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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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6. JAPAN

ILLEGAL LODGE ACTIVITIES AND THE DUTCH LACQUER TRADE



Fig. 6.1: Kawahara Keiga (ca. 1786-ca. 1860), View of the island Dejima in the bay of Nagasaki, ca. 1809, silk painting, 80.5 x 58.5 cm. Collection: Het Scheepvaart Museum, Amsterdam. Reproduced from: maritiemdigitaal.nl.

6.1. Freemasonry in Japan (1772-1853)

The relationship between the Netherlands and Japan goes back for over 400 years. From the beginning of the 17th century onwards, the commercial trade between the two countries has resulted in a cultural exchange and a shared material culture. Until Japan opened up to the west in 1854, the Dutch boasted a monopoly on this trade, be it under very strict rules.¹ From 1643 onwards, they were allowed to maintain a trading post or *Faktorij* on the artificial island of Dejima in the bay of Nagasaki, where a small group of Dutchmen lead an isolated existence. Only twice a year the Dutch ships carrying supplies and trade goods would arrive, often also carrying replacements for the VOC employees in the trade post. The commercial trade with Japan concentrated on valuable metals (gold, silver and copper) and to a lesser extent on luxury goods, including paper, soy sauce, sake, rice, tea, camphor, porcelain and lacquer ware. Private trade or *kamban* by the VOC employees was also allowed under certain rules and actually made up a large part of the shipped luxury goods.

Japanese lacquer was more expensive than porcelain, and had to compete with Chinese lacquer and European imitations for its place in the consumer market. By the beginning of the 18th century, private trade accounted for most of the lacquer export from Dejima. As Impey and Jörg pointed out in their standard work on the subject, *Japanese Export Lacquer 1580-1850*, bartering with the Japanese lacquer workers was an art in itself. Dutch officials who agreed high prices for VOC orders could benefit from cheaper prices for private orders, on which substantial profits could be made in Batavia.² While the early

trade consisted of objects with traditional lacquer decors, from circa 1785 onwards lacquer ware was also produced with decorations copied from European prints (much later than was the case with porcelain³), as will be discussed in more detail later. The introduction of this practice has been attributed to Isaac Titsingh (see chapter 4) and/or Johan Fredrik Baron van Rheede tot de Parkeler (see chapter 5). Both held the position of *Opperhoofd* (= chief officer and negotiator) of Dejima in the 1780s and are known to have ordered such lacquer wares.⁴

The surviving archives of the VOC, ego documents, as well as the many descriptions and images made by Japanese scientists and artists, document the activities of the Dutch in Dejima in great detail. Yet, there is little known material on the private trade in lacquer ware, let alone on masonic objects. Relevant orders may not always have been recognized by scholars unfamiliar with masonic terminology or symbolism.⁵ More importantly, in accordance with the rules of the Grand Lodge, documents regarding masonic matters were to be kept strictly separate from any profane correspondence or administration, including that of the VOC and its successor, the Nederlandsche Handel Maatschappij (Netherlands Trading Company, 1824). Luckily, surviving lodge archives do contain some information on masonic export lacquer. These documents also suggest that we may need to adjust our view of the way the Dutchmen in Dejima passed their spare time.

◆ *The first Dutch freemasons in Japan*

Isaac Titsingh, a member of lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia since 1771 and *Opperhoofd* of Dejima in 1779-80, 1781-1782 and 1783-1784, is generally considered the first freemason in Japan⁶, but lodge archives show that other Dutch freemasons beat him to it. George Steendekker, appointed as Foreign Deputy Grand Master by the Grand Lodge in The Hague in 1769 in order to found lodges overseas (see chapters 3-4), travelled to Japan in 1772 as captain of the ship Maria Margaretha.⁷ Unfortunately, this first trip in a masonic diplomatic capacity also seems to have been his last, as the ship was lost on the return journey, so the Grand Lodge never received a report on the results of his assignment. We do know that the ships from the Netherlands to Japan and back made a stopover in Batavia, and that the membership records of the local lodges include men who were stationed in Dejima in service of the VOC. Among them were most of the Heads of the Faktoriij between 1771 and 1850:

- Arend Willem Feith (member of La Vertueuse since 1770), *Opperhoofd* 1771-1772, 1773-1774, 1775-1776, 1777-1779, 1780-1781;
- The aforementioned Isaak Titsingh;
- Hendrik Caspar Romberg (member of La Vertueuse since 1782), *Opperhoofd* 1782-1783, 1784-1785, 1786-1787, 1789-1790;
- Johan Fredrik Baron van Rheede tot de Parkeler (member of La Vertueuse since 1784), *Opperhoofd* 1785-1786, 1787-1789;
- Gijsbert Hemmij (member of lodge La Fidèle Sincérité in Batavia since 1775), *Opperhoofd* 1792-1798;
- Willem Wardenaar (member of La Fidèle Sincérité since 1797), *Opperhoofd* 1800-1803;
- Hendrik Doeff Jr (member of La Vertueuse since 1800), *Opperhoofd* 1803-1817;
- Germain Felix Meijlan (member of La Vertueuse since 1811), *Opperhoofd* 1826-1830;
- Joseph Henrij Levijssohn (member of La Constante et Fidèle in Semarang since 1829), *Opperhoofd* 1845-1850.⁸

With so many freemasons in an influential position for over three quarters of a century, it is not surprising that the production of masonic lacquer ware started and blossomed under their rule. This was however, also a period in which trade with Japan was often hampered by political upheaval: a war with England (1780-1784), the foundation of the Dutch Republic (1795), the bankruptcy of the VOC (1799), the occupation of the Low Countries by the French (1799-1814), the occupation of Java by the British (1811-1814) and the founding of the Nederlandsche Handel Maatschappij (1824).

◆ *The first commissions of masonic lacquer ware*

As discussed in chapter 5, Dutch lodges in Batavia kept yearly inventories, in which Japanese porcelain and lacquer ware were frequently mentioned. That is not surprising; the population of Batavia was closely involved in the international trade and export objects were therefore part of many households. More interesting are especially commissioned goods for the lodges in Batavia. However, there are no known examples of masonic commissions for Japanese porcelain. The earliest mention of an order of lacquer with masonic decorations in the archives dates back to 1788, some time after the production of lacquer after European prints is believed to have started.

■ *Tracing boards for lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia*

As discussed in chapter 5, lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia received various gifts to celebrate the inauguration of its new lodge building in 1786. For this occasion lodge member Romberg sent 'a tracing board being Satin with gold well detailed' from Dejima, where he had been posted as Chief since 1785.⁹ This suggests that Romberg had first supplied a masonic print or drawing as an example - possibly the first such image to reach a Japanese artist. The embroidered tracing board was in use until at least 1812, and probably repaired in 1818.¹⁰

Romberg then sent a second gift, as is mentioned in the lodge minutes of 13-3-1788:

The recently from Japan returned Br[other] Romberg presented to the lodge an extra fine lacquered box to store all the jewels of the Worshipful Master, and the Officers.¹¹

This implies the order must have been given some time earlier and that Romberg may have gotten involved in the order of lacquer objects soon after he arrived in 1785. The box, of which is not clear whether it had a traditional or a masonic decor, was kept in one of the closets in the antechamber to the temple. It was also described as a 'small Japanese lacquered chest' for documents and was listed yearly in the lodge inventories until 1834.¹²

As previously discussed, Past Master Titsingh, had been given a commission when he was stationed in Bengal, to have an Indian floor tapestry made for the lodge room, incorporating a tracing board in its design.¹³ When this turned out not to be possible Romberg stepped in to help, according to the lodge minutes of 3-5-1788:

That B[rother] Romberg, spurred on by a Profound Need for Our royal art had offered himself to have a Tracing Board made for the Lodge in Japan, that was equal in neatness and elegance to the tapestry.

