated with European subjects, including porcelain with family crests, mythological and biblical scenes. A relatively unknown category of objects was produced specifically for freemasons and decorated with lodge emblems and other symbols having a 'secret' meaning that only the initiated were meant to understand. The dozens of surviving examples of such objects in collections all over the world were until recently considered mere curiosities. Examples of masonic export porcelain and lacquer have also survived in the collection of the CMC in The Hague. They suggest that freemasons were active among the VOC and the overseas trade posts, and raise all sorts of questions not answered by previous research:

- Was there a connection between the activities of the VOC and the founding of masonic lodges in the Dutch overseas trade posts?
- What number of freemasons was active within the VOC or the trade posts? What was their background?
- What was the market of commissioners and buyers of masonic export objects? Through which channels were such objects acquired? Were they commercial commodities or rarities in their time?
- What are the characteristics of masonic export objects? What is the meaning of their symbolic decoration and which visual sources were used as examples?
- Who were the artists and craftsmen involved? Did local artists in Asia understand masonic symbolism? If so, were any of them initiated into a Dutch lodge?
- What other examples of material culture directly resulted from the involvement of freemasons in the Asian trade? Were there lodge buildings and temple interiors comparable to those in the Netherlands? If so, have examples of this heritage survived?
- What was the significance, if any, of the involvement of freemasons in the cultural and commercial exchange between East and West?

In order to answer these questions, it was necessary to first gain a basic understanding of the organization of Dutch freemasonry, its ritual and social practices. After all, the objects concerned were clearly part of an established decorative tradition based on symbols derived from the masonic ritual. In fact, the whole extraordinary material culture of freemasonry proved deeply rooted in its rituals. It then quickly became clear that the objects were the result of a complex exchange between Dutch freemasons and local communities in Southeast Asia, which deserved to be explored, as it could provide a valuable new insight into the nature and extent of the exchange between East and West. It touched upon shared heritage and material culture, as well as the practice of belief systems and the function of early social networks. However, this remains a primarily an art historical study, which means excursions into other relevant fields

of research have to be limited and will be made only to support conclusions about the objects central to this book. Below the parameters of the research project and the sources used are outlined.

#### ♦ *Limitations and sources used*

For practical reasons the time frame of the research project was limited to little over a century: from 1735 (the foundation of the first Grand Lodge in the Netherlands) to 1853 (the year before Japan opened to the West). Geographically the limits were set to activities of freemasons along the shipping route to Southeast Asia, including Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, Malacca (Malaysia), the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), China and Japan. More specifically, the main focus was limited to developments between 1757 (the year the Grand Lodge commissioned the founding of a lodge overseas) and 1837 (the year the two main lodges in Batavia merged), after which the sheer bulk of available archive material vastly increases. Contacts between the Dutch, British, Swedish and French lodges in the region during this time frame also proved relevant.

On the history of the VOC, the lives of the Dutch in the Asian trade posts and the production of export wares for the Dutch market a large body of published research is already available. However, the lodge membership of VOC employees and relevant historical figures is usually only mentioned in passing, if at all. Frank Lequin's *Isaac Titsingh (1745-1812). Een Passie voor Japan. Leven en werk van de grondlegger van de Europese Japanologie* (2000) for instance, mentions Titsingh's membership of a lodge in Batavia and the contacts made there, but the author does not seem to have consulted the available lodge archives. Likewise, literature on the production of export wares like lacquer and porcelain does refer to objects with masonic decorations, but the information provided is usually limited to a caption under an illustration. The same goes for museum catalogues and databases, which provide little more than the objects' titles. The archives of the VOC in the National Archive in The Hague have also been extensively studied in the past. Published inventories and research results indicate these do not contain relevant information on the activities of freemasons within the Company or on masonic export goods, suggesting these were part of the private trade by its employees. This lack of documentation is in accordance with the custom among freemasons to keep correspondence on masonic matters wholly separate from those on non-masonic or *profane*<sup>13</sup> matters.

So instead, I focused almost exclusively on relatively unknown sources: 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century masonic archives and literature, to see what these could add to the already available knowledge on the exchange with Asia. Below is a short overview of the main sources used.

#### ▪ *Masonic archives*

Readers assuming that it was necessary to travel to Southeast Asia to consult relevant lodge archives, may be surprised to hear that most of them are kept in The Hague. The earliest such documents in the CMC date back to the commission to establish a Dutch lodge in Bengal in 1757. Of lodges in India, Ceylon and Malacca only fragmented 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century material survived, but enough to get an impression of the activities and members of several lodges in the region.<sup>14</sup> Luckily, more complete archives survive of the lodges in the Dutch East Indies. Those of the two main lodges in Batavia are the most detailed, including minute books, correspondence and membership records, even furniture inventories and invoices. In Japan and China, no Dutch lodges were assumed to have been active.

The archive of the Grand Lodge itself provided important additional information, as all lodges under its jurisdiction were required to annually submit a list of members and a financial overview. Even though the correspondence with the lodges in Asia was infrequent - with wars, natural catastrophes, lost ships and other events hampering communication -, the few surviving letters received by the Grand Lodge provided valuable information, as did the registers of outgoing and incoming correspondence. News from abroad was also mentioned at the yearly meeting of the Grand Lodge, of which detailed minutes were kept. Additional information could be obtained from the fragmentary archive of the so-called Provincial Grand Lodge for the Dutch East Indies, the local representative body of the Grand Lodge (see chapter 3). Lastly, the CMC membership card register with the names of members up until 1900 also proved useful.<sup>15</sup>

#### ▪ *Masonic literature*

Freemasons have always studied their own history, as is clear from numerous commemorative publications and jubilee books. Historical overviews also appeared in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century yearbooks, such as

*Nederlandse Vrij-metzelaars Almanach* and *Nederlandsch Jaarboekje voor Vrijmetselaren*, as well as in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century subscription magazines, such as *Algemeen Maçonniek Tijdschrift* and *Indisch Maçonniek Tijdschrift*. Due to their limited circulation the earliest relevant publications are often unavailable in public and academic libraries. Most of the masonic literature referenced in this book is present in the collection of the CMC.

