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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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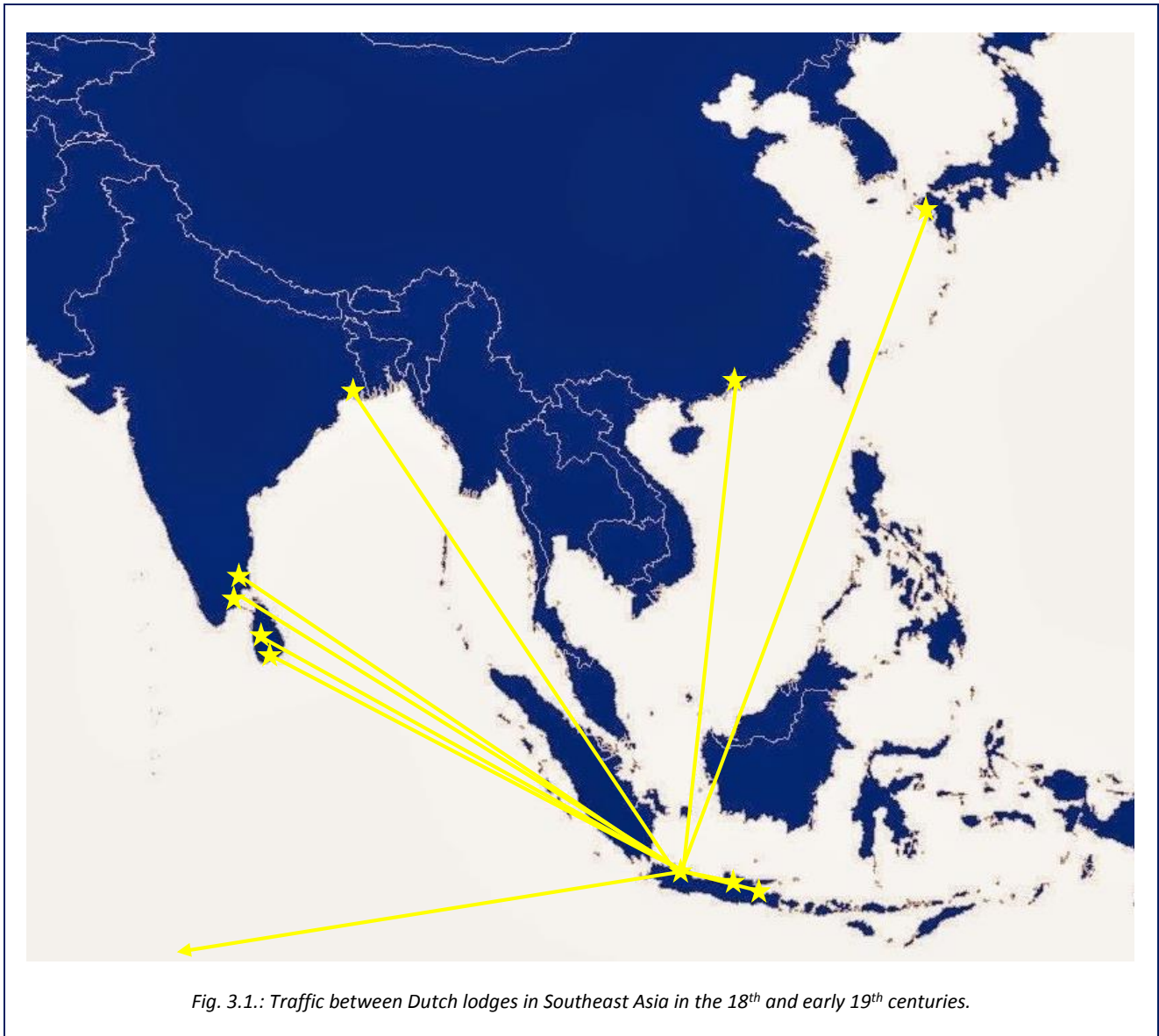
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3. DUTCH FREEMASONRY ALONG THE TRADE ROUTES TO SOUTHEAST ASIA



3.1. Freemasonry and European expansion

In recent years, the study of freemasonry has focussed on (global) network relationships and western expansion. Jessica Harland-Jacobs provides an introduction into this field in the article 'Hands across the Empire' (1999), explaining the interest in 'new human geographies'.¹ Such networks are characterized by a transoceanic reach, in which 'patterned interactions' take place, and 'transformation of socio-spatial interactions over time' can be studied.² Examples of relevant studies are Harland-Jacobs' *Builders of Empire. Freemasonry and British Imperialism* (2007), Joachim Berger's 'European Freemasonries, 1850-1935: Networks and Transnational Movements' (2010), and Simon Deschamps' thesis *Franc-maçonnerie et pouvoir colonial dans l'Inde britannique, 1730-1921* (2014), all of which focus more heavily on the 19th than the 18th century, as that is when transnational rather than national identities were formed.

As Berger put it, there were 'certain groups of masonic actors whose activity regularly spanned national boundaries and who created regulatory mechanisms for their cross-border cooperation'.³ Berger also identified the actors and mediators in this process as (for the 19th century) European aristocrats and emigrants, while (for the 18th century) those involved in trade and the military should be added. Between them, these groups overlap. Both Harland-Jacobs and Deschamps point to the contradiction between

freemasonry's inclusive ideals and the racial politics of the establishment, to which most members belonged. Deschamps also points to freemasonry as part of the highly symbolical and performative show of British colonial power in the 19th century.

The academic wide view taken in such studies places freemasonry firmly within the context of imperial history, supra-nationalism and (male) cosmopolitanism. They reflect recent changes in the methodological approach to the history of western expansion. In his article 'A New Dutch Imperial History? Perambulations in a Prospective Field' (2013) Remco Raben discusses this 'New Imperial History' movement, especially popular among scholars in Britain and France. The movement is characterized by a focus on cultural perspectives, spatial dimensions and the 'webbed' character of empires. Raben very convincingly demonstrates that the Dutch situation requires a different approach, only partially due to the modest scale and different spatial layout of its overseas territories. More importantly, 'The Netherlands themselves were never perceived as an empire and Dutch colonialism retained a strong business-orientated and technocratic bend'.⁴ This lack of 'imperial' mind-set influenced both Dutch and colonial identities. The level of ambition, aggression and cultural interference may have been similar, but 'Dutch colonialism was less about "empire" than about "opportunity"'.⁵ Furthermore, the impact of colonial culture on Dutch society and (material) culture has not yet been studied in a systematic manner, and Dutch scholarship has focussed so heavily on VOC connections, that many alternative networks have been overlooked (such as slaves, convicts, women, religious groups, philanthropic organisations, etc.).⁶ While Raben pleads for applying some New Imperial History approaches, such as network research, to the Dutch situation, he also warns that 'empire' could be 'made to do too much, at the risk of neglecting alternative dynamics'.⁷

Recent scholarship has concentrated less on identifying the founders, membership body and individual lodge developments within the colonial context. For drawing conclusions about the impact of freemasonry on western expansion, doing such 'groundwork' remains invaluable: extracting statistical data from lodge archives on the number of members and their social stratification, without which many conclusions about masonic networks must be considered preliminary. In 1969, John M. Roberts suggested there were possibly 100.000 freemasons in 1789 and it is telling that, even in the digital age, this is still one of the best sources to quote on such information.⁸ We lack overviews of precisely how many freemasons were active where and when. While we know global networks were extensively travelled, we cannot demonstrate, for instance, how the members of one particular colonial lodge moved across its imperial web over time, which would help to better understand spatial dynamics on both an individual and a group level.