That his W[orshipful] [Master] had accepted This serious offer by said B[rother], and requested to have such a Tracing Board made according to the same offer, after a model which will be made available to said B[rother].

That his W[orshipful] [Master] on the willingness shown by B[rother] Coortsen, to take care of an able painter who could draw it accurately, had likewise accepted this presentation and decided to have two Tracing Boards made in order to use one for the service of the L[odge] instead of the current which had decayed well by length of time and the other brought along with B[rother] Romberg, so it was understood to be satisfied with this arrangement.¹⁴

In other words Romberg, who was about to leave for Japan anyway, suggested to have a tracing board made there, which could be placed in the middle of Titsingh tapestry during rituals. Although we do not know the name of the Japanese artist employed, the financial records of the lodge do reveal which artist in Batavia was commissioned to make the basic design by lodge member Jan Reynier Coortsen (died 1791), a merchant and administrator of the VOC. Three payments were made for a total of 110 Rds, the equivalent of circa € 2.400,- today.¹⁵ These were made on 2-7-1788 'to the Chinese Oey Kieko (...) for the painting of a tracing board', on 23-7-1788 'to the Chinese Giu Ki' for the same, and on 6-9-1788 'to the Chinese painter' ('schilder Chinees') without further specification.¹⁶

Titsingh's correspondence includes a letter by Romberg dated 25-11-1789, in which he mentions the order of the tracing board:

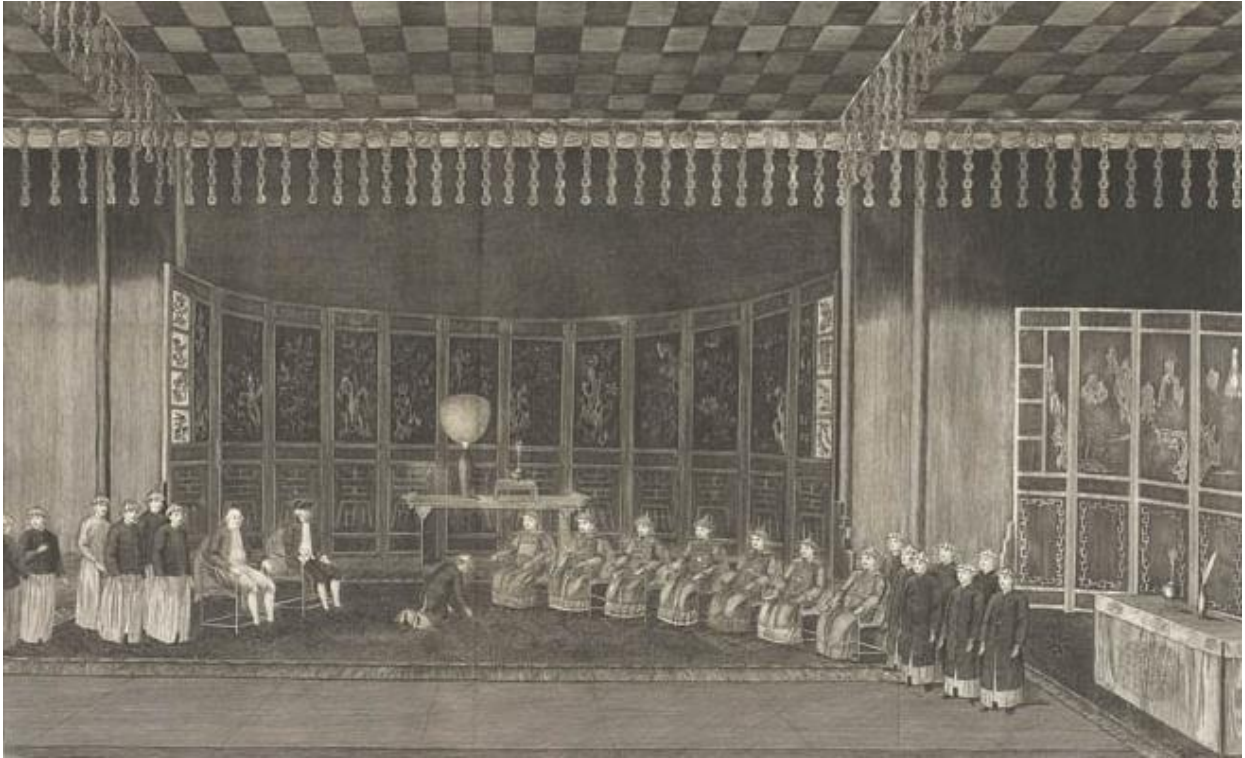


Fig. 6.2 and detail: Titsingh in China, uit: A.E. Van Braam Houckgeest, *Voyage de l'ambassade* (1797), showing the reception of Dutch diplomats in Canton. Titsingh is the second seated figure from the left, recognizable by his hat. Collection: University Library Leiden, inv.no. 353 B 12-13. Reproduced from: hetgeheugenvannederland.com.



Fig. 6.3: Panel with the list of names of the Dutch 'Opperhoofden' of Dejima. Black lacquer on wood with gilding and pearlshell, 162.5 × 106.5 × 4.5 cm, ca. 1823 (names added until 1850). Collection: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.no. BK-16465. Reproduced from: rijksmuseum.nl.

[...] under kind order of Negotieboekhouder Mr. [Hendrik] [Andries] Ulps:

[...] 1 lacquered painting depicting the Tracing Board of La Vertueuse, as I had it embroidered, black and gold according to specifications by Mr Overstraaten.¹⁷

Hendrik Andries Ulps (died 1791) is not listed as a member of a lodge in Batavia¹⁸, but his involvement in the order makes it likely that he too was a freemason, perhaps initiated elsewhere. Pieter Gerardus van Overstraten (1755-1801) was a government Secretary and the Master of the Lodge at the time. According to the minute books, the finished tracing board arrived on 24-6-1791:

By Br[other] Romberg was brought from Japan A fine lacquered Tracing Board ~~which cost him there the sum of Rd 150~~ and the same being offered to this L[odge] for the purchase value it was so agreed to take over the said Tracing Board for that price.¹⁹

The crossed out text suggests that this special object had a commercial value of around 150 Rds, which combined with the already paid design would amount to a total of 260 Rds (circa € 3.600,-).²⁰ But when the object was formally valued along with other items in 1793, its worth was estimated as reduced to 50 Rds (circa € 1.200,-).²¹ The tracing board was kept 'in the lodge room upstairs', along with the earlier embroidered version.²²

Considering this is all about a European image, brought to Batavia by a Dutchman, copied by a Chinese painter to be recopied by a Japanese artist, and then brought for use in the Dutch community in Batavia, that makes this lacquer object a prime example of the cultural exchange along the international trade route. The fact that it concerned a ritual object, not a decorative item, is remarkable.

Although it was a special and precious object even for its time, it did not remain unique for long. The lodge inventory of 1796 specifies not only '1 Japanese embroidered and 1 ditto painted small Tracing Board' (Rombergs orders), but also another '2 Japanese Lacquered Tracing Boards' of which it is unclear

how they were acquired. This brings the subtotal to three lacquered versions.²³ The 'small' version was no longer mentioned after 1797, while a new acquisition appeared in the minutes of a meeting on 26-10-1804. Brother Pieter Walbeek (born 1764), resident in Bandjermasin, Palembang and Cheribon, later extraordinary member of the Council of the Dutch East Indies, made a gift to the lodge consisting of silverware and 'A Japanese lacquered Tracing Board'.²⁴ So in total four lacquered tracing boards were acquired by the lodge between 1788 and 1804. As the main props used in the rituals, tracing boards were generally intensively used until totally worn, which may explain why none of these lacquer objects survived. Two remaining examples were still listed in the inventory of 1807, but there is no mention of them in later versions.²⁵ In May 1815 however, the costs of 'glueing and making in order the tracing board (Japanese) 6 Spd' is mentioned in the financial accounts of the lodge.²⁶ This suggests some of the lacquer or mother of pearl may have come off.