An important source on freemasonry in the Dutch East Indies is the work of J. Hageman Cz. (1817-1871), a historian and Secretary/librarian of the lodge De Vriendschap in Soerabaya in 1854-1859, and again in 1863-1865.<sup>16</sup> He published several historical articles in *Nederlandsch Jaarboekje voor Vrijmetselaren* between 1857 and 1869. Hageman consulted the memory of the oldest local masons, and was able to study lodge and governmental archives when they were still quite complete. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries parts were lost in the transfer from one archivist to the next, from old lodge buildings to new, and in the 1960s in the hurried exodus from Indonesia to the Netherlands. Wherever original documents are now missing, Hageman's accounts provide the most reliable information. However, as a proud freemason he preferred to paint a rather positive picture of the actions of his 'brethren'. Although he never omitted any conflicts and minor scandals, to the frustration of the reader he never elaborated on the juicy details either.

After Hageman an uncritical method (*citeercultuur*) seems to have developed amongst later authors on the subject. Most notable historical overviews for a masonic audience were F.H. der Kinderen's 'Geschiedenis der V[rij] M[etselarij] te Batavia' (1864), H. Maarschalk's *Geschiedenis van de Orde der Vrijmetselaren in Nederland, onderhorige Koloniën en Landen* (1872), A. Pieren's 'Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis der Loges "La Vertueuse" en "La Fidèle Sincérité" te Batavia [...]' (1901/1902) and D. de Visser Smits' *Vrijmetselarij. Geschiedenis, maatschappelijke betekenis en doel* (1931). These authors relied on Hageman's findings and only added new information about the events in their own time, as did the writers of 20<sup>th</sup> century commemorative books - most notably *Gedenboek van de Vrijmetselarij in Nederlandsch Oost-Indië 1767-1917* and *100 jaren Maçonnieke Arbeid in het Licht van de Ster in het Oosten, 1837-1937*.

Very little has been written about the history of Dutch lodges in India, Ceylon, Malaysia and Japan. Their archives were assumed lost and relevant documents scattered through the Grand Lodge archives remained unpublished until now. Hageman gathered some additional information from correspondence records of the lodges in Batavia. Also relevant is a series of articles from the 1950s by J.R. Dashwood on the history of British freemasonry in Ceylon in the masonic journal *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*. Dashwood briefly mentions the Dutch lodges on the island.

The activities of an international mix of freemasons in China and Japan were described in the 1970s-1980s by Christopher Haffner, a member of the British Quatuor Coronati Lodge of Research, with the help of Swedish colleague Harry Lindberg and his son Bengt.<sup>17</sup> Haffner first pointed to a connection between the Order and the European East India Companies. Olof P. Berg's 'Frimureriet bland ostindiefararna' (2000) further explored the involvement of Swedish freemasons in the China trade, which also proved relevant to the Dutch situation.

Pieter Hendrik Pott (1918-1989), director of the Museum voor Volkenkunde (Ethnographical Museum) and professor of museology at the Leiden University, as well as a notable scholar on freemasonry, also deserves to be mentioned (fig. 10b). Besides his many articles on masonic rituals in *Thoth*, he was also the first to study masonic lacquer ware and point to pictorial sources of its decorations.<sup>18</sup>

#### ▪ *Academic literature*

In academic circles the history of Dutch freemasonry in Asia has been studied since the 1970s, but only on a very limited scale. P.W. van de Veur's *Freemasonry in Indonesia from Radermacher to Soekarno 1762-1961* (1976) and Th. Stevens' *Vrijmetselarij en samenleving in Nederlands-Indië en Indonesië, 1764-1962* (1994) are considered the standard works on the subject. However, both authors focus mainly on developments from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Although the title of Van der Veur's book suggests otherwise, he barely discusses the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Stevens provided an overview of earlier literature on the subject, including Hageman, Maarschalk and various commemorative publications, and then focused on political developments in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig. 10a-b: Two 'giants' in the field of study who deserve to be remembered. Left: Beij Croiset van Uchelen, curator of the collections of the Order of Freemasons under the Grand East of the Netherlands. Right: Piet Pott, director of the Museum voor Volkenkunde, professor of Museology at the Leiden University and a scholar of freemasonry. Reproduced from: Thoth 49 (1998) 1, p. 2 / Thoth 40 (1989) 3, p. 71.

Neither author seems to have extensively consulted the available early lodge archives in the CMC. Stevens' book was especially valuable as the first publication on the subject to reach a wider audience (outside masonic circles) and to be translated for Indonesian readers. However, its chapters on the early developments illustrate the mechanism of *citeercultuur*, or how successive authors allowed some inaccuracies to be requoted from each other. Where in the following chapters the statements of previous authors differ from the facts mentioned in lodge archives - as they frequently do - the contemporary source is considered most likely to be correct. It is important to note that the same event can be attributed to different dates by successive authors. Confusion about the masonic calendar, which differs by 4.000 years and 2 months from ours (but was not always used consistently and has its own variations), was probably responsible. Such contradictory findings are provided in footnotes.