In the 1950s and 60s, Dashwood lovingly detailed the developments in British India and Ceylon.⁹ His lodge histories are among those that deserve to be updated. As will be demonstrated in chapters 4 and 5, with so many genealogical sources on the colonies now available online, simply reviewing a well-known membership list can already provide new insights and help reconstruct developments about which lodge archives are fragmentary. Prescott has already suggested how new digital tools can help spatial analysis of masonic networks, but there too statistical information remains among the *desiderata*.¹⁰

Freemasonry was an 'exportable model of sociability'¹¹ and, as far as the Dutch are concerned, certainly qualifies as one of Raben's overlooked webs or networks. The Order's clear hierarchical structure and international contacts make it an almost ideal subject for prosopography studies. The membership of the Order combined ritual and intellectual aspects with a socio-economic function. Drinking and camaraderie were part of lodge life. Once accepted, men would meet kindred spirits in the lodge and make friends. These personal contacts would sometimes lead to business or political relationships. No doubt some new candidates were not only attracted by masonic ideals, but also by the network opportunities that lodge membership would open up. Many other societies and gentlemen's clubs also functioned as networks in the 18th century¹², so what was special about freemasonry?

♦ *Masonic networks and passports*

At conferences, scholars trying to explain to a wider audience how freemasonry's network operated in the 18th century, sometimes compare it to the way online network relationships are formed today. A comparison between the function of masonic 'passports' within the 18th century network and LinkedIn for

Les Sœurs ne l'ont point comprise
Et ont eu un Siu Eclair' où règnent le Silence, la Concorde, & la Paix, & l'Amour.
1755. Suivant le Calcul écoulé le 26 Août 1755.
Charitas nos Ducit
Nous Inspecteurs Maîtres & Ouvriers de la T. R. L. de St. J. de 6^{me} Classe
à Amsterdam sous le titre de la charité, 'privilegiée' par Constitution' de Son C. M. N. Decret de tous les Sœurs & z
regulièrement assemblée par le nombre Mystérieux, déclarons, à tous les Hommes Eclairés, regardant sur la surface de la terre, que
le T. R. Josias Belesoigne, Junior, dont la Signature ci dessous ('non variée') a été reçu par nous, A. C. Maçon,
à qui après qu'il a dû soutenir, avec force, courage & fermeté les Travaux les plus pénibles & les Exercices les plus pénibles,
nous lui avons conféré comme une récompense due à son zèle, son assiduité & sa foyauté, le Sublime Grade de Maître
& l'avons admis, comme tel à nos travaux, & initié à nos Mystères les plus secrets, où il nous a aidé de ses talents & de
ses lumières.
F. J. L. L. 26. 8. 1755
par Mandement de la T. R. L.
de J. Belesoigne Jr. (non variée)

Fig. 3.2: Patent or lodge certificate, issued by lodge La Charité in Amsterdam on 26-8-1755 to Josias Belesoigne Jr.
 Reproduced from: Croiset van Uchelen 1965 B, p. 20.

instance, with its possibility to introduce or endorse a colleague to (a group of) peers previously unknown to them, certainly helps to grasp the concept. The brotherhood-principle meant that any freemason would be welcomed as one of their own in a (regular) lodge in any city or county, provided he could 'make himself known' as a mason. That meant being able to show knowledge of the right signs and words before entering the lodge. The Grand Lodge of Ireland is thought to have been the first to introduce the use of certificates as proof of membership.¹³ This was soon copied by other Grand Lodges.

A lodge member could not just decide to leave at any moment, because membership implied certain duties, particularly for the officers. If a member was about to travel, he could ask for 'resignation and patent'.¹⁴ He would then receive a certificate (also called *patent* or *acte* in Dutch), declaring the holder a freemason from a regular lodge. It was usually hand written and signed by the lodge officers. The oldest Dutch certificate dates from 26-8-1755 and was issued by lodge La Charité in Amsterdam, at the time working under a English (Moderns) Constitution, to brother Josias Belesoigne Jr (fig. 3.2.). The records of Old Dundee Lodge (1755) in London also provide an example of this internationally widespread practice:

1755, Jan 23. Resolved 'That the Members of this Lodge that Use the Sea should pay 1s[hilling] each Night they come [to the Lodge], and that they have a Certificate [if desired] on their going away and that a Seal be provided for their Certificates, and that the Master, Wardens, Past Master and Treasurer do Provide a Seal accordingly'.¹⁵

Such papers were at first only provided to members who were about to permanently leave the lodge, such as move to another town or travel abroad.¹⁶ As freemasonry spread throughout Europe, different rites and degrees were developed and used by different masonic bodies, while Grand Lodges warned against involvement with illegitimate lodges and comen posing as freemasons. As a result, getting access to a lodge where one was not yet registered as member or visitor became much more difficult, not just overseas, but also close to home. The book of law of the Dutch Grand Lodge noted that measures were taken accordingly in 1761:

A visitor, however educated in Masonry he might be, will not be received in any Lodge, unless he is personally known there, proposed by a known Brother, or lastly on a good reference by his Lodge.

Therefore the Grand Lodge in these Lands has allowed, that every special Lodge, will give to its Members a Note, signed by one of the Attending Officers, including the Name of the Lodge, that of the Brother, and the Steps, into which he has been lifted, marked by Numbers 1, 2 or 3, to be shown by the Brother Visitor at his questioning.¹⁷

These 'notes' developed into more elaborate certificates or diplomas, showing the particular degree of initiation of the holder. The difference between patents and diplomas blurred, and such certificates were enhanced with elaborate calligraphy and seals as a mark of authenticity. From 1763 onwards the Dutch Grand Lodge allowed its lodges to produce formal membership certificates, and gradually handwritten versions were replaced by printed ones with elaborate engravings. Lodges had to send these certificates to the Grand Secretary, who would sign and proof them with the Grand Seal in order to ensure authenticity.¹⁸ All this at a cost, of course. In 1798 a uniform text was agreed upon by the Grand Lodge, but under French rule this was abandoned again. In 1840 a standard certificate was commissioned by the Grand Lodge, which would remain unchanged for the next 125 years.

As other European Grand Lodges followed a similar practice in the 18th century, the membership certificate gained the character of a masonic 'passport', which opened doors on an international level.¹⁹ A travelling freemason would be able to count on the assistance of local brethren in finding his way around town and being introduced into local society. When stranded, injured or bankrupted on a foreign shore, he could apply for help to the local lodge and should he perish, his widow or children could try the same. The many surviving letters pleading for such financial assistance form a rich source for research, and illustrate how masonic networks offered an early form of social security to members.

The advantages of the brotherhood principle for travellers and merchants were obvious, and it is not surprising that lodge records note the rather hasty initiations of candidates who are about to depart on a journey overseas. The By-Laws of Old Dundee Lodge (1760) again provide an example:

Going on a Voyage or Journey. 16th. "But if any Person or Brother be Proposed to be made a Mason in or Admitted a Member of this Lodge, cannot [tro] Reason of his going on a Voyage or Journey] stay till he is Proposed and Balloted for as above, he may be Proposed, Balloted for and [if Approved of] may be Made or Admitted on the 'Same Night'. This Law shall not Include any Person 'Residing on Shore' [...].²⁰

Various sea captains, including those of 'East India Man' were indeed recorded as initiated in this lodge on a brief stopover, including one of Swedish and several of Dutch nationality.²¹ It was not uncommon to receive more than one degree on the same night, or even to receive some of the higher degrees this way. If there was not enough time, travellers could be given a degree 'by communication', without undergoing the actual initiation ceremony.

International relationships between masonic bodies would become formalised on the basis of reciprocal recognition between Grand Lodges, which allowed the establishment of official diplomatic relationships, and formal declarations of friendship between lodges (see for instance the bond between Dutch and Swedish lodges, discussed in chapter 7).²² Masonic law stated that discussion of politics and religion were not allowed within the lodge. This made it possible to build and sustain friendly relationships with local and visiting lodge members of different nationalities, even if they were considered competitors, members of the opposition, or even the enemy in daily life. These two masonic principles, brotherhood and (religious/political) tolerance, allowed lodges to function as a worldwide network, facilitating the dissemination of new ideas across borders, and supporting international trade relations as well as private enterprise. This is why prosopography in relation to freemasonry's role in western expansion, globalization and cosmopolitanism are more recent focus points of researchers in the field of study.²³ The relationship between freemasonry, western expansion, international trade ports and globe-crossing seafarers has been recently explored under edition of Cécile Révauger and Eric Saunier in *La Franc-Maçonnerie dans les ports* (2012). It underlines the growing scholarly interest in the subject, but also that much basic data and tools are still lacking, such as comprehensive overviews of lodges, particularly in the trade posts, and their membership to cross-reference with navy and trade company records.