It will remain a question how these Japanese tracing boards looked. Probably very similar to the masonic lacquer boxes discussed in the next paragraphs, of which the production took off around the same time. One can easily imagine lodge members and visitors admiring, if not coveting these beautiful objects. As a Japanese artist was already familiar with an example design, a commission to adapt it to suit a smaller surface (like the lid of a tobacco box) was easily given.

■ *Commissions for lodge La Fidèle Sincérité in Batavia*

Although lodge La Fidèle Sincérité is generally thought to have had a much smaller budget than La Vertueuse, which united the wealthiest men in Batavia, this lodge also invested in special commissions of lacquer ware. In 1822 La Fidèle Sincérité also acquired a 'Japanese Apprentice Tracing Board in a frame'.²⁷ The same 1822 inventory mentions '1 Japanese List of Names of the subscribers for the building of this Lodge'.²⁸ Both items were listed in the inventories up until 1833.²⁹ On 27-10-1824 a new lodge building was consecrated, the cost of which had been financed by having each member buy a share. The list of benefactors names would have been displayed prominently in the building, perhaps in the Hall. The object was included in the inventories until 1833.³⁰ Although it did not survive, an object in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam can give us some idea of how it might have looked. A black lacquered panel lists the names of the Chiefs of Dejima in gold, the frame inlaid with flowers in pearlshell (fig. 6.3). It was probably made in 1823, while names were added until 1850.³¹

One special item did survive: a box, executed in black lacquer inlaid with pearlshell and some details highlighted in gilding. The lid is decorated with the seal of the lodge (fig. 6.4, compare fig. 5.86), consisting of a (simplified) tracing board, enclosed in a circle. Two columns and steps represent the Temple. Between the columns are crossed acacia sprigs with a skull below them (representing Hiram's grave), an all-seeing eye in a radiant triangle in between the sprigs and a five pointed star with the letter G above them. The scene is surrounded by building tools, including square, compasses, level, plumb line, hammer and trowel. Above the columns are the faces of the sun and the moon. Along the edge of the circle, letters spell the name of the lodge in gold, the words separated by inlaid dots: 'LOGE • DE • LA • FIDÈLE • SINC • ÉRITÉ'. The whole is surrounded by two cords with tassels, entwining into (love)knots, painted in gold. The corners of the lid are decorated from left to right with a square and compasses resting on a quarter circle, a flaming five pointed star, a level and a plumb line. The sides of the box are decorated with flowers and it is closed with a lock.

As La Fidèle Sincérité was inactive between 1825 and 1833, and merged with La Vertueuse into the new lodge De Ster in het Oosten in 1837, the box must have been ordered well before that date. Such a precious object could have been commissioned to celebrate a lodge jubilee. The occasion of the inauguration of a new lodge building in 1824 could be a possibility, as the style of the lacquer work dates from ca 1810-1825.³² Indeed the inventory of the lodge for 1825 mentions 'a chest or box carrying the title La Fidèle Sincérité', containing various aprons.³³ The box could have been an order by the lodge itself, or a luxurious gift by a member or another lodge. It is now in the collection of the British Federation of the International Order of Mixed Freemasonry 'Le Droit Humain' in London.



Fig. 6.4: Japanese box, made for lodge La Fidèle Sincerite in Batavia. Black and gold lacquer, inlaid with pearlshell, 1815-1825. Compare to fig. 5.86. Collection: Le Droit Humain. Reproduced from: droit-humain.org/uk/gallery.

◆ Lodge Decima (1804)

Dutch freemasons stationed in Japan in the second half of the 18th century, must have known about each other's membership of the Order. Some of them had already met in a lodge in Batavia. The lodges in the Dutch East Indies actively exchanged lists of members, one reason being to prevent fraudsters from being admitted. So they would have been familiar with the names of other local members, even if they had never met in person. Or they would have identified each other as freemasons do today, by the use of typical masonic phrases during a regular conversation that would have only been noticed by another initiate, by making gestures relating to the ritual (the famous masonic handshake), or by using personal objects, such as smoking ware or a snuff box with a masonic decoration.

The formal history of freemasonry in Japan is counted from 1866, when a lodge was constituted in Yokohama, so the big question is if freemasons in Dejima already held formal lodge meetings during the 18th century - whether they actively participated in masonic rituals during their time in Japan. According to the regulations of the Order at the time, a request for the foundation of a new lodge would have to be addressed to the Provincial Grand Lodge in Batavia by at least seven freemasons. Considering the small group of Dutchmen in Dejima, it would have been difficult to meet that requirement. But *if* the number of initiates was sufficient at any given moment, their isolated existence and the coinciding boredom would have easily spurned a wish to found a lodge. It is therefore not surprising that during the office of Opperhoofd Hendrik Doeff jr a lodge was indeed founded, be it in a somewhat unorthodox matter.³⁴ Although no records of this lodge survive, its foundation is mentioned in minute books of La Vertueuse in Batavia.

Doeff came to Dejima at a bad time. The Dutch government in Batavia was forced to hire American ships for the trade with Japan between 1797 and 1809, as Dutch ships could not arrive as a result of the conflict with the British. In 1798 most of the buildings on Deshima were destroyed by a fire. In 1799 the VOC went bankrupt, while the trade with Japan was continued by the government of the Dutch East Indies.

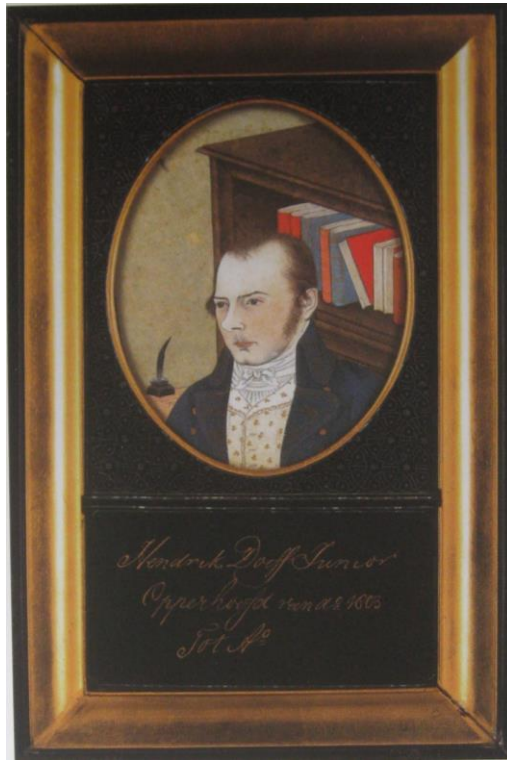


Fig. 6.5: Kawahara Keiga (ca. 1786-ca. 1860), portrait of Hendrik Doeff, 1803, 35 x 23 cm. Collection: Kobe City Museum. Reproduced from: Impey/Jörg 2005, p. 63.

Doeff was stationed in Dejima from 1799 as part of a group of men who had to reorganize the chaotic situation. Initially he worked as a secretary and warehouse master, but from 1803 he was Head of the factory until 1817. In his memoirs, *Herinneringen uit Japan* (1833), Doeff recalled how a colleague, Maarten Mak (1795-1857), was his successor as secretary to the factory in 1801 and again in 1803 as warehouse master.³⁵ The accountant Age Iges (died 1820) succeeded Mak as secretary. As will become clear from the proceedings that follow, Doeff was a freemason, probably initiated in a lodge in Amsterdam or Batavia before he left for Japan. Iges must have been initiated in Batavia as well, as his name is mentioned in the financial records of La Vertueuse in January 1798.³⁶

According to Doeff's memoirs, the rented Danish ship Maria Susanna arrived under a Dutch flag in the harbor of Nagasaki on 8-8-1804, under command of a captain Gerrit Belmer (died 1810), a member of lodge La Fidèle Sincérité since 1804.³⁷ On 11-8-1804 a second captain, Arend (also: Arnoldus) Musquetier, arrived with the ship Gesina Antoinette.³⁸ Franciscus Emilius Baron Lawick van Pabst (1769-1829), a captain of the troupes in Batavia and a friend of Musquetier, had travelled along to Japan for the benefit of his health.³⁹ At least one other freemason, captain Hoofd, must have also arrived on one of these ships.⁴⁰ These six gentlemen identified each other as freemasons and learned that there was no lodge on the island. This was probably not what they expected, as lodges were available in almost all other Dutch trading posts. They therefore decided to form a lodge themselves, but were one man short. In warehouse master Mak they saw a suitable candidate, so they initiated him on the spot to make up the required number of founding members. But in doing so they had gone way ahead of the usual proceedings.