An important and more accurate source of information on the early history of the Dutch lodges in Asia, is a series of articles by De Neve, Lutter and Christiaans in the genealogical journal *De Indische Navorscher* (1994). They provided a summary of the founding and development of each lodge, the genealogy, profane and masonic careers of each of the founding members, as well as their portraits. They also provided transcripts of some of the earliest documents of the lodges in Asia. I have tried to expand on their work in an appendix with membership details on India and Ceylon.

The relevance of freemasonry to western expansion is a growing field of interest to scholars, especially in France. Recent publications include *La franc-maçonnerie dans les ports* (2012) under edition of Cécile Révauger and Éric Saunier, *Le Monde Maçonnique des Lumières: Europe, Amériques, Colonies* (2013) under edition of Révauger and Charles Porset, as well as Jessica L. Harland-Jacobs' *Builders of Empire: Freemasons and British Imperialism, 1717-1927* (2013) and Simon Dechamps' *Franc-maçonnerie et Pouvoir colonial dans l'Inde Britannique 1730-1921* (2014).<sup>19</sup> While the historical importance of Dutch lodges is clearly acknowledged by most authors on the subject, the language barrier prevented most from exploring Dutch lodge archives in detail. That makes for a lop-sided historical picture, which underlines the need for translations of Dutch primary sources and joint international research initiatives. While analysis of the role

of Dutch freemasons within the wider international masonic, trade, power and political networks is urgently needed, this cannot be accurately done without first establishing more basic lodge histories, membership data etc. from archival sources. This study, while concentrating on material culture, will hopefully provide others with some of that necessary groundwork.

#### ▪ *Collections*

So far, an overview of the development of the material culture of Dutch freemasonry and its iconography has been lacking. While the history of freemasonry is a growing research field, material culture is not yet a main subject within that field. Yet this material culture is especially helpful in understanding freemasonry's ritual developments, its use of space, influence on the living environment and application of masonic concepts outside the lodge, as well as the consumption pattern of lodges and their engagement with the art market, and numerous other aspects of the field of study. Curators of masonic collections are currently making great contributions to his developing area of research, and raising awareness of its importance among other researchers.

An attempt was made to locate objects comparable to those in the CMC in other collections, both private and public, in the Netherlands and abroad. Surprisingly, masonic export porcelain and lacquer were not found to be represented in major Dutch collections on Asian art, such as the Groninger Museum, the Prinsessehof in Leeuwarden, the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague or the Museum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam owns only two relevant objects. Additionally, the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum (London), the Nordiska Museet (Stockholm), the National Heritage Museum (Lexington) and the Winterthur Museum were among those found to include several relevant objects. (Many others, owning just one relevant item, are listed in the illustration credits and endnotes.) The back catalogues of auction houses Christies and Sotheby's, as well as several art dealers, also proved useful.

However, masonic collections abroad served as the main source of comparison. While the CMC itself boasts the largest collection of masonic export lacquer, the Library and Museum of Freemasonry in London (L&MF) keeps the largest collection of masonic export porcelain. Among others consulted were the Musée du Grand Orient de France, the Musée de la Grande Loge de France and the Musée de la Maison des Maçons (Grande Loge Nationale Française) (all three in Paris), the Deutschen Freimaurer Museum (Bayreuth), the Norske Frimurerordens Museum (Oslo), the Svenska Frimurare Ordens Museum (Stockholm) as well as the Masonic Library and Museum of Pennsylvania, the online Phoenixmasonry Masonic Museum and the George Washington Masonic Memorial. As it was not possible to personally visit all relevant collections outside the Netherlands to physically examine the objects, provenance records and helpful curators provided the necessary information.

#### ♦ *Method and presentation*

Working as a heritage professional in daily life, it was important to me that this project would not get stuck in theoretical analyses and mainly have a practical purpose: to accurately identify a group of objects in the CMC, to help others more easily recognize and interpret the complex material culture and iconography of freemasonry, and in order to do so make relevant Dutch archive sources more accessible to a wider international audience.

Traditionally, art historical studies tend to focus on the decorative, stylistic and technical production of visual and decorative art. Christiaan Jörg's dissertation *Porselein als handelswaar. De porseleinhandel als onderdeel van de China-handel van de V.O.C. 1729-1794* was a groundbreaking study in 1978, as one of the first to view art within the context of social and economic processes that drive commissioners, buyers and traders, and also influence the artist's creative process. This approach has since become generally accepted in the art historical curriculum, while the exchange between East and West serves as a particularly relevant area of research in this era of global networks. The material culture described in this book did not originate from creative, social and economic processes alone, but also from a distinct ritual context, which clearly demands a cross-disciplinary perspective.

Jan Snoek has done similar ground-breaking work on the subject of masonic and fraternal ritual studies since his dissertation *Initiations: a methodological approach to the application of classification and definition theory in the study of rituals* (1987). It needs to be emphasized here, that the study of masonic

rituals may seem a niche subject at first glance, but in fact provides insights which are very relevant to many other disciplines, including art history and social studies. Ritual, material culture and iconography are intricately interwoven. Experiencing a ritual together, formulating a new one or disagreeing on its contents strongly impacted the dynamic between people. It influenced both their personal and business relationships, stimulated rivalry between some groups and friendship between others. This quite unexpectedly makes ritual dynamics highly relevant to the functioning of masculine networks within the VOC, to the international trade in art objects and to cultural mediation.