♦ *Permanent and ambulant lodges*

As Jessica Harland Jacobs pointed out: 'Freemasonry, that declares that its members meet on terms of equality, found its way into the world through that most unequal of policies, empire'.²⁴ Freemasonry spread quickly from England throughout Europe in the first half of the 18th century, and from there to the East and West Indies. Once a group of masons were on a ship together or in a foreign city and recognized each other, they would be keen to meet and - provided a sufficient number of them was present - would often decide to establish a lodge of their own. In the colonies, men were not only far away from home and loved ones, but often at risk from tropical disease, shipwreck, unlucky investments and international violence. A lodge meeting offered a welcome opportunity to feel at home. The repetition of familiar customs, words and rituals must have offered a sense of stability, tightened bonds and killed time. Once a lodge had been established in a sea port or trade post, it would be frequented by employees of the East India Companies stationed here and other European settlers, who would mix with both frequent and incidental visitors to their port, including sea-captains, military and naval officers, merchants and diplomats.²⁵ These travellers were pleased to return to lodges as familiar beacons along the way, where they could pick up news from home or hear about absent friends. As Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire remarked:

[...] there was a universal Republic of Trade [...]. In order to find associates, clients, legal and financial guarantees, the traders did not hesitate to use the lodge networks. One of their first steps once debarked in a foreign harbour was to go to the trade lodge as a brother visitor. The Captains of the ship followed in their footsteps.²⁶

Lodge records suggest that the membership of the Order could be beneficial to careers made in the Far East. Whether one was promoted after becoming a member, or became a member after reaching a certain point in one's career, remains somewhat of a chicken-or-egg question. Both were common and, as discussed below, family relationships may have played an equally important part in such appointments.

Not only the European entrepreneurial spirit, but international conflicts also contributed much to the spread of freemasonry. During the 18th and 19th centuries European military regiments were deployed in the Mediterranean, Africa, Asia and America. The Grand Lodge of Ireland is also credited with having established 'travelling warrants' or Constitutions for ambulant lodges.²⁷ It was not uncommon for a lodge, consisting mainly of officers, to accompany a regiment or company during peace or wartime missions. There were in fact two types of ambulant lodges: independent ones that worked on their own Constitution, and those that worked temporarily as a 'daughter' of an existing lodge without gaining an independent Constitution. In the latter case, it was like a split section or subdivision, which would separate itself off the lodge to travel and would be dissolved into the lodge on its return home. Examples of ambulant lodges also include those at sea, consisting of the crew and/or travellers on a ship during a long journey. As the following chapter will show, once an ambulant lodge arrived at a destination where it would stay for an extended period of time, it was not uncommon for it to temporarily merge with or use the facilities of a local lodge (see for instance De Militaire Broederschap in chapter 5).²⁸

♦ *The first European lodges along the trade routes*

The Cape was an important stop on the way from Europe to Asia and it seems logical that the first lodges along this trade route would have been founded there. There are however no surviving records suggesting this was the case. The first activities were recorded in India after a British initiative in 1728-1730, well before the Dutch Grand Lodge was founded.²⁹ Of course the Dutch couldn't help being somewhat late to the game, because they first had to deal with the ban on freemasonry (1735-1744) and the subsequent reorganisation of the Grand Lodge (1756). However, by the time the Dutch were able to found their first lodge in Bengal in 1757, there was already a handful of English lodges active in India, not counting any Scottish and Irish Constitutions.³⁰

From the founding of the Antients Grand Lodge in 1751-1753 onwards, it provided about twice as many warrants for travelling lodges in the area as that of the Moderns (lodges belonging to both Grand Lodges are listed in Table 3.A).³¹ Masonic historians such as Gould and later scholars such as Harland-Jacobs have already demonstrated the heavy involvement of the British East India Company employees in the earliest lodges overseas. Deschamps is one of the first to actually focus on the relationship between the

Table 3.A: English lodges in India founded before 1800 as listed in Lane's Masonic Records

NB: some lodges have changed number or warrant more than once, and double names occur

- Nameless lodge [East India Arms], no. 40, 1730, Calcutta, Bengal
- Lodge Star in the East, no. 67, 1740, Calcutta, Bengal
- Nameless lodge, no. 102, 1752, Madras (Chingleput), Madras
- Nameless lodge, no. 101, 1752, Chandernagore (French settlement) Bengal
- Nameless lodge, no. 139, 1758, Bombay, Bombay
- Lodge Industry and Perseverance, no. 109, 1761, Calcutta, Bengal
- Lodge No. 8 Calcutta, no. 286, 1762, Calcutta, Bengal
- Lodge No. 1, no. 233, 1765, Madras
- Lodge No. 2, no. 234, 1765, Madras
- Lodge No. 3, no. 235, 1765, Madras
- Nameless lodge, no. 146, 1767, Calcutta, Bengal
- Nameless lodge [Fort George], no. 255, 1767, Madras, (Chingleput) Madras
- Lodge No. 1 Provincial, no. 152, 1768, Madras (Chingleput), Madras
- 3rd Lodge of India, no. 273, 1768, Bengal
- 4th Lodge of Bengal, no. 280, 1768, Bengal
- 5th Lodge of Bengal [A], no. 349, 1771, Dacca, Bengal
- 5th Lodge of Bengal [B], no. 373, 1773, Calcutta, Bengal
- 7th Lodge of Bengal, no. 351, 1772, Bengal
- 8th Lodge of Bengal, no. 352, 1772, Bengal
- 9th Lodge of Bengal, no. 353, 1772, Bengal
- Lodge True Friendship, no. 316, 1773, Calcutta, Bengal
- 10th Lodge of Bengal, no. 292, 1773, Muxadavad, Bengal

- Provincial Grand Lodge, no. 218, 1781, Madras (Chingleput), Madras
- No. 2, Coast of Coromandel, no. 398, 1786, Arcot (North Arcot), Madras
- Lodge Perfect Unanimity, no. 150, 1786, Chennai
- Nameless lodge, no. 399, 1786, Futtu Ghur [Futegurh], Allahabad N.W. Provinces
- Lodge of Perfect Harmony, no. 419, 1786, Coast of Coromandel, Chingleput, Madras
- The Stewards' Lodge, no. 94, 1786, Madras (Chingleput), Madras
- Lodge of Social Friendship, no. 420, 1787, Coast of Coromandel, Chingleput, Madras
- Lodge No. 4, Coast of Coromandel, no. 326, 1787, Coast of Coromandel, Chingleput, Madras
- No. 5, Coast of Coromandel, no. 421, 1787, Coast of Coromandel, Chingleput, Madras
- 7th Lodge of Bengal, 1793, no. 464, 1789, Fredericksnagore, Bengal
- Lodge Solid Friendship, no. 481, 1789, Trichinopoly, Madras
- Lodge of Sincere Friendship, no. 381, 1792, Chunar, Mirzapur
- 9th Lodge of Bengal, no. 529, 1793, Cawnpore, Allahabad
- 4th Lodge of Bengal, no. 371, 1793, Calcutta, Bengal
- Lodge of Unanimity, no. 365, 1793, Calcutta, Bengal
- 17th Regiment Light Dragoons, no. 361, 1794, Bombay, Bombay
- 33rd Regiment of Foot, 1798, Calcutta, Bengal
- Lodge of Philanthropists, no. 569, 1798, Surat (Guzerat), Bombay
- Lodge Humility with Fortitude, no. 229, 1798, Calcutta, Bengal
- Lodge of Unity, Peace, and Concord, no. 574, 1798, Chingleput, Madras
- Nameless lodge, no. 404, 1799, Calcutta, Bengal
- St. Andrew's Union Lodge, no. 601, 1799, Madras, (Chingleput) Madras

Order and the British East India Company in the 18th century, but his conclusions concentrate on 19th century expansion politics.³² Curiously, a comprehensive study of freemasonry's role within the various European East India Companies is still lacking. Yet that is precisely what could demonstrate the global interconnectedness of lodges and the intertwining of trade, social and knowledge networks.