Mak later returned to Batavia on one of the Dutch ships. Carrying a formal request for a letter of constitution for the new lodge Decima, he sped to the building of La Vertueuse. The welcome he received there was less warm than he had expected. The lodge minutes of 6-11-1805 recorded what transpired next:

In awe of the grand architect of the Universe the 6+ of 11* in the Year of the true Light 5805. Monday, in the evening at seven o'clock apprentice Lodge in La Vertueuse [...]

Furthermore, on examination of the for the aforementioned submitted diploma having seen from that it was undersigned by the B[rother] F.E. Baron van Lawick van Pabst as Grand Master and the former servant B[rother] of this L[odge] Age Iges as Secretary, accordingly provided under their signatures on 29+ van de 9* of the year of true Light 1804.

Also having become apparent that the original receipt offered by the aforementioned Mak of his Debit to the Socalled L[odge] Decima, has been given out by the B[rother] Hendrik Doeff Junior [as Treasurer]. Taken into account that the aforementioned B[rothers] van Lawick van Pabst, Age Iges and Hendrik Doeff Junior all are acknowledged Masons at this L[odge], which has worked in an unconstitutional manner and under the name of the L[odge] Decima held gatherings and meetings prohibited by law, which deed has to be announced locally, according to Art. 67. of the general book of law and it follows that [it was] agreed to inform of the unlawful reception of Marten Mak, and the unconstitutional establishment of the so-called L[odge] Decima at the first opportunity the High Enlightened Deputy Grand Master National Nicolaas Engelhard, currently residing in Semarang; under transmission *in Copia* the letter by Marten Mak and the enclosed receipt as well as the original of the thereby offered Diploma, requesting to dispose of them, as his High enlightened [Grand Master] sees fit according to his wisdom and the nature of the case.⁴¹

So lodge Decima was considered illegal without taking the enthusiasm of the brothers in Japan or the delay and other difficulties hampering international communication into account. The decisive factor in his harsh judgment could have been a financial one. One had to pay a substantial fee for the constitution of a lodge, as well as for each initiation, and La Vertueuse seemed eager to pocket some of that money. Even though initiating Mak again would be useless, as he had already undergone the entire process, he was made to pay the full fee just to be allowed to swear the oath once more. The lodge wrote the intended letter to Engelhard on 3-12-1805 and added:

By the First undersigned, after reading the aforementioned letter and for clarification of its contents, it was expressed that his W[orshipfull] at the return of the Japanese ships in the year 1804 had indeed been requested by the Br. F.E. Baron van Lawick van Pabst for a letter of constitution for a L[odge] in Decima, with information of the already proceded work; though that because on the Island Decima could hardly be found seven Dutch Employees, a lot less than the recognized number of Seven B[rothers] free Masons to Constitute a L[odge] and moreover the aforementioned B[rother] van Lawick van Pabst was not equipped with any papers whatsoever, which should have shown his qualifications, his W[orshipfull] could not pay attention to this, none the less not suggested to the more named B[roeder] van Lawick van Pabst of the unlawfulness of the meetings held and work directed under his continuation and that when the circumstances thereof should become known legally, He and those that had worked with him could not ignore to come into an unfavorable position of having made themselves guilty in the highest sense of a direct violation of the prohibition by the general book of law against the organizing or attending similar illegal meetings.⁴²

The letter was signed by Johan [Jan] Hendrik Holle (1755-1808), a merchant acting as Master of the Lodge at the time.⁴³

While we don't know what happened to lodge Decima, whether it ceased activities or continued defiantly, we do know what happened to some of the lodge members.⁴⁴ On 18-1-1806 Marten Mak was initiated for the second time in La Vertueuse as intended.⁴⁵ Immediately afterwards, Mak requested to be initiated into the second degree which 'even though he did not serve his time as Apprentice' was allowed 'from Consideration that he is a traveling B[rother].'⁴⁶ Mak was also initiated into the Master's degree on 28-2-1806, again because he was a 'a travelling B[rother], who is about to leave for Japan'.⁴⁷ He served again as warehouse master in Dejima and was replaced in 1807 by Jan Cock Blomhoff (1779-1853), who arrived on 28 July on the ship De Goede Trouw under captain Hendrik Voorman, a member of lodge La Fidele Sincerite.⁴⁸ Mak then returned to Batavia.

The minutes of La Vertueuse show that Iges was balloted with two black beans on 27-10-1806. He was then made a Master on 8-11-1806.⁴⁹ On 22-4-1808 he was balloted again, probably for one of the higher degrees, in which he was initiated on 25-4-1808.⁵⁰ His name is still listed in the overviews of contributions paid in 1811-1812⁵¹ and in the lists of guests for the celebration of St. John in the lodge La Fidèle Sincérité te Batavia in 1812 and 1814.⁵² In 1815, the *Java Half-Yearly Almanac and Directory* listed an 'A. Iges, baker, Armanusgracht'.⁵³



Fig. 6.7: Kawahara Keiga (ca. 1786-ca. 1860), portrait of Philipp Frans Balthazar von Siebold (1796-1866), 1823. Collection: Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum. Reproduced from: nagasaki-museum.jp.

Doeff had been instrumental in maintaining the Dutch trade monopoly, when the Russian envoy Nikolai Rezanov (1764-1807) arrived in August 1804 in an attempt to break into the Japanese market and would be so again when the British ship *Phaeton* arrived in 1808 to try the same.⁵⁴ Doeff stayed in Japan for a long time and managed to continue the trade post when Dutch ships did not arrive as planned between 1808 and 1816, due to the French annexation of the Netherlands and the following confiscation of the Dutch East Indies by the British. When in 1813 Wardenaar was sent to Dejima with an English delegation to take over command, disguised under a Dutch flag, Doeff again managed to remain in control. He was finally relieved of his position by Cock Blomhoff as the next Opperhoofd in 1817 and returned to the Netherlands. His ship *Admiraal Evertsen* ran into trouble near Mauritius and although he was rescued by the American ship *Pickering*, he lost all the documents and objects he had collected over the past 19 years. If any existed, the archive of lodge Decima was probably lost on the same journey. Back home Doeff got a position as advisor on the trade with Japan and was involved in the *Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij*.

What masonic activities, if any, took place in Japan after Doeff's leave? From 1815 onwards, Dejima was the responsibility of the Ministry for the Colonies in The Hague, and the resident physician was an appointed military officer.⁵⁵ In 1823 the German physician and scientist Philipp Frans Balthazar von Siebold (1796-1866) arrived as such a military physician. He was also a scientist and famously went on to study Japanese flora, fauna and culture. Von Siebold gathered a collection of Japanese specimens and artefacts, which formed the basis of the later Ethnographical and Natural History Museums in Leiden. It is not (yet) known if this influential scholar was also freemason too, but in his company on the *Hofreis*, the diplomatic journey to the Edo court, were his assistant Heinrich Burger (1804/1806-1858) and the artist Karl Hubert de Villeneuve (1800-1874), both members of *La Fidèle Sincérité*.⁵⁶ An article in the *Freemasons' Quarterly Review* (1849) suggests that Von Siebold was at least familiar with the phenomenon:

The present professor at Leyden, Bro. F. Von Sybold, who had made a long stay at Japan, whither he had gone as medical attendant to the Dutch embassy, but remained several years after its return, for the purpose of measuring the country and investigation, addressed the Lodge Socrates in Frankfurt upon the subject of

lodges in Japan, and among other matters mentioned, that at initiations the candidate's eyes were released from a bandage in front of a looking glass, amid the cry of 'know yourself'.