The study of masonic rituals, publications and prints from the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries made it possible to trace the visual sources for the decorations on the export objects in the CMC and related collections. This helped to explain their symbolic meaning and understand the function of these objects within the lodge and private ownership. Masonic prints and ritual texts have been used to date objects, which in some cases also contributes to more accurate dating of export porcelain and lacquer in general.

By consulting masonic archives, it became possible to reconstruct the earliest development of the lodges in Southeast Asia and correct a lot of previously published data. Furthermore, it proved possible to trace the building of freemasons' halls in the Dutch East Indies, take inventory of their decorations and furnishings, and to identify the artists and craftsmen employed. The archives provided an insight into the general consumption patterns of the lodges, their social function and interaction with the local population. Such findings were supplemented with data from previously published research on the exchange with Asia to provide context and identify the commissioners, buyers and traders in masonic export objects. It should be noted, that - as the main focus was on describing and identifying a little known material culture - the international politics and conflicts affecting the Dutch trade posts are mentioned only in passing. Other researchers are already focusing on the relevance of freemasonry to political and social history. Lodge members and visitor lists were compared to the VOC enlistment database of the National Archive.<sup>20</sup> This provided an insight into the number of Dutch freemasons active in Asia. Rather than discussing them as characteristic groups, an effort has been made to focus on personal histories and to individually name those who usually remain anonymous, such as the Javanese and Chinese employed by the lodges.

As I could not depend on any longstanding academic frame of reference for the material culture of Dutch freemasonry, this provided a great freedom as well as obstacles. Marty Bax's *Het Web der Schepping. Theosofie en kunst in Nederland van Lauweriks tot Mondriaan* (2004) and Marijo Ariëns-Volker's and *De wangen van de Macroprosopus. Een nieuwe interpretatie van het schilderij 'Les Femmes d'Alger' van Pablo Picasso* (2004), both studies of the relationship between modern art and esoteric currents, were very useful points of reference in this respect. Even though both dealt with a much later era, they offered useful insights into the social dynamics of esoteric societies, the relevance of network and genealogical relationships (prosopography) in the art market, and the dissemination of esoteric thought as an influence on the production process, the buyers and traders market.<sup>21</sup>

How is the material culture of freemasonry presented from an art historical perspective in the following chapters? For readers still unfamiliar with the subject, as most fellow art historians will be, the first part of this book offers a (very compacted) introduction into the developments of freemasonry in the Netherlands. This is followed by an introduction into the rituals and their related iconography, as well as the material culture to which this iconography is applied in a decorative manner. The material culture of freemasonry is explored in various stages: from the descriptions in early texts and the earliest depictions of lodge interiors, to lodge inventories and designs, and finally, the earliest photographs and surviving buildings. This broad introduction is essential to the understanding of the second part of the book, which deals with the material culture of the lodges in Southeast Asia and the identification of surviving (export) objects.

This second part first explains the relevance of freemasonry to travellers, as well as the overlap between the VOC and the Dutch masonic network, strengthened by the family ties between both organisations. Separate chapters on India and Ceylon, the Dutch East Indies (Java) and Malaysia, China and Japan, first offer a brief history of the local lodges to provide the context in which a material culture could develop. When information on this material culture is available, correspondence, minutes, inventories and financial accounts are used to demonstrate which buildings were commissioned, how they were decorated and furnished, which artists were involved, and what the function of individual objects was to their users. Provided sufficient material is available, chapters also include an overview of the most important surviving

objects, of which the decorations and visual sources are explained. This approach allows one to assess both the presence of freemasonry within the trade posts, the development of its material culture, and the artistic value and ritual function of individual objects. The material presented can serve as a 'guide' for the future determination, dating and provenance of similar objects. In order to fully focus on this new area of research, some compromises had to be made: the VOC is mentioned to 'set the scene', but its history is not explored further. Even so, some findings will offer new perspectives on the Company. In the last chapter, the previous findings are summarized to support conclusions and explain which questions remain unanswered.

In order to make the material written in Dutch more widely accessible to scholars, English translations of (parts of) original documents are provided in this publication, rather than paraphrased or summarized. Although it has consequences for the length of some chapters, a choice was made to offer primary source material (like transcripts of inventories and membership lists) as inserts in the lay out, rather than to 'banish' these to traditional appendixes in the back of the book. Presenting material in this fashion allows readers to take in or ignore one or more layers of textual and visual information at their convenience. From an art historical perspective, the discussion of previously unpublished inventories and images are the quintessential data provided in this book, therefore deserving of a central place. The size of the chapters also reflects the amount of documentation available on lodges in a particular region in Southeast Asia - which for the Dutch East Indies remains, even after careful selection of highlights, almost overwhelming. In contrast there is relatively little material on Japan, which made the available data easier to handle.

Where Dutch archive documents and publications are quoted, translations were provided by the author.<sup>22</sup> For the benefit of the reader (masonic) abbreviations were translated in full and the original Dutch text is provided in the endnotes. Some readers may find Appendix I helpful, as it explains frequently used masonic terminology. Appendix II presents an overview of biographical data, including a list of over 324 Dutch freemasons active in India and Ceylon (1758-1838), which provides an insight into the social stratification, professional activities and masonic 'careers' (successive initiations and appointed offices within a lodge). This appendix may prove a useful basis for future research.