The VOC may have already been in decline by the second half of the 18th century, but this did little to stop the Dutch Order from flourishing and expanding. Its lodges would prosper on the island of Java after 1763. As discussed by Ed Mullan in his *History of Freemasonry in Sumatra and Penang* (2003), there were at least five British lodges active nearby:

- Bencool Lodge Number 1 (Moderns), No. 356, active in Fort Marlborough (now Bengkulu City) on Sumatra in 1765-1797³³;
- Marlborough Lodge No. 424 (Moderns), later called Rising Sun Lodge, active in Fort Marlborough in 1772-1832³⁴;
- Unanimity and Industry Lodge No. 2 (Moderns), No. 559, also active in Fort Marlborough in 1796-1813³⁵;
- Neptune Lodge No. 344 (Antients), active in Georgetown on the island Penang (Pulau Pinang) near the Malay peninsula, in 1809-1819, and 1825-1846³⁶;

- Humanity with Courage Lodge No. 826, also active in Georgetown 1822-1826, then fused with Lodge Neptune No. 344.³⁷

More British lodges followed along the route in Gibraltar, the Canary Islands, the island St. Helen, the Gold Coast and the island Mauritius in the second half of the 18th century.³⁸

Other countries soon joined in. A Danish lodge, named De l'Amour Fraternelle (Broderkærlighed), was recorded in Tranquebar (Negapatnam, India) in 1748.³⁹ Other lodges were active on ships of the Swedish East India Company and in Canton from 1759 onwards (see chapter 7). Such links between Scandinavian freemasons were first explored by Olof P. Berg in *Frimureri i Göteborg under 1700-Talet* (1998) and more recently brought to light in the membership lists of the Swedish Order under edition of Andreas Önnersfors: *Mystiskt brodraskap - matigt nätverk. Studier i det svenska 1700-tals frimuriretiet* (2006). A first attempt to identify French seafaring freemasons was made in the *Dictionnaire des Marins Francs-Maçons* (2005) by research lodge The Link No. 2. The French had early lodges-at-sea on the frigates Cybèle from Lorient (Bretagne) in 1744 and Vestale from Le Havre (Normandy) in 1756.⁴⁰ Lodges were also founded in the Île de France, which between 1715 and 1810 was the name for Mauritius and other islands near the east coast of Africa, which were under French rule (later English rule)⁴¹:

- St. Jean de la Philadelphie, travelling on a ship of the French *Compagnie des Indes* in 1765, active in Île de France and later Pondicherry (India)⁴²;
- La Parfaite Harmonie, founded in 1774-1775 in St. Denis on the Île de Bourbon (= Réunion) and active until 1828⁴³;
- L'Heureuse Réunion, founded on Île de St. Paul in 1777⁴⁴;
- La Triple Espérance, founded in 1778 in Port Louis, Mauritius, and the oldest lodge in the region still active today⁴⁵;
- L'Heureuse Traverse, founded in Port Louis, Mauritius, in 1778⁴⁶;
- Grande Loge Provinciale pour Île de Bourbon (= Réunion), established by the Grand Orient de France in 1781⁴⁷;
- La Triple Union, founded in Saint Benoit, Île de Bourbon (= Réunion), in 1784⁴⁸;
- La Paix, founded in Pondicherry (India) in 1790, but also active in Port Louis, Mauritius⁴⁹;
- Les Quinze Artistes, active in Port Louis between 1791 and 1838⁵⁰;
- Les Vingt-Un, ambulant lodge, active in Île de France between 1786 and 1799.⁵¹

Several of these lodges, especially La Triple Espérance, Les Quinze Artistes and Les Vingt-Un, kept regular contact with the Dutch lodges on Java by the end of the 18th century (see chapter 5).⁵² When the Île de France went over into British rule, several more lodges were founded: the French lodge Amitié (1816)⁵³, the English (Moderns) lodge Faith and Loyalty in Port Louis (1816-1828)⁵⁴, and the French lodge Les Amis Réunis in Port Louis (1825).⁵⁵ Other lodges under the jurisdiction of the Grand Orient de France operated in Pondicherry, India: Les Amis Réunis (1792), La Fraternité Cosmopolite (1785-1823) and its Chapter (1787), Les Navigateurs Réunis (1789-1811) and the military ambulant lodge La Sincère Amitié (1787).⁵⁶ An unnamed French lodge was active in Chandernagore⁵⁷, while an ambulant French Loge Provisoire, was active among the Dutch on Java in 1799 (see chapter 5).⁵⁸

It wasn't long before every conceivable port on the route to Asia boasted a European lodge. A freemason could travel from Gibraltar via the Canary Islands, the island of St. Helen and the West coast of Africa to Cape Town; from there via the islands Mauritius and Réunion onward to Ceylon (= Sri Lanka), Java and Sumatra, Malacca (= Malaysia); along the Coromandel Coast, to the Indian provinces Bengal, Negapatnam (= Negapattinam) and Surat; even to China, Manila, Singapore and Japan, in the knowledge he would always find a lodge welcoming him. From 1772 onwards the Dutch masonic almanac included a list of lodges worldwide as a guide for travellers. The role of Dutch lodges within the wider international masonic, power and commercial networks, sketched by Harland-Jacobs and others, urgently needs to be assessed. But in order to do so, scholars will first need better access to the many lodge histories and membership data buried in Dutch archival sources. Visitor books illustrate particularly well how individual members moved between lodges of different nationalities along the trade route, and systematically tracking such movements could reveal the spatial structure of the masonic 'web'.⁵⁹ Exploring the

production of masonic material culture along the trade route in the next chapters, will help identify such individuals among the trade community.

♦ *Provincial Grand Masters*

Following procedure was not very practical because of the slow transport of mail by ship in the 18th century. Even though most lodge communications were sent in duplicate or even triplicate via separate ships, in case one would be lost, it could take a year before question and answer had been received. By that time the original senders would often have moved on. The Grand Lodge of England took measures to ease this process, indicating it valued the expanse of freemasonry across the globe. From 1726 onwards, local representatives of the Grand Lodge of England were appointed in the form of Deputy Grand Masters, because:

[...] the extraordinary Increase of Craftsmen, and their travelling into distant Parts and convening themselves in Lodges, required an immediate Head, to whom they might apply where it was not possible to wait the decision or Opinion of the Grand Lodge.⁶⁰

These Deputy Grand Masters had the power to found lodges and collect contributions. Accordingly, on 27-12-1728 the Grand Lodge of England decided:

[...] to Empower and authorize our Well-beloved Brother George Pomfret [...] That he do, in our place and stead, Constitute a regular Lodge, in due form, at Fort William [Calcutta] in Bengal in the East Indies.⁶¹

This lodge, later no. 72, was probably known by the name of the pub in which it met: The East India Company's Arms.⁶² It was suspended in 1756. In 1729 Ralph [Far] Winter was appointed Provincial Grand Master 'for East India in Bengal' and James Dawson 'for East India'.⁶³ Winter's name was often spelled 'Farwinter' in masonic literature, which may explain why he was not identified more closely. He was the son of Nehemiah Winter, a captain, stakeholder and director of the EIC. The whole Winter family was involved in the Asia trade. Ralph [Far] Winter succeeded an uncle as captain of the ship *The Eyles* in 1728.⁶⁴

Out of sight of the Grand lodge, such regional representatives functioned almost autonomously. They had the rank of Deputy Grand Master until 1767, and were from then on addressed as Provincial Grand Masters. These men presided over a Provincial Grand Lodge in a particular (overseas) district and were assisted by various Provincial Grand Officers.⁶⁵ The Dutch Grand Lodge would later follow this British example.