When we compare these different reports we must come to the conclusion that Freemasonry not only exists in the East, but is spread over a large portion of Persia, Japan, Egypt, and European Turkey, and that a very considerable number of our brethren have seen the light who are not professing Christians.⁵⁷

During the 19th century, one would expect a guest speaker in a lodge on the subject of freemasonry to be a freemason himself. Unfortunately, the archives of lodge Sokrates zur Standhaftigkeit in Frankfurt am Main which could have provided a further insight, were lost during World War II. A further clue that Von Siebold was at the very least intimately familiar with freemasonry, is the fact that he ordered a masonic lacquer box for his uncle, Johan Heinrich Theodor Damian von Siebold (1768-1828), a member of lodge Johannis der Evangelist in Darmstadt.⁵⁸

In 1826 the aforementioned freemason Germain Felix Meijlan took over as Opperhoofd. The minutes of lodge La Fidèle Sincérité from around that time indicate that it was still beneficial for travelers to and from Japan to be initiated. On 21-4-1826 Hendrik Strauch⁵⁹ wrote in his capacity as Secretary to La Fidèle Sincérité that the Master of the Lodge had proposed a new member: 'Pierre van Outeren, born in Leijden, age 25 years, profession Scribe and Accountant in Japan', while Strauch himself proposed 'Pieter Willem Verkerk Pistorius, born Rotterdam, age 21 years, profession Civil servant in Japan'.⁶⁰

Johan [Gerard] Frederik Van Overmeer Fisscher (1800-1848) was stationed as a civil servant in Dejima between 1820 and 1830, but journeyed to Batavia in 1825 and 1827. He quickly made a career and became a warehouse master, although he was overlooked for the position of Opperhoofd. Like his superior Cock Blomhoff he acquired a large collection of Japanese art and artefacts that later became part of the Dutch Royal Cabinet. The lodge minutes for the Chapter of La Fidèle Sincérité, recount how on 23-4-1827:

[...] the Brother J.F. Overmeer Fisscher, already for a long time being favored in the Symbolic Degrees with the degree of Master mason, having himself, after having served his time as Master, joined us to be advantaged with the Degrees of Elu and Scots Master which had been granted to him at the time as he was about to leave, though by the speedy sailing of the Japanese ships with which the forenamed Brother Fisscher had to leave for Japan as a civil servant not having taken place at the time which is why he has reapplied to obtain said Degrees.⁶¹

It was decided to provide him with the desired degrees 'by communication', which means without the required ceremony. On 17-4-1830 Overmeer Fisscher obtained the further degrees of *Ridder van de Degen en het Oosten* (Knight of the Sword and the East) and *Souverein Prince Rose Croix* (Sovereign Prince Rose Croix).⁶²

On 27-4-1831 the Chapter minutes of La Fidèle Sincérité note that: 'Br[other] A. Manuel [was] to be promoted to Scots Master as he is about to leave for Japan'. The candidacy was accepted and the degree was again provided 'by communication'.⁶³ Manuel, already a member of the lodge since 1829, had to pay fl. 161,- (ca. € 1.450⁶⁴) for the degrees of *Schots Meester* (Scots Master) and *Élu* (Elected Master).⁶⁵ On 18-5-1833 the minutes of the same Chapter mention a 'request by Brother J. Borger about to leave for Japan, to be promoted'. This was again approved and Borger was made *Schots Meester*, while the aforementioned brother Manuel was granted the degree of *Ridder van de Degen en het Oosten* after a similar request.⁶⁶ On 19-4-1835 the secretary of La Fidele Sincerite wrote to the Provincial Grand Master asking to allow Pieter Vis, commander of the ship India, to be initiated before his leave for Japan.⁶⁷

These minutes show that the required number of seven masons was now more easily assembled in Dejima. This also raises some questions. Considering the continuous traffic of freemasons between the Dutch East Indies and Japan, how likely was it that only Henrik Doeff was the only one who felt the need to create the familiar atmosphere of a lodge so far away from home? And why would these travelers ask to rush their (costly) initiations into not just freemasonry, but even its highest degrees on the eve of their leave for Japan, if there were no lodge meetings to attend? For which activities did they expect to have to be able to show their masonic credentials? Some calculated answers can be formulated as follows.

The evidence of (illegal) masonic activities on Dejima in 1804 provides a new insight into the way the Dutchmen spent their free time on the island, as well as the nature of their relationship to each other. It also raises questions about the relationship and cultural exchange with the Japanese. Was it really possible to keep lodge activities strictly secret, while every move the Dutch made was closely watched?



Fig. 6.8: Portraits of Nishi Amane (left) and Tsuda Mamichi (right). Collection: National Diet Library, Tokyo. Reproduced from: commons.wikimedia.org.

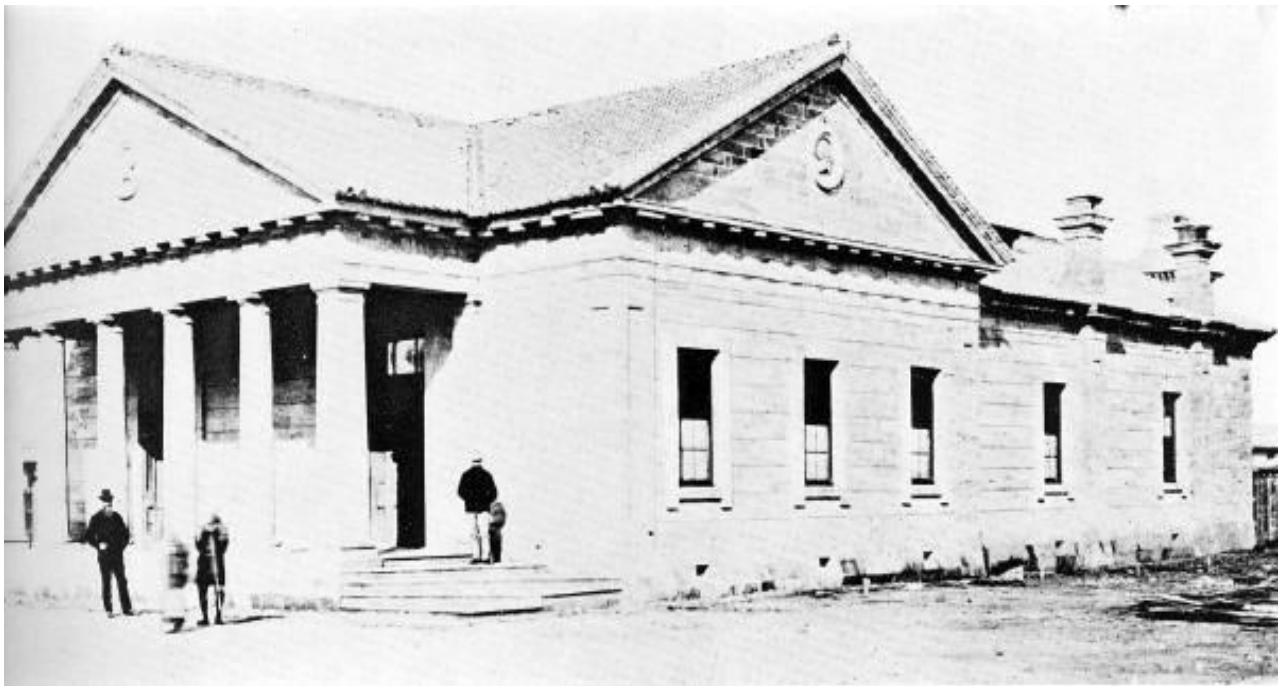


Fig. 6.9: The Freemason's Hall in Yokohama, built in 1868-1869 at plot no. 170 Yamashitacho and destroyed in the earthquake of 1880. Reproduced from: 2.gol.com/users/lodge1.