A PhD-thesis must conform to certain academic rules. Let's not forget that behind the data and objects presented here according to those rules, there are very personal stories to be discovered. Imagine a young, well-to-do man on his journey of becoming a freemason. How he nervously enters the lodge building for the first time on the night of his initiation, sweating a little under his wig. He will feel a mixture of thrill and fear during the ritual, which is cleverly designed to induce a powerful emotional experience using theatrical props, light and sound effects. After being welcomed into the brotherhood, it will take him several years to discover the deeper meaning behind each symbol used in the lodge, and to be initiated into a number of successive degrees. Perhaps he will even become a respectable Worshipful Master or chairman of a lodge one day. He might want to show his affiliation to masonic ideals and impress his fellows by displaying in his house a fine object decorated with the symbols of the Order. If he is wealthy enough, he can commission a precious porcelain bowl or a lacquer box from Asia, and provide a masonic image of his choice to be copied onto it.

Now imagine how another freemason, a bit more of a rogue, has to make the perilous journey to the East in service of the East India Company, hoping he will not go down with an unfortunate ship nor die of boredom during the many months at sea. Provided he does not succumb to some exotic disease after arrival in Batavia, Canton or Dejima, our hero will have to negotiate with Asian merchants in order to procure the desired goods for the Company as well as for the private orders he accepted. If he succeeds, he will pray those fragile objects among the cargo of the return ship will make it home in one piece. And what of the Asian artist, who must at least once have wondered about the meaning of the strange western images he so skilfully copied onto porcelain or lacquer on a daily basis? Or better yet, what of a Eurasian woman in Batavia, married to a lodge member and invited to the celebration of St. John's Day, where she will receive a small silver jewel in the shape of a trowel to remember the occasion? There is a basis for a historical novel in every masonic object - every punch bowl, every lacquer box.

## 1.2. The academic study of freemasonry

Apart from *post mortem* sightings of Elvis Presley, it is difficult to name a subject that has been the source of more preposterous theories than freemasonry. The history of misconceptions about the Order is as long as the history of the initiation society itself. It is important to realize how these misconceptions were first conceived and then perpetuated, as they influenced both public and academic attitudes towards the subject, and explain why art historians overlooked the material culture of freemasonry for so long.

### ♦ *Separating fact and fiction*

As will be discussed later in chapter 2, the exact origins of freemasonry are subject to continuing discoveries and arguments between scholars. This is why some prefer to see the re-establishment of the first governing masonic body, the (Premier) Grand Lodge of England, in 1717 as a starting point of modern, metropolitan freemasonry. Ironically, one of this Grand Lodge's first publications contributed much to the later confusion about the Order's origins.

In 1723 James Anderson compiled *The Constitutions of the Free-masons. Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, &c. of that most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity* for use by all the lodges under the rule of the Grand Lodge.<sup>23</sup> At the time it was not uncommon to add a sense of tradition and status to a new organization, by giving it an inspiring, legendary history (a process known as 'the invention of tradition'<sup>24</sup>). Such a fictional history was also incorporated in *The Constitutions*, naming a long list of important historical, biblical and mythical architects and builders as past members of the Order. In the following editions of the book, a summary of the recent activities of the Grand Lodge was added without marking the line between fictional and factual history.

Later 18<sup>th</sup> century publications on freemasonry borrowed generously from *The Constitutions*, again without distinguishing fact from fiction. This created the first misunderstandings about the Order's origins amongst readers both within and outside the Order. As will be discussed below, lodge members performed ritual initiations which refer to specific masonic myths. When these rituals were first 'exposed' to the public in early 18<sup>th</sup> century pamphlets and later published in members' handbooks, these myths were added to the mix, fuelling ever more spectacular theories on the history of freemasonry. For example, the origins of the Order have been contributed to Adam, the builders of the Egyptian pyramids, the Christian crusaders as well as the medieval cathedral builders. No doubt some book somewhere also mentions an extra-terrestrial intervention.

Until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most research on freemasonry was undertaken by scholars who themselves were members of a lodge. They provided a bounty of historical accounts and jubilee books of lodges, which make up a large part of the bibliography of this book. Such publications were usually distributed amongst members only and therefore failed to reach the academia.

In their enthusiasm, some authors on freemasonry fell victim to wishful thinking or *Hineininterpretierung*. Ancient depictions of building tools and other (universal) symbols - which *are* used in masonic iconography, but not exclusively - were interpreted as proof of the ancient roots of the Order. Hieroglyphs resembling masonic tools, medieval tombstones depicting a square and a pair of compasses, and allegorical figures carrying the symbols of architecture were often mistakenly interpreted as proof of ancient origins. The origins of these symbols in the iconographical tradition of many older, unrelated organizations and belief systems were overlooked.

Such inaccuracies in literature, combined with the strong anti-masonic sentiments that were expressed alternately by church and government under different regimes, have clouded general perceptions. In 1796 the French Jesuit priest Augustin de Barruel (1741-1820) formulated a conspiracy theory that the French Revolution was a masonic plot against Christendom, to which others added a Jewish component.<sup>25</sup> From then onwards, anti-semitic and anti-masonic sentiments have gone hand in hand, culminating in the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion in Russia in 1897-1898*. The intimate, 'secret' character that is inherent to masonic organizations did little to counterbalance the many rumours and misconceptions. The Nazi-regime, which reprinted the *Protocols*, also published a vast amount of other anti-masonic and -semitic propaganda during World War II.<sup>26</sup> This literature is (in the Netherlands) still

widely available in second hand book shops, and continues to contribute to prejudice and misunderstandings amongst the public to this day.