When a group of men aboard a ship or on a foreign shore decided to found a lodge, they had to obey masonic laws. The Dutch regulations specified that they had to apply to the Grand Lodge in The Hague for permission:

[...] where there is already a local lodge, no Constitution will be granted, than to ten Brethren, among which the Worshipful Master and the Wardens have to be Master Masons, and for which they will pay *Twenty Ducats*; but that, where there is no local lodge, seven Brethren, among which the Worshipful Master and the two Wardens, also being Master Masons, can obtain a Constitution for *Ten Ducats*.⁶⁶

Silver Ducats had the same value as *Rijksdaalders* (2 ½ Dutch Guilders), so the fee of 20 Ducats came down to 50 Guilders, the equivalent of a little over € 500,- today.⁶⁷ And although the title of Provincial Grand Master was a privilege, the man appointed to this function also had to pay a fee to the Dutch Grand Lodge for a certificate, formally acknowledging his power over a region.

3.2. Dutch lodges along the trade route (1758-1837)

Table 3.B: Dutch lodges in the West-Indies, 1754-1853

EC = English Constitution

Netherlands Antilles	Active years
St. Eustatius	
St. Jan de Dooper	1747-1760 EC, 1760-1773
La Parfait Union	1754
St. Pieter	1757-1760
Les Parfaites Maçons	1758
Unity Lodge	1772-1791 EC, 1791-1813
Deugd beloond/Virtue rewarded/La Vertu recompense	1773
Willemstad	1793
Concordia	1793-1823
(The) Reunion	1800-1809
De Eendracht	1819
Curaçao	
Vriendschap	1757-ca. 1776
L'Union/De Eendracht	1774-before 1781, 1782/83-1800
De Vergenoeging	1784-1796, 1804-1840, 1854-present
De Eensgezindheid	1832-1840
St. Maarten	
St. Maarten Unie 3	1794-1815
Charity	1800-1809
Suriname	
Paramaribo	
Concordia	1761-present (merged with La Zelée)
De Vereenigde deugd	1766-1777 EC, 1777-ca. 1803
La Zelée	1767-1803 (merged with Concordia)
L'Union	1773-1788
La Solitaire	1774-1788
Cura et Vigilantia	1776-1788 (ambulant lodge)
De Standvastigheid	1778-1850
Guyana	
Demerary	
St. Jean de la Réunion	1771-before 1779, 1779-1812
Berbice	
Coelum Non Mutat Genius	1799-1811
Brazil	
Rio de Janeiro	
La Constante Amitié	1815

♦ Dutch freemasonry and the VOC

The foundation of the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) in 1602 followed years of trade with Asia by earlier temporary and occasional trade companies, many of which had ties to the States of Holland. The Dutch wanted to compete with the Spanish and Portuguese for the trade in pepper from Asia and founded a company to do so, in which some of the former trade companies as well as the government of the Dutch Republic were involved. At first, the VOC was given a trade permit for 21 years, and its organisational structure in several Chambers (*Kamers*) or boards main cities, each led by a team of Directors (*Bewindhebbers*), was established. Their representatives made decisions in regular meetings, best described as a G17 (*Heren Zeventien*, or: Gentlemen Seventeen). They determined which ships, with how many men, would sail to the East with which goods and how much capital for purchases. As will be

discussed in the following chapters. In the first half of the 17th century, the Dutch Company set up trade posts doubling as local government centres in the Cape, the Dutch East Indies, India and Ceylon. In China the Dutch established a trade office in Canton alongside those of competing European East India Companies, while in contrast in Japan the Dutch had a monopoly on trade through their isolated settlement on Dejima. After the Cape, Batavia was the most important stop on the trade route, connecting to the whole of Asia. In the following chapters, the VOC presence in each region will be briefly introduced.

The VOC had substantial power in that it could establish trade monopolies, build forts, impose laws, draw up contracts and even deploy military. At home, all this activity required the founding of shipyards and the building of warehouses. The trade itself centred on goods perceived as exotic and precious, such as spices, textiles, porcelain and lacquer wares, but the VOC was also involved in the trade in metals, opium and even humans (slaves). Such commodities were traded not only between the Netherlands, the Cape and Southeast Asia, but also locally in Asia itself. At first the Dutch presence was relatively modest: small settlements were conquered along coastal areas or tolerated by local rulers. Many of the VOC employees were of other than Dutch nationalities, and during the 17th and 18th centuries their presence amounted to a few thousand per region, enough to dominate but not enough to colonize whole areas. Until circa 1720 the trade was so lucrative that the Company's history is strongly associated with the Dutch 'Golden Age' (*Gouden Eeuw*), but by the middle of the 18th century, competition and conflicts with other European countries sent the VOC further and further into decline. A series of death blows was delivered by the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War with the British in 1780 and the French occupation of the Netherlands in 1795. The Company was eventually suspended in 1799, leaving the State to take on its enormous debt. The history of the VOC is one characterised by commerce, violence, slavery and greed as much as innovation, knowledge, objects and cultural exchange. Especially colonial and post-colonial developments in the Dutch East Indies have impacted Dutch society and culture, and remain a sensitive subject in today's Dutch politics.

For most readers the VOC will be a familiar stage, on which freemasons are a relatively unknown group of actors. The discussion below will therefore focus on those actors and their unfamiliar props. Instead of providing a detailed overview of the company's history here - for which can be referred to standard works such as M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs' *De VOC in Azië* (1976) and Charles R. Boxer's *Jan Compagnie in war and peace, 1602-1799. A short history of the Dutch East India Company* (1979), or Femme S. Gaastra's *De geschiedenis van de VOC* (2002) and Els Jacob's *Merchant in Asia: The Trade of the Dutch East India Company during the Eighteenth Century* (2010), the bibliographies included therein or in Raben's aforementioned article - it seems more relevant to point readers to recent scholarship of the overlooked networks, of which freemasonry is but one, such as Kerry Ward's *Networks of Empire: forced migration in the Dutch East India Company* (2009); to Remco Raben and Ulbe Bosma's important study of colonial identities *Being "Dutch" in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500-1920* (2008), or to Michel Ketelaars' study of women in the Company: *Compagniesdochters: vrouwen en de VOC (1602-1795)* (2014).

Genealogical studies also offer valuable perspectives both on the VOC and on freemasonry. Roel de Neve and Yvonne Prins for instance, have described in 'Indische familienetwerken in de VOC tijd' (2002) how family networks played an important role within the organisational structure of the Company. A particular group of families provided company employees for a number of successive generations. These 'VOC-families' often settled in the East, where they formed large, interrelated networks that reserved a large portion of the highest functions for themselves.⁶⁸ While it has a negative connotation today, nepotism was considered a positive quality in the 18th century. In fact, much of the organisational structure of the Dutch government and the VOC relied on it:

For obtaining a public civil function someone's personal traits were not the most important. [...] The most important criteria however were and remained that one belonged to the right family. It is therefore not surprising that the family-feeling among regents was much stronger developed than is the case in our current society. The realisation of being parented to each other, reached much further than the closest relatives only. Close contacts were sometimes also kept with persons to whom one was much more distantly related. One viewed it as an expensive duty towards the family to help relatives move upwards. Moreover the regents would do anything to keep the social capital (governmental power, material wealth, relationships, education) of the family stable or enlarge it.⁶⁹