Dutch and Japanese scholars made intimate studies of each other's culture and habits, sometimes resulting in close friendships. Freemasons were in positions of influence until at least 1850, when freemason Joseph Henrij Levijssohn was replaced as Opperhoofd. Were masonic ideals really never shared between scholars and friends until the founding of the first official lodge in Japan in 1864? Considering that Japanese artists were asked to copy masonic prints from 1786 onwards, it would not be surprising if (more) rules were broken for practical purposes.

◆ *The first Japanese freemasons*

Taking the long presence of freemasons in Japan into account, it seems only logical that the Dutch played a part in the first official (legal) initiation of Japanese men. This event took place in 1864, when two Japanese

naval officers were accepted as freemasons in lodge La Vertu in Leiden.⁶⁸ Two years earlier negotiations were held between the Japanese Naval Department and the Dutch Consulate in Japan. It was agreed to send a group of Japanese officers to the Netherlands in order to study naval architecture, medicine and western studies. Amongst these men were two researchers: Nishi Shusuke (1829-1897) en Tsuda Shinichiro (1829-1903), later named Nishi Amane en Tsuda Mamichi. Nishi had studied Dutch and English, and, like Tsuda, was a researcher of European Culture. The two men travelled to the Netherlands with dr. J.C.L. Pompe van Meerdervoort (1829-1908), who had been the last resident physician on Dejima and was involved in setting up a teaching hospital in Nagasaki. In Leiden they were assigned as students of Simon Vissering (1818-1888), a professor of law and political sciences, who was also member of La Vertu, a local lodge closely associated with university teachers and students. The lodge minutes recorded on 20-10-1864:

In this Lodge has been accepted as E[ntered and] A[ccepted] F[ree] M[ason] Shusuke (Amane) Nishi, born in Tsuwano in Japan, age 35 [...] Mr. Nishi, having signed the required declaration, was brought within the Lodge and made a Mason according to ancient custom; having shown sufficient proof of his constancy, taking into account his rather scanty knowledge of the Dutch language, the Brethren decided that he be permitted to see the Light.⁶⁹

Nishi's initiation was followed by that of Tsuda on 17-11-1864, but the lodge records do not elaborate any further. This Dutch experience of course influenced their views on western culture. Both men became prominent intellectuals and played an important role in the modernization of Japan.⁷⁰

In 1854 Japan had opened up to Western trade after a display of power by the American expedition of four warships lead by commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry (1794-1858), although it would take until 1859 before the trade from various ports would be truly open. The influx of traders from various parts of the world also meant an influx of freemasons, most notably British and American men. There were many conservative Japanese landowners who could not accept the treaty signed by the *shogun*, not by the emperor, and who wanted the incoming stream of western traders reversed. This led to some vicious attacks on foreigners, some of whom just happened to be freemasons. Amongst the unlucky victims in Yokohama were the Dutch sea captains Wessel de Vos (1818-1860) and Jasper Nanning Decker (1810-1860). They were buried on 29-2-1860 on the new international cemetery in Yokohama, as recounted by a witness:

A day or two after, the funeral took place, with Masonic rites and all the ceremony which the resources of the settlement permitted, and was attended by the several Consular representatives, the entire foreign community, and the crews of vessels in port, it being considered desirable to make as much of a demonstration as possible.⁷¹

In the Dutch East Indies public display of masonic ceremony was already common (see chapter 5), but this was the first recorded case in Japan. While general anti-western sentiments were strong in some parts of society, it is precisely around this time that freemasonry started to flourish in Japan.

The first official lodge activities in Japan were linked to a traveling military lodge, which was active in Japan in the 1860s. The British Minden Lodge, belonging to the 20st 'Regiment of Foot' of the Lancashire Fusiliers, obtained its constitution from the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1748. Because the regiment took part in various international conflicts, the lodge travelled through various parts of Europe.⁷² By 1796 the lodge was in the Plymouth area, where two new battalions were formed. These recruited men in 1796-1801, including several Dutchmen. The lodge then travelled with the regiment to Ireland, Egypt and the Mediterranean. The regiment was directed to St. Helena to guard Napoleon in 1819 and sent to India in 1821, where it remained for a long time. The 2nd Battalion formed a new travelling lodge in 1860: Sphinx Lodge no. 263. The battalion was then stationed in Yokohama in 1864, where the attached lodge met from 27-1-1865 onwards in a warehouse on Main Street, owned by lodge member T.W. Walker. This lodge also admitted (foreign) civilians as members. When the military had to move on again, the lodge was closed on 28-3-1866. But so many civilian freemasons were now living in the area that they had already applied for the constitution of a permanent lodge to the Grand Lodge of England.⁷³ Yokohama Lodge no. 1092, formally

founded on 26-6-1866, was recorded in history as the first lodge in Japan. A proper Freemasons' Hall was built on Main Street, opposite the German club, for which the first stone was laid in 1869.⁷⁴

The foundation of other internationally oriented lodges soon followed, but these were still ruled by foreign masonic bodies.⁷⁵ According to the Japanese Peace Preservation Law of 1887 the meeting of secret societies remained prohibited. An exception was made for freemasonry - provided membership was limited to foreigners.⁷⁶ Tadasu Hayashi (1850-1913), Japan's first ambassador to Great Britain, became a member of Empire Lodge no 2108 in London in 1903.⁷⁷ The membership of Japanese men would not become common until after World War II. Japan would finally get its own Grand Lodge in 1957.

Beantwoordend J. v. v.
3. September.

Hoog Eerwaarde Grootmeester!

Onder eenige goederen, die van Japan
ontvangen, bevinden zich enkele stukken wezenige Japanezen, die
trouwlijk tot de over geheel de aarde verbreide Instel-
ling der Vrijmetselarij. Ik durf het U Hoog Eerw.
aan het hoofd staande des hier te Lande gevestigde
Ordes, deze Doet hier bij udding aan te bieden, met
verzoek, dat U Hoog Eerw. deze kleine oploffende heid
gelieve te beschouwen als een blyft van de onbepaalde
Afgaetking en der plichtmatigen Personee, die
U ongereunde worden toegebragen

Hoog Eerwaarde Grootmeester!

Dordrecht den 12. Dag der 6. M. d.
D. N. L. 1820 (12 Aug. 1820)

Door Uw Hoog Eerw.
in getrouwe B.
Jan Schouten

Fig. 6.10: Letter by Jan Schouten to Grand Master Prince Frederik, offering him a masonic lacquer box as a token of esteem, dated 18-8-1920. Collection: CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague.

6.2. Masonic export lacquer

◆ Commercial production

The lacquer objects commissioned by the lodges in Batavia in the 18th century were unique, in the sense that there were no copies and they were not distributed to a wider market. This would be the case with lacquer boxes with masonic designs, which were taken into production around the turn of the 19th century. At first, only small size boxes were being produced, perhaps serving as a memento for freemasons having spent time in Dejima. Examples are discussed below. The traffic between the Netherlands and Japan was hampered between 1808 and 1817, which implies that a more commercial production of masonic lacquer boxes probably started soon after the restoration of communications, with the first finished products reaching the Netherlands around 1820.