Through the more benign popular fiction of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many also came to believe that 'the Order' is an elitist brotherhood, a world-wide network, secretly trying to rule the world. To readers of that genre this book will be sadly disappointing. Contrary to persistent conspiracy theories, freemasonry is neither a religion, nor a sectarian movement, branch of the mafia or a capitalist conspiracy. As an initiation society freemasonry propagated a tolerant worldview combined with an exciting ritual element and social functions similar to other contemporary gentlemen's clubs.<sup>27</sup> That freemasonry's basic moral values and playful symbolism somehow remained valid for much later generations, can be concluded from the fact that so many different masculine, mixed and feminine masonic organizations are still active today. However, masonic orders were and are simply too diverse to ever operate as one global organization, as some fiction writers like to think, although international friendly contacts between Orders and lodges are common. What this book will show, is that freemasonry *did* once form a global network, but only in a positive sense, supporting international travellers.

The distinction between fact and fiction has always been obvious to serious scholars of the subject, including many members of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge of Research, who produced an invaluable body of work in their *Transactions*. However, it was the publication of *The Craft: a History of English Freemasonry* (1986) by John Hamill, curator of the collections of the United Grand Lodge of England, which marked an important turning point in general attitudes towards freemasonry. For over a hundred years, freemasonry was assumed to have organically evolved from an 'operative' (handwork) masonry in the medieval guild system to a 'speculative' (philosophical or symbolic) freemasonry by the introduction of 'gentlemen masons'. Probably the first masonic author to formulate this theory, was Robert Freke Gould (1836-1915), most notably in his *The History of Freemasonry* (1884-1887).<sup>28</sup> Hamill was one of the first authoritative figures from within the Order to prove this theory to be flawed. It marked a turning point in the approach to the subject.<sup>29</sup> Hamill's book stimulated a fresh, critical and methodological approach and warmed non-members to the subject. The current view on the Order's origins is that things were much more complex. The crucial development did not take place between operative and speculative masons, but rather between stone masons (who were both operative and speculative) to gentlemen masons (who were speculative only). This is discussed further in paragraph 2.1. below.

#### ♦ *Changing academic attitudes*

Andrew Prescott, whose memorable directorship of the Centre of Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism at the University of Sheffield (2000-2007) stimulated a wave of new developments in the field of study, considered the need of a cross-disciplinary academic approach:

One of the attractions of the study of Freemasonry is its inherently inter-disciplinary character - to study fully Freemasonry we need the skills of the historian, the literary specialist, the museum curator, the art historian, the sociologist and so on. However, if the study of Freemasonry does not have a home disciplinary base, it again runs the risk of becoming sterile. The subject field in which the study of Freemasonry sits most comfortably is that of the history of religion [...].<sup>30</sup>

Within religious studies, freemasonry is currently viewed as part of the western esoteric tradition. While the term 'esoteric' is mainly associated with spirituality in popular culture, in the academic field the term 'western esoteric' is more narrowly defined. It covers a body of 'rejected knowledge': ideas and worldviews that have evolved from antiquity until the present day within a complex of currents, defined by mainstream (Christian) culture and religion as 'other'.<sup>31</sup> Since the Renaissance, some of the most influential of these currents were 17<sup>th</sup> century alchemy, 18<sup>th</sup> century freemasonry, 19<sup>th</sup> century theosophy and occultism, and 20<sup>th</sup> century anthroposophy.

In the past academic attitudes have been plainly dismissive of esoteric traditions, as Wouter Hanegraaff summarized at the conference *Masonic and Esoteric Heritage* in his lecture 'Western Esotericism and the Status of the Image' (2005):

[...] since the Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the perspectives typical of Renaissance magic and hermeticism were increasingly outlawed as 'occult and irrational superstitions'. Rejection led to marginalization, and eventually resulted in a very serious lack of factual knowledge among academics about the history of esotericism and its importance and influence in western culture. That lack of information is only now beginning to be corrected.<sup>32</sup>

When freemasonry was studied seriously, it was often 'typecast' by historians and theologians as an intellectual or political by-product of the Enlightenment, or a whimsical pastime of an aristocratic elite. Dutch academic research into freemasonry, if any, tended to focus on subjects like the transfer of ideas during the Enlightenment, the views of the Catholic Church, or aspects of sociability in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But perspectives have shifted significantly as a result of developments during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 1960s the *Chaire d'Histoire des courants ésotériques et mystiques dans l'Europe moderne et contemporaine* was founded at the *École Pratique des Hauts Études* (Sorbonne) in Paris. This paved the way for groundbreaking studies, including Francis Yates' *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964), Antoine Faivre's *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental*, (1986), Wouter Hanegraaff's *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (1996) and the *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (Leiden 2005). Hanegraaff's argument that western esoteric currents should not be viewed as alternatives or subculture currents against mainstream (Judeo-Christian) religions, philosophies or sciences, but as *part of* our multifaceted western culture, is now widely accepted.<sup>33</sup>

The new approach by religious scholars also sparked a wider interest in the subject within the humanities. Margaret Jacob's *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (1981)<sup>34</sup> paved the way for other academic studies focusing on freemasonry, such as Helmut Reinalter's *Freimaurer und Geheimbünde im 18. Jahrhundert in Mitteleuropa* (1983) and David Stevenson's *The Origins of Freemasonry. Scotland's Century 1590-1710* (1988). Academic chairs, research institutes and networks were founded, including the *Centro de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Española* (1983, University of Zaragoza, Spain), the two Pierre-Theodore Verhaegen Chairs for the study of Freethinking, Rationalism and Freemasonry (1983, Université Libre de Bruxelles and Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium), the *Wissenschaftliche Kommission zur Erforschung der Freimaurerei* (1992, University of Innsbrück, Austria) and the Centre for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism (2000, University of Sheffield, Great Britain). In the Netherlands this growing academic interest resulted in the founding of the Chair for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and related currents (University of Amsterdam, 1999) and the Chair for Freemasonry as an intellectual current and socio-cultural European Phenomenon (University of Leiden, 2000).<sup>35</sup>

Freemasonry is now viewed as not only an important intellectual current within the Enlightenment, but also as a society (specific group) that initiated, influenced and reflected general trends in western society: changes in social behaviour and status, race and gender issues, the distinction between private and public space, etc. The subject is studied from a cross-disciplinary viewpoint, incorporating methodology from religious, social, cultural, historical and gender studies. Researchers are only recently becoming aware of just how much of an impact this particular current has made on western society.