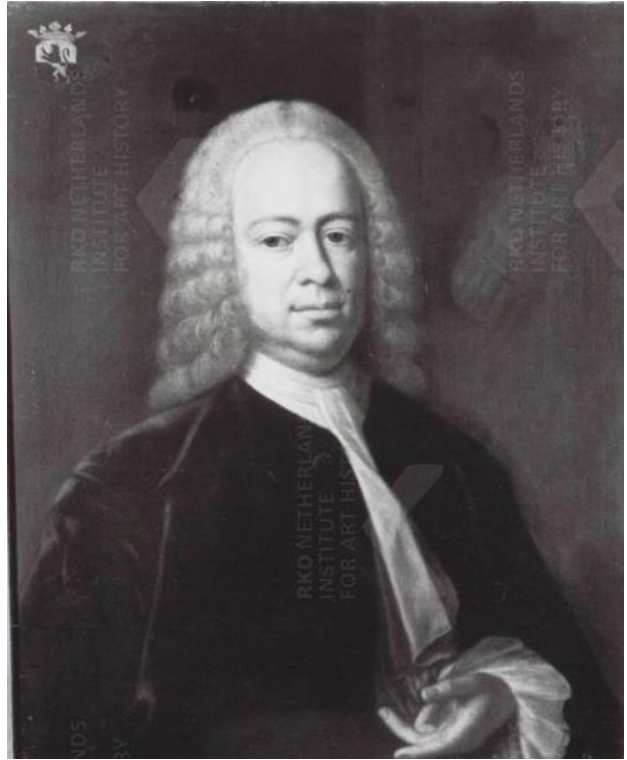


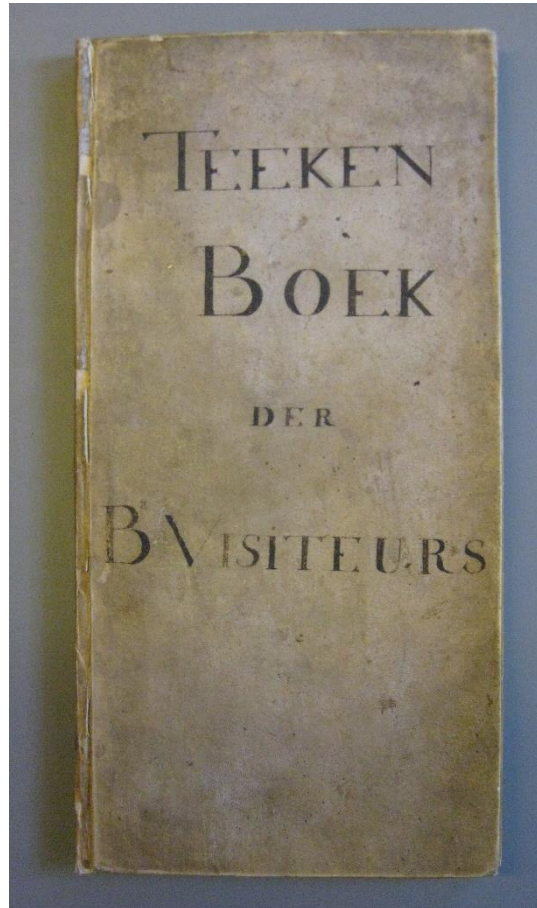
Fig. 3.3: Philip van Dijk (1683-1753, attributed), portrait of Samuel Beeckman (1621-1689), director of the WIC and grandfather of Maria Beeckman, ca. 1750-1761. Pencil drawing, 15.3 x 13 cm. Private collection. Reproduced from: rkd.nl.

Fig. 3.4: Philip van Dijk (1683-1753, attributed), portrait of Samuel Radermacher (1693-1761), governor of the VOC and brother of the first Dutch Grand Master, ca. 1750-1761. Oil on canvas, 80 x 65.5 cm. Private collection. Reproduced from: rkd.nl.

Becoming a director of the VOC was one of the most coveted positions, not in the least because it came with the power to decide who else might go East - to make a fortune and perhaps one day become governor general. The speed of one's career in the East Indies again largely depended on one's connections. Those who achieved their aims would be able to return to the Netherlands, where they and their families would live of their acquired wealth and no doubt take seats in some local board, while those who did not succeed had no other option than to ask for renewal of their contracts and hope they'd survive a prolonged stay in the East Indies.⁷⁰

The prosperous development of Dutch freemasonry coincided with the slow decline of the VOC, which saw its revenues become less and its trade hampered by international conflicts. None the less there were many ties between the two organisations, as its wealthy board members moved in the same social circles and shared family connections. Take for instance the family and in-laws of the first Dutch Grand Master, Johan Cornelis Radermacher (1700-1748, see chapter 2). He was the grandson of Johan Radermacher (1633-1704), a bailiff in the city of Middelburg and a governor of the WIC since 1674.⁷¹ The Grand Master's wife was a member of the Van der Schinne family, involved in Company matters since Isaac van der Schinne (1640-1686) had been Chief of the Japanese factory. His brother, Samuel Radermacher (1693-1761), was a governor of the VOC in 1730-1761 (fig. 3.4).⁷² Two of the Grand Master's three sons, Jacob Cornelis Mattheus (1741-1783) and Samuel (1748-1816), were involved in both the international trade and the founding of lodges in Asia, discussed in the following chapters.⁷³ The Grand Master's mother was Maria Beeckman (1661-1719), granddaughter of Samuel Beeckman (1621-1689) a director of the WIC in Middelburg (fig. 3.3), and wife of Daniel Radermacher (1664-1708).⁷⁴

In Asia, the relationships in larger Dutch family networks were built on the connections between fathers and sons-in-law⁷⁵, in which the lodges may have also played a part. Among the brethren the bonds between fathers and potential sons-in-law became tight-knit, and adoption lodges provided occasions to meet eligible young women (see chapter 5). Some genealogical connections between lodge members who



J. George Labbant de la F. Epinard
 a Londres
 J. Nbo Opreghed op Galle
 Frantz Drabje aus van Logen Zerobabel aus Copenhagen
 Atte Houtkous present den 11^{de} 1775
 J. H. Brunman van La Pair
 J. B. J. van Guden van de G. H. S. van de G. H. S.
 W. H. Casier de la loge P. indissoluble.
 J. A. Nelles te Loo van de G. H. S. van de G. H. S.

Fig. 3.5: Page from the visitor book of lodge La Bien Aimée in Amsterdam, December 1775, including signatures from visitors from England, Denmark, Ceylon and the Cape in the same month. Collection: CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, inv.no. 4354.
 Photo: Kroon & Wagtberg Hansen, The Hague.

Table 3.C: Lodges in Dutch cities connected to the VOC, 1735-1800

EC= English Constitution; FC= French Constitution; GC = German Constitution; SC= Scottish Constitution

Amsterdam

De la Paix	1735-1749 (continued as La Bien Aimée)
La Bien Aimée	1754-present (continuation of De la Paix)
La Fidélité	1749-1756 EC, 1757-1773
La Paix (De Vreede)	1749-1756 EC, 1757-present
Vreede en Liefde	1753-1761
Concordia Vincit Animos	1755-1756 SC, 1757-1804, 1815-present
La Charité	1755-1756 EC, 1757-present
Lodge of Perseverance	1756
L'Espérance	1757-1767
Lodge of Regularity/Concordia et Unitas	1757-1769 EC
De Resolutie	1757-1774
Les Sept Frères Réunis	1762- 1769 EC
Virtutis et Artis Amici	1762 EC, 1763-1778
La Persévérance/Perseverance Lodge	1766-1769 EC
Concordia Vera	1788-1790

Rotterdam

D'Orange/Orange Lodge	1748 EC, 1749-1756
Frédéric Royal	1759-1762, 1762-1786 EC, 1786-present
La Persévérance	1762-1788 (split from Frédéric Royal)
Concordia/De (Pruisische) Eendragt	1764-1766 GC, 1769-1875
De Drie Kolommen	1767-1782 EC, 1783-present
British Union	1767-1813 EC
Victory	1768-1813 EC
Salus Patriae	1785-1807 (merged with Frédéric Royal)

Middelburg

La Philantropie	1758-1850
La Compagnie Durable	1770-present

The Hague

Loge du Grand Maître des Provinces Unies (Grand Loge des Provinces Unies) et le resort de la Généralité	1734-1749 (continued as La Sincérité/L'Union)
Le Véritable Zèle	1735, 1744-1752, 1756-1798
La Sincérité/L'Union	1749-1757 (merged with La Royale into L'Union Royale)
La Royale	1752-1755 EC, 1756-1757 (merged with La Royale into L'Union Royale)
Les Coeurs Unies	1749-1755 EC, 1756-1802
L'Indissoluble	1756-before 1800
L'Union Royale	1757-present (merger of Royale and L'Union)
L'Égalité/St. Albert	1757-1758
Les Amis de la Justice	1758-1764
L'Égalité des Frères	1762-1769
Le Temple de Bonheur	1773-1774 (merged with L'Union Royale)
L'Union Orange	1781-1798
Les Vrais Bataves/Eendragt maakt magt	1789-1794 FC, 1795- 1847 (merged with L'Union Royale)

were VOC-employees have already been pointed out by Jean Gelman Taylor in *The Social World of Batavia, European and Eurasian in Dutch Batavia* (1983), but this remains an area deserving more research.