Indeed, on 12-8-1820 Jan Schouten, Worshipful Master of the Lodge La Flamboyante in Dordrecht (see chapter 2) wrote to the Dutch Grand Master, Prince Frederik (1797-1881):

Amongst some goods, received from Japan during these days, are some though few boxes, relating to the world-wide dispersed Institution of Freemasonry. I dare to humbly offer Your High Honorable, being at the head of this order established in this country, this Box, requesting that Your High Honorable will consider this

small attention as a sign of the unlimited esteem and the dutiful worship, that is unreservedly addressed to You.⁷⁸

Schouten was in an excellent position to acquire Asian objects, as he owned a shipping yard in Dordrecht.⁷⁹ Schouten had been initiated into lodge Het Vrij Geweten in Breda in 1810, and then became co-founder and Master of the Lodge La Flamboyante from 1812 to 1852. In 1823 he was responsible for the building of the steamer Vereniging (later named Prins Frederik der Nederlanden, after the Grand Master), while he co-founded the Eerste Oost-Indische Rederij (First East Indian Shipping Yard) in 1825. The members of La Flamboyante, which included many mariners, financed the building of three fregats, named Broedertrouw (1837), Delta (1840) and Osiris (1841), which he nicknamed his Faith, Hope and Charity. Later followed the ships Jan Schouten (1853) and the Grootmeester Nationaal (1857). At the same time Schouten fulfilled the position of Deputy Grand Master of the Order between 1840 and 1853. He was also active as a poet, and amongst other subjects wrote frequently about freemasonry and even poems on his ships.⁸⁰

Being a very passionate freemason, his gift to the Grand Master was no doubt sincere, but it was also commercially smart. Which brother would not want to own a beautiful object similar to that of the Prince, a material representation of ideals shared between brothers world-wide? The gesture may well have stimulated a wider demand for these objects.

♦ *Characteristics and variations in decoration*

While most of the lodge-commissioned objects did not survive, there are still many examples of masonic lacquer boxes in public and private collections all over the world. These boxes differ in shape and quality of execution, but the central decoration is usually one of four commonly used designs. In the 1960s P.H. Pott already identified three of the pictorial sources for these designs.⁸¹ These are derived from specific engravings in popular ritual manuals, which freemasons must have carried with them as an *aide-memoire* on their travels to the East. If one had the opportunity to convene a lodge in a foreign port with the participation of one or more foreign visitors, not all participants would be familiar with the same ritual or have sufficient experience as lodge officers in the leading of the proceedings. In those cases it was especially handy if one had a ritual manual as an instruction guide.

Travelling freemasons could have their aprons and officers' jewels amongst their personal belongings. These were often designed as a simplified tracing board, reduced to a few main symbols. The fourth type of lacquer box is probably decorated after such a personal object. Exceptions to the four types discussed below, such as the box for La Fidèle Sincérité mentioned earlier, must be considered very rare.

▪ *Type 1: L'Ordre des Francs-Maçons trahi [...] (1745)*

In 1745 the French ritual manual *L'Ordre des Francs-Maçons trahi et le secret des Mopses revelé*, was published simultaneously with the Dutch translation: *De geheimen der Vrije-Metselaars en der Mopsen geopenbaart* (see chapter 2). The text includes a short description of a tracing board:

One should take heed, that in the middle of the room of Acception a large field is marked on the floor, where one draws with Chalk two Columns, remains of the Temple of Solomon: on both sides of this field one sees drawn a large J and a large B. [...] In the middle of the field, and between the drawn Columns, are three candle [sticks] with burning candles, arranged in a triangle, or placed.⁸²

The frontispiece for this publication was an engraving of a tracing board, titled *Image of the lodge for the acception of a free-masons Apprentice-Fellow-Craft* (Fig. 6.11). The different symbols are numbered and explained to the reader in a caption. Letters indicate the seats of the lodge Officers as well as the place of the most important pieces of furniture.

For a freemason, all of these symbols would have a specific meaning or recall a certain concept. The columns 'J' and 'B' refer to the columns 'Jachin' and 'Boaz' at the Temple of Solomon (1 Kon. 7:21). The left column reads *Force* (Strength) and the right *Sagesse* (Wisdom). In the middle of the image is a flaming star with the letter 'G' and the word *Beauté* (Beauty). Together Wisdom, Strength and Beauty form an important *trias* within freemasonry. The different tools refer to the symbolical building of the Temple. Above the left column is a rough stone, above the right a pointed stone with an axe. Working the rough



Fig. 6.12: Tobacco box with a design after *L'Ordre des Franc-Maçons trahi* [...] (1745). Black lacquer with pearlshell on copper, 1785-1820, 13.5 X 8 X 2.5 cm. Collectie CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, inv.no. 1807. Reproduced from: vrijmetselarij.nl.
 Fig. 6.13: Japanese box with a design after *L'Ordre des Franc-Maçons trahi* [...] (1745). Black lacquer with pearlshell on copper (interior later lined with velvet), 1785-1820, 13.5 x 8 x 2.4 cm. Collectie CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, inv.no. 1804. Reproduced from: vrijmetselarij.nl.

now crossed with a pair of compasses. The Latin words have been replaced by a radiant sun. Above the rough stone, a trowel has appeared, and a bow has been added to the cord. Fig. 6.13 shows a slight variation on this decor (type 1b): the box has rounded edges and an indented border has been added to the central decoration, while flames have been added to the five-pointed star.

As only the Dutch were in the position to order, boxes of type 1 have so far only been identified in Dutch collections.⁸⁶ This type was probably one the first to be produced, when the number of commissions from the home market was still relatively low. But it cannot be excluded that Dutch freemasons traded these boxes with other countries (or took orders on their behalf), so examples could still turn up in collections elsewhere.

■ Type 2: *Jachin and Boaz* (1797)

The first edition of the British ritual manual *Jachin en Boaz; or, an authentic key to the Door of Freemasonry, both Ancient and Modern* appeared in 1762.⁸⁷ The book was reprinted several times, but never translated into Dutch, nor into the French spoken by the Dutch elite. An addition to the 1776 edition was a frontispiece, showing a tracing board within an oval medallion hanging on a bow (Fig. 6.14). According to the accompanying text, the image was derived from the jewels that freemasons would wear on a ribbon around the neck.⁸⁸ In the 1797 edition the oval medallion was replaced by an octagonal one, now hanging on a bow with longer ribbons, probably in accordance with changing fashions. This later print was signed by James Baynes (1766-1837) as designer of the drawing and Isaac Taylor (1730-1780?) as engraver. The tracing board itself was also executed in a different style and appears to have been mirrored, but although the composition was somewhat rearranged most of the symbols remained the same. Here too the different elements in the composition were numbered and (compared to *Le secret des franc-maçons trahi*) explained a little more elaborately in the text. Not only the plan of the lodge and the main symbols of the tracing board, but also the officers' badges and the props used in the initiation of a candidate are illustrated.