Recent publications of standard works such as *Le Monde Maçonnique de Lumières (Europe Amériques & Colonies). Dictionnaire prosopographique* (2013) under edition of Charles Porset and Cécile Révauger, and the *Handbook of Freemasonry* (2014) by editors Henrik Bogdan and Jan Snoek, also underline that the subject is now firmly on the academic map. However, because the study of freemasonry is still a relatively 'young' field, it lacks the longstanding tradition of academic research and publications that most other fields of study can rely on. Many of the basic questions about the origins and history of freemasonry are yet unanswered, while academic literature, statistics, basic research tools and reference frameworks are only now becoming available. A daunting and at the same time challenging overview of the *desiderata* provided by André Hanou in 'De loge parterre' (2002) is still relevant - more than ten years after its publication.<sup>36</sup> The amount of uninventoried and unresearched archival sources in masonic collections all over the world is vast. As Andrew Prescott already underlined, a new generation of researchers needs to 'get their hands dirty in those unopened boxes'.<sup>37</sup>

### ♦ *Art historical perspectives*

Of all western esoteric currents, freemasonry has probably produced the richest material culture. Despite the progressive developments listed above, scholarly attention towards freemasonry for a long time focused on its intellectual heritage: its influence on history, politics, society and prominent historical figures. From the 1980s onwards a number of major European exhibitions on the subject were organized with the cooperation of (Grand) lodges. Examples are: *Een eeuw vrijmetselarij in onze gewesten, 1740-1840* (Brussels 1983), *Fragments Impressionées. Tabliers Maçonnes des XVIIIème et XIXème Siècles* (Turin 1991), *Freimaurer. Solange die Welt besteht* (Vienna 1992), *De vrijmetselarij en Europa van de 18<sup>de</sup> eeuw tot heden* (Brussels 1993), *La Franc-Maçonnerie* (Bordeaux 1994), *Franc-Maçonnerie. Avenir d'un tradition* (Tours 1997), *The Freemason in his Raiment of Light* (Tours 2002), *Geheime Gesellschaft* (Weimar 2002); *Freemasons in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia* (Prague 2003), *Wijsheid met Vreugd gepaard* (Gent 2003) and *Splendeurs Maçonnes* (Toulouse 2003). Perhaps because these mainly included examples of applied art (ritual and domestic objects perceived as *curiosa*) rather than visual art, such events drew little attention from art historians.

Until recently, freemasonry remained a virtually absent theme in art criticism.<sup>38</sup> Western esoteric currents were discussed from time to time, though mainly in connection to Romantic, Symbolist and early Abstract art. Relevant art works which should have been recognized as part of a particular esoteric visual tradition were only discussed as expressions of more general religious and spiritual feelings. Examples of this approach are the exhibitions and catalogues *Kunstenaren der Idee. Symbolistische tendenzen in Nederland ca. 1880-1930* (The Hague 1978), *Zeichen des Glaubens. Geist der Avant-Garde: Religiöse Tendenzen in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart 1980), *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (Los Angeles/Chicago/The Hague 1986-1987), *Okkultismus und Avantgarde. Von Munch bis Mondrian 1900-1915* (Frankfurt am Main 1995) and *Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik* (Hamm/Würzburg 2005). Such exhibitions failed to point out, for instance, how 'masonic art' is pictorially or structurally different from 'theosophical art'. These also tended to focus on two-dimensional (modern) art, whereas western esotericism has influenced both the applied and visual arts, and architecture. In many cases the artists involved were striving to create a true *Gesamtkunstwerk* wherein the whole living environment harmoniously expressed their esoteric ideals.

This omission was part of a larger oversight. Within art and heritage studies, there is a tradition of documenting, researching and restoring important examples of religious and social, domestic and public art and architecture. It is widely accepted that world religions such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism have profoundly influenced artists in their personal iconography and expression of artistic concepts. In the Netherlands however, the traditional approach to western art is firmly based on Christian mainstream iconography. The fact that many celebrated artists were influenced by currents such as freemasonry, occultism, theosophy and anthroposophy has until recently been insufficiently acknowledged. (It is curious that when studying Christian religious art, basic knowledge of the bible is considered essential, but when studying for instance theosophical art, such as the work of Piet Mondriaan, acquiring knowledge of Helena Blavatsky's body of work is not considered a worthwhile investment by most art historians.)

This oversight can - albeit only partially - be blamed on practical obstacles. While the study of western esotericism has developed from a niche within religious studies to a thriving international, cross-disciplinary field, most of its published results have yet to cross over into art historical studies. To date (2015) we lack an academic body of reference, such as a concise overview of esoteric iconography, material culture and terminology, which would allow the identification and systematic analysis of relevant elements in art and architecture - as well as the assessment of their cultural-historical value for conservation purposes. Another obstacle is that, while the Netherlands boasts a chair for the study of western esotericism at the University of Amsterdam and two relevant collections (CMC, BPH), scholarship still tends to focus on international historical developments. We simply do not know which esoteric currents were active in the Netherlands between circa 1750 and 1940, let alone in which town, for how long and who the founders were.<sup>39</sup> It is necessary to quantify the historical engagement of the Dutch with esoteric currents and demonstrate its relevance to today's society, in order to create a much wider *draagvlak* (support) for investment in education and research into the subject.