The VOC was organized in six Chambers, each responsible for a part of the financial and administrative matters involved in the trade route around the Cape to Asia. It is interesting to note when lodges were founded in the cities, where these Chambers were housed (see Table 3.C⁷⁶). In Amsterdam a first lodge was founded in 1735, and 13 lodges would become active before 1800. The first lodge in Rotterdam was founded in 1748, and 8 lodges would become active there before 1800. Middelburg got its first lodge in 1758, and in total only 2 were active there before 1800. In Delft and Hoorn no lodges were founded until the 19th century (after the demise of the VOC), while in Enkhuizen there are no known lodge activities. Although the city of The Hague did not boast a VOC Chamber, it was home to the 'Haagse Besogne', an

important advisory board to the VOC. It dealt with papers from Batavia and prepared letters for the 'Heren XVII', the board of the VOC. Representatives of the various Chambers took part in the Besogne. Before 1800 another 14 lodges were active in The Hague. That brings the total in cities connected to the VOC to 37 lodges.

From the founding of the first lodge in The Hague in 1734 many freemasons travelled East in service of the Company. As the membership records of the Order are about to be digitalized in the near future, comparison to the *monsterrollen* (enrolment papers) of the VOC will soon be able to reveal the exact numbers. The traffic from Asia back to the Netherlands was equally frequent and is illustrated by the visitor books of Dutch lodges, of which that of lodge La Bien Aimée in Amsterdam is but one small example (fig. 3.5). In this book visitors were registered from all over Europe, the Cape as well as the West and East Indies, including signatures from members of lodges La Vertueuse and La Fidèle Sincérité in Batavia, De Standvastigheid in Bengal and De Opreghtheid in Ceylon, to which we will come back later.

Now that the impact of the VOC on social and economic history have been well studied, in recent years the focus has shifted towards the impact of its global trade network on material culture and cultural exchange. The first extensive study of this phenomenon to also tackle methodological issues, is the publication *Mediating Netherlandish Art and Material Culture in Asia* (2014). The authors argue that the term 'cultural mediation' best represents the nature of the transfer of goods between Europe and Asia, and its influence on material culture.⁷⁷ Objects would not just exchange hands. Contributing author Astrid Erll in particular, explains that this mediation process can be further distinguished into phases of production, transmission (to other temporal and local settings), reception, transcultural remediation (the making of new material culture based on earlier mediations), and afterlife (duration of these repeated processes).⁷⁸ In this process Company employees acted as agents or mediators, while the international VOC network provided the transfer channels. As Erll points out, 'studying cultural transmission means reconstructing the networks involved in moving art objects (and with them less tangible phenomena, such as tastes and styles) from one socio-cultural context to the other'.⁷⁹ Dutch freemasons formed precisely such a transfer network along the trade route, intricately woven within both the VOC trade network and its wider family relationships. These men acted as mediators of a unique commodity: masonic ideals and iconography expressed in ritual, functional and decorative objects. Their role in the social, political, religious and aesthetic framework facilitating cultural mediation between East and West is only just becoming clear.

♦ *First Grand Lodge representatives overseas*

It has generally been accepted that the first Dutch lodge in an overseas trade post was founded in the West Indies in 1754 and the first in the East Indies in 1759. The reason the Dutch were relatively late to the game in comparison to the British and French, was the fact that the government ordered masonic activities to be suspended in 1735 (see chapter 2). Although some activities resumed after 1744, it would take another ten years before the founding of the first lodges in the colonies. After the reorganisation of the Dutch Grand Lodge in 1756, the Order still copied the customs of the British, also what its organisational structure overseas was concerned. From the list of 'Acts and Commissions for Foreign Deputy and Provincial Grand Masters' it is clear the Dutch appointed such officers from 1757 onwards.⁸⁰ In January of that year a Deputy Grand Master was sent to Amsterdam as a representative of The Hague, and in February a Deputy Grand Secretary was sent as a correspondent to 'France and Brabant'. By December the first Provincial Grand Master for the West Indies was appointed: captain Henrik Rietveld (later *Schout bij Nacht* and commander of the warship Nassau), got the proxy to found lodges in Curaçao and St. Thomas. Before the year was over, a similar appointment was made for the East Indies. On 18-12-1757 the meeting of the Grand Lodge discussed 'the Commission of Brother Abraham de Labat, to erect a regular lodge in Bengal'.⁸¹ This short note in the minute books marks the formal beginning of the Dutch masonic adventure in Asia.

Abraham de Labat (1736-1770) had earlier that year been accepted as a member of lodge Concordia Vincit Animos in Amsterdam. He came to the lodge for the first time as a visitor, on 9-1-1757. The lodge minutes show that De Labat had been initiated earlier into an irregular lodge, and he was now being proposed as a candidate of Concordia Vincit Animos. This meant he had to retake the oath and pay two Ducats for a copy of the lodge rules. The minutes also show that he was regularly present at meetings and actively proposed new members. On 3-7-1757 De Labat was appointed Treasurer, but on 4-12-1757 he asked for a membership patent, probably in preparation for his journey abroad, where he'd expect to need



Fig. 3.6: Treaty signed by the Grand Lodge of England, recognizing the independence of the Dutch Grand Lodge in 1770. Collection: Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London, in: Hamill/Gilbert 1991, p. 55.

to show it. De Labat then left on 30-12-1757 in the function of junior merchant in service of the VOC on the ship Osdorp for Bengal.⁸² His commission to found a lodge was not mentioned in the minutes of his mother lodge, but they did note that another freemason about to embark for India received a similar commission a year later:

A message of the Grand Lodge dated 23 December 1758 shows, that B[rother] Jacobus Larwood van Scheevikhaven was provided with an act of Provincial Gr[and] M[aster] over the Dutch East-Indies.⁸³

This commission gave Van Scheevikhaven (1728-1762, also spelled Schevichaven or Scheevichhaven) the right to found lodges in the East Indian Archipelago. Although he had left the Netherlands for Bengal in 1750⁸⁴, it is thought he was appointed in 1758 by lodge La Paix in Amsterdam as a representative of the Order in India.⁸⁵ Another freemason visiting India, François Leonard Pierre August Tissot [de] Grenus (1732-1810), had also obtained the power 'to erect a Regular Lodge of Free and Accepted masons in Batavia as well as here [= India]'.⁸⁶ Tissot Grenus travelled as a sergeant on the ship Vrouwe Elisabeth to Batavia, where he arrived in 26-10-1757 and then went on to Bengal in July 1758.

It is not clear if these commissions were prompted by requests from Dutch freemasons stationed in Asia, or whether this was a conscious move by the Grand Lodge to actively expand masonic activities to the overseas territories. As the following chapter will show, lodges were indeed erected in Hoogly in Bengal (1758) and in Batavia on Java (1763). George Steendekker (died 1773) would also play a part in the foundation of Dutch lodges in Asia. He was a first mate on the ship Jerusalem in 1766 and on his way to Bengal carried Grand Lodge correspondence for the lodges in Batavia and Bengal.⁸⁷ Steendekker had just been promoted to captain of the ship Lychocton of the Chamber of Amsterdam, when he was commissioned as 'foreign Deputy Grand Master by the Grand Lodge on 13-5-1769'.⁸⁸ He was to travel to Batavia, and while on stopover at the Cape founded a lodge there 'in order to favour the correspondence and all incoming Brethren, who have to keep rest Day there, as would then also have the facilities, to visit each other in a lawful manner'.⁸⁹ His letter of instruction of April of the same year stated that the Grand

Lodge had until then not found the right brother to give this commission to, suggesting the wish to found a lodge at the Cape already existed for some time.⁹⁰

Other lodges followed, but a real peak in the number of Dutch lodge foundations occurred after 1770, the year in which the Grand Lodge in The Hague was recognized as an independent masonic body by the Grand Lodge of England. Things went so well, that on 26-8-1776 Jean Joseph de Vignoles (1721-1780), the British Grand Master for Foreign Lodges, wrote to James Heseltine, the Grand Secretary (in office 1769-1783) of the Moderns Grand Lodge), expressing concern about the speed with which many lodges were founded by Dutch traders in Curaçao, Bengal, Suriname, Batavia, Ceylon, the Cape, Negapatnam and the Coromandel Coast.⁹¹

As the number of lodges grew, the Grand Lodge needed to ensure the safe transfer of correspondence and money, if she truly wanted to expand her power and income from contributions paid. Ship's captains and other VOC employees who were affiliated to the Order were used as go-betweens, in order to deliver letters and *wissels* (international money orders). In the side bar of letters was carefully noted which captain and which ship carried the original letter and which the duplicate (in case a ship went down). As visitor records of lodges in Asia are incomplete, these side bar notes are an important supplement of relevant names. Hageman noted three phases in the early development of freemasonry in Asia:

- 1759-1776: expansion throughout the region, overseen by three successive Provincial Grand Masters whose governing style was both cramped and short-sighted;
- 1776-1781: activities in secret, quietly and without much expansion;
- 1781-1799: activities in public, especially in the Dutch East Indies, but disruption by conflicts and a decline of activities in the rest of Asia.⁹²

Between 1754 and 1853 at least 50 lodges were founded under a Dutch Constitution along the shipping routes to the East and West Indies (Tables 3.B-C, 4.A, 5.A).⁹³ The history of these lodges is still largely unexplored and the system of formal recognition of lodges caused some early developments to be overlooked. Masonic bodies attached great importance to the formal Constitution date of a lodge. Those were the dates published in yearly overviews of affiliated lodges or commemorated in publications, while lodges themselves usually kept records from the formal Constitution date onwards. The preceding events (which sometimes spanned several years), as well as the activities of lodges which never succeeded in obtaining formal recognition, were not considered part of official masonic history. As a result later scholars automatically concentrated on the official, published history.

Previous authors such as Stevens and Harland-Jacobs have focused on the history of freemasonry in Asia in relation to political developments and western expansion, therefore these aspects will not be revisited here. Members considered themselves equal, regardless of their career and status, and tried to leave politics out of their activities. Although they were not always successful in achieving such ideals, brethren from among occupying forces and prisoners-of-war were welcomed in the Dutch lodges (see chapter 5). The focus here lies more on internal aspects such as the daily grind of lodge life and quite literally the interior of the lodge building. These were men far away from home, trying to weather sea and tropical climates long enough to make profits and fortunes. They formed a strong social network that crossed borders and developed a specific material culture. This network both existed within and interacted with the East India Companies and later international trade networks, providing economic opportunities and resulting in new categories of export objects.

♦ *Dutch lodges at Cape the Good Hope*

The Cape was an important stopover for VOC ships, where fresh supplies were bought and goods were traded, before continuing the journey to Asia. While the Dutch masonic almanac of 1766 recorded 'The Continent of Africa is inhabited by people too enslaved, too ignorant, & too barbaric, to be capable of receiving and welcoming our Royal Art', only three years later it noted: 'There is a good small number of Lodges, in the cities where there are some European establishments, & and they are usually under the protection of the Consuls'.⁹⁴ Because activities in India and Java were recorded much earlier, it seems strange that the first Dutch lodge was not founded at the Cape before 1772. It is of course possible that



Fig. 3.7: Freemasons' Hall of lodge De Goede Hoop in Cape Town, dating back to 1803. Reproduced from: Van de Sande 1995, p. 77.

masonic activities in the region did start earlier, but that word simply did not reach the Grand Lodge, as one unlucky ship could easily cause a year's delay in communication. It is also possible the Dutch previously visited lodges belonging to another jurisdiction or worked under a foreign Constitution, but again there seems to be no evidence for either option. While Hageman listed several British lodges as active in Cape Town from 1781 onwards, Lane's overview of English lodges suggests none were formally constituted in South Africa before 1800.⁹⁵ In any case, the administration of the Dutch Grand Lodge and the masonic almanacs would record four lodges founded in South Africa before 1850 (Table 3.D).⁹⁶

The aforementioned Steendekker was probably involved in the founding of lodge L'Incorruptible, about which little else than its name is known, and Van der Weijde in that of lodge De Goede Hoop (1772), which is still active today. Visitor books of lodges in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies show that there was a heavy traffic from and to lodge De Goede Hoop in the next decade. On 21-8- 1784 lieutenant colonel Cornelis Jacob van de Graaff (1734-1812), the newly appointed governor of the Dutch fort at the Cape, was also appointed Provincial Grand Master for South Africa.⁹⁷ An overview of events in the years 1785-1804 was published in a report by Commissary General and Deputy Grand Master Jacob Abraham Uitenhage de Mist (1749-1823) in the masonic almanac of 1806.⁹⁸ Later historical overviews are few, and include J. Boudewijnse's *Gedachtenisviering van het honderdjarig bestaan der Loge 'De Goede Hoop' te Kaapstad* (1874), Osborne Hambrook Bate's *The early history of the Lodge 'De Goede Hoop' 1772-1781* (1908, revised 1972), A.T. Penman's 'Freemasonry in South Africa' (1967) and A.A. Cooper's *The Freemasons of South Africa* (1986). Cape Town still boasts one of the oldest surviving Dutch lodge buildings, dating back to 1803 and built under supervision of De Mist (fig. 3.7).

Table 3.D: Dutch lodges in South Africa founded before 1850

Cape Town

L'Incorruptible before 1772-1797
De Goede Hoop 1772-1785, 1803-1873, 1884-1886, 1893-1961
(continued under the Grand Lodge of South Africa)

De Goede Trouw 1800-1961 (continued under the Grand Lodge of South-Africa)

Graaff Reinet

De Vereeniging 1834-1844, 1865-1889, 1906-1961 (continued under the Grand Lodge of South Africa)

For practical reasons the developments in South Africa will not be discussed further here, but freemasonry in such an import region deserves to have a full, contemporary study devoted to it soon.⁹⁹

The following four chapters will each focus on a different region of Southeast Asia, examining different aspects of the role of Dutch freemasons in cultural and economic exchange. The chapter on India and Ceylon (and its Appendix II) deals with the organisation of the Order regarding its overseas lodges, their hierarchy and power struggles, communication channels and challenges, as well as the make-up of the membership body. In the chapter on the Dutch East Indies the focus lies on the development of lodge buildings and interiors, the commissioning of craftsmen and artists, and the consumption pattern of the lodges. The chapter on China illustrates how the international network between Dutch, Scandinavian and American freemasons facilitated the production and private trade of masonic export porcelain. Lastly, the chapter on Japan has a similar focus on the masonic export lacquer, in which the Dutch dominated the market. As a whole, these chapters illustrate the development of a unique material culture and decorative iconography, and the contribution of masonic networks to cultural mediation.