Fortunately, over the last two decades the (private) archives of esoteric organizations have quickly become more (digitally) accessible for research.<sup>40</sup> This has, amongst others, allowed much documentary

evidence to surface of the participation of artists in 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century esoteric societies, and of the dissemination of esoteric thought in artistic and buyers' circles. Cross-disciplinary conferences such as *Kunst en Westerse Esoterie* (Amsterdam 1999), *Freemasonry and the Visual Arts* (London 2001), *Freimaurerische Kunst und 'Theater'* (Bayreuth 2002), *Masonic and Esoteric Heritage. New Perspectives for Art and Heritage Policies* (The Hague 2005) and *Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy and the Arts in the Modern World* (Amsterdam 2013) advocated a review of existing interpretations of the body of work of artist-members of esoteric organizations. Publications such as Marty Bax' *Het Web der Schepping. Kunst & Theosofie rond 1900* (2006) and exhibitions like *L'Europe des esprits ou la fascination de l'occulte, 1750-1950* (Strasbourg 2011) have also marked an unmistakable change in attitudes towards the subject. As more and more students become equally familiar with esoteric symbolism as with classical iconography, the study of western esotericism will become an important new area of research within Dutch art history. A new generation of art historians is now focusing specifically on the rich visual symbolism and the artist-members of masonic lodges. Because of increasing digital accessibility of relevant collections, their choice of subject is also becoming less dependent on the traditional curriculum.

#### ♦ *Neglected cultural heritage*

As a result of the oversight in art history described above, surviving examples of the material culture of esoteric currents (including masonic and other fraternal organisations) were neither acknowledged as valuable cultural heritage, nor protected accordingly. The material culture of Dutch freemasonry has already dealt with two rounds of devastation. Many lodge buildings and artefacts dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were confiscated, sold or wilfully destroyed by the Nazis during World War II. Other lodge buildings were bombed or badly damaged by the Allied Forces who were housed in them shortly after the war. The war also may have contributed in an unexpected manner to a later 'blind spot' for masonic and esoteric heritage in general perceptions.

As esoteric currents were banned by the Nazi regime, some artists or their families in fear of prosecution destroyed 'incriminating' documents from their own archives in 1940-1945. Later art historians, unaware that anything was missing, overlooked such esoteric engagement.<sup>41</sup> The vast amount of anti-masonic propaganda produced by the Nazis may have done more unseen, lasting damage than has generally been assumed. Before 1940 Dutch newspapers reported regularly on the lodge membership of artists and other prominent figures as a matter-of-fact. After 1945 however, such mentions became rarer, as can be demonstrated by searches in the Dutch newspaper database of the National Library. While a search for the term *vrijmetselarij* (= freemasonry) for the years 1920-1940 results in over 6.000 hits; for 1945-1965 the result is a little over 600 hits (a decrease of 90%). This phenomenon, to which undoubtedly other factors have also contributed, deserves further research.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the association of all things esoteric with all things New Age, did not exactly warm art history and heritage professionals to the subject either. They seem to have shied away from naming western esotericism as an influence, as if the revered genius of a well-known artist or architect would be somehow tainted by association with a body of ideas perceived as 'soft' and 'hazy'.<sup>42</sup> As a result, by the end of the century little attention was paid to the need for conservation of lodge buildings. Many were demolished by city planners or unrecognizably altered by renovation architects, unfamiliar with the hidden symbolism in their original designs. The Netherlands' most significant masonic hall was demolished in the 1990s and other major examples, such as the former theosophist and co-masonic hall (1916) in the Museum of Communication in The Hague, do not have the status of protected monument.<sup>43</sup> As opposed to such categories as religious, mobile or 'young' (post-war) heritage, esoteric, masonic or fraternal buildings are not an acknowledged category of monuments in national stock taking, conservation or funding schemes.

Perhaps Hanegraaff's appropriately titled *Western Esotericism: a guide for the perplexed* (2013) could be recommended to art history and heritage students in order to ensure a more balanced approach of the subject in future? Presently, unfamiliarity with the subject as well as lingering prejudices continue to contribute to a 'blind spot' for esoteric heritage in heritage policies. Unfortunately this same blind spot affects collection policies. Jan Snoek asserted in 2008 that libraries and museums need a wake-up call:

To these basic requirements I personally would add the necessity to provide the large well known collecting institutions with sufficient means to prevent important documents to be sold at auctions to private collectors in whose treasure chests they often become inaccessible for researchers, as happens now almost daily.<sup>44</sup>

Most Dutch university libraries and professional heritage organizations do not have a collection, research, conservation policy or budget aimed at esoteric, fraternal or masonic documents or objects.<sup>45</sup> In other words, this part of Dutch heritage remains at risk. Care for important buildings and objects is left to private owners, including lodges, who often lack the funds and knowledge to adhere to professional standards. Some are willing to offer their collections as permanent loans to heritage institutes in order to allow better access and care, but the obstacle there is that institutes will accept either their library, archive or objects, but not all three, intricately interwoven elements.

The call - already made at the conference *Masonic and Esoteric Heritage. New perspectives for Art and Heritage Policies* at the National Library in 2005 - for more cooperation between academics, heritage professionals and lodges, the building of cross disciplinary knowledge networks, streamlining collection policies and tackling conservation problems together, deserves to be repeated here.