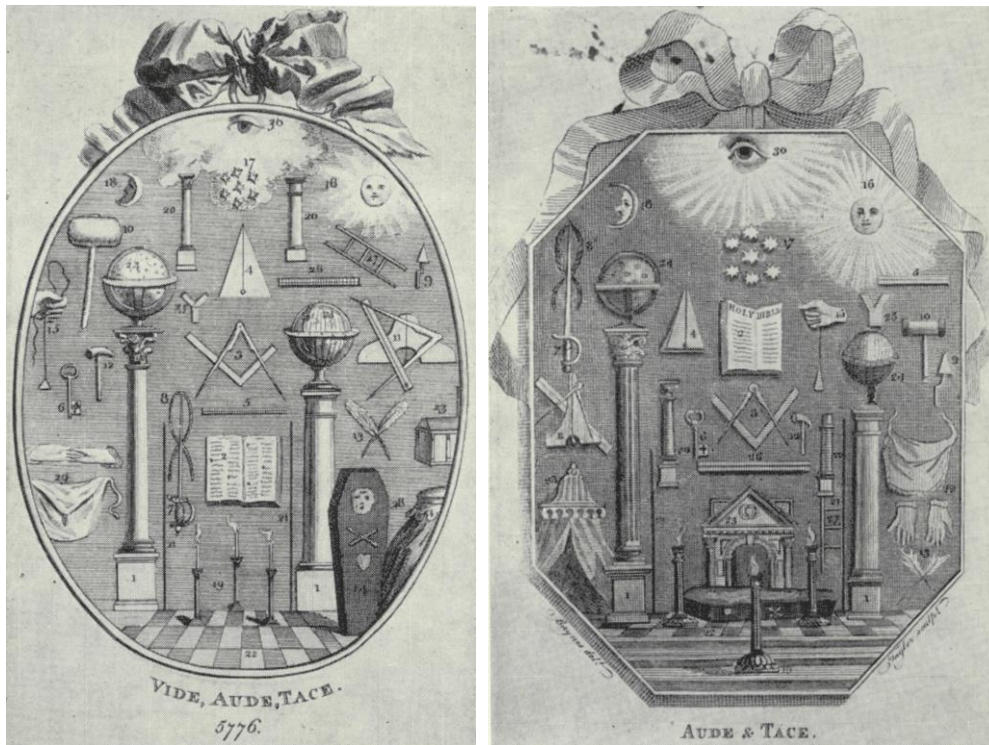


Fig. 6.14: Frontispieces to the 1776 and 1797 editions of *Jachin and Boaz, or an authentic key to the Door of Free-Masonry, both Ancient and Modern* (1762). Reproduced from: Pott 1966, p. 180.

'Description of the Regalia and Emblematical Figures used in Freemasonry, represented in the Frontispiece:

1. The two pillars called *Jachin and Boaz*, the first for signifying *Strength*, the second to establish in the *Lord*.
2. The *Holy Bible* opened, as an emblem that it should be the rule of our faith.
3. The *Compass and the Square*, to figure our actions, and keep them within bounds, the *Master's emblem or jewel*, which is suspended with a ribbon round the neck, and always worn when the *Lodge* is opened, and on public days of meeting, funerals, &c.
4. The *Level*, the *Senior Warden's emblem or jewel*.
5. The *24 Inch Gauge*, to measure the *Mason's work*.
6. The *Key*, or *Treasurer's emblem*.
7. The *Sword*, presented to the naked left breast of the *Apprentice*.
8. The *Cable, or Rope*, put round the neck of every new-made *Mason* at the time of making.
9. The *Trowel*, an instrument of great use among *Masons*.
10. The *Gavel, or setting Maul*, used in building *Solomon's Temple*, the first grand work of *Masonry*.
11. The *Plumb, Level, Compass, and Plumb Rule*, the *Junior Warden's emblem*.
12. The small *Hammer*, to knock of superfluous pieces.
13. The *Cross Pens*, the *Secretary's emblem*.
14. A *Coffin*, with the figure of the maimed body of *Hiram* (the first *Grand Master*) painted on it. He was murdered by three *Fellow-Crafts*, for refusing to reveal the *Secret*.
15. The *Hand Plummet*, for taking perpendiculars.
16. The *Sun rising in the east*, emblematical of the *Master Mason*, standing in the east, and setting the men to work.
17. The *Seven Stars*, an astronomical emblem, frequently engraved on the medals worn by *Masons*.
18. The *Moon* that rules the night.
19. The *Candlesticks*, placed in triangular form.
20. The *Columns*, used by the *Senior and Junior Wardens* in the *Lodge*.
21. Two black *Rods*, carried by the *Senior and Junior Deacons*.
22. The *Three Steps and Pavement*.
23. *Entrance or Porch to Solomon's Temple*.
24. The *Terrestrial and Celestial Globes*, representing the works of creation.
25. A *Machine* used by *Masons* for forming *Triangles*.
26. The large *Rule*, for measuring the work.
27. The *three Step Ladder* used in *Masonry*.
28. *Hiram's Tent*.
29. The *White Aprons and Gloves*, emblems of innocence.
30. *Eye of Providence*, the great superintendent of all the works of the *Universe*, and *Masonry* represented as under its immediate influence.⁸⁹



Fig. 6.15 (and detail): Tobacco box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797) with an inscription on the inside 'Japan De 20^{de} November A 5823'. Black lacquer with pearlshell on copper, 1800-1823, 14.5 x 9 x 3 cm. Collection CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, inv.no.1803. Reproduced from: vrijmetselarij.nl (box). Photograph by the author (lid).

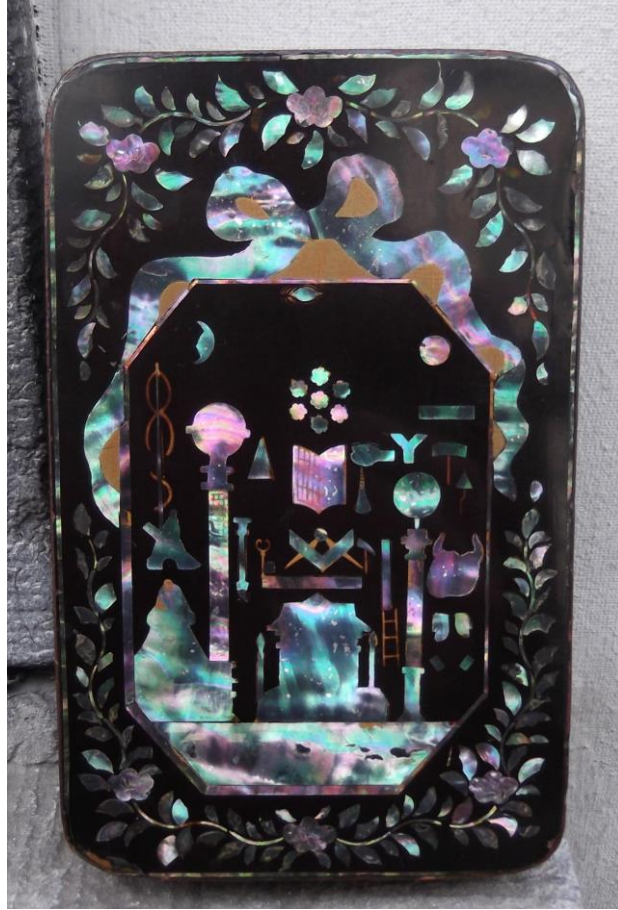


Fig. 6.16a-b: Tobacco box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797) with an inscription on the inside of the lid 'Souvenir du Capt. Mesdagh a Son Ami L. Marguerite, Japan 26 November 1825'. Black lacquer with pearlshell on copper, 1800-1823, size not listed. Collection and photographs with kind permission of Antiques Wim Prové, Belgium.

A decoration after the 1797 frontispiece is more often found on masonic lacquer ware than any other, and in more varied executions and types of boxes, indicating it was very popular. As the engraving depicts the usual elements of a British masonic ritual, some symbols may have been unfamiliar to Dutch freemasons, including the sword, the noose and the ladder (all used in the Apprentice degree) and the mathematical symbol depicting the Pythagorean theorem (no. 25, used in the ornament of Past Masters).⁹⁰ Yet the type 2 design is the most common decoration of masonic lacquer boxes in Dutch collections.

There is a tobacco box with a design after *Jachin and Boaz* [...] in the CMC collection (type 2a) (fig. 6.15). It is executed in black lacquer and pearlshell on a copper base with details highlighted in gold. The field within the medallion is sprinkled with gold. Again every effort was made by the Japanese artist to make details, such as the body of Hiram on the coffin, visible by engraving the inlaid sections. An inscription on the inside of the lid reads: 'Japan De 20 St November A 5823' [= 1823]. A similar box, but with rounded corners, a less detailed inlay and an added floral decoration on the lid, appeared at auction. This also carries an inscription on the inside of the lid: 'Souvenir du Capt. Mesdagh a Son Ami L. Margeritte, Japan 26 November 1825' (type 2b, Fig. 6.16). This was probably M. Mesdagh, captain of the ship Johanna Elisabet in 1825.⁹¹ In other variations of this decor the field of the medallion in between the pearlshell is filled in with gold lacquer (type 2c, fig. 6.17). The corners of the box are clipped, giving it an octagonal shape. The sides are decorated with flowering branches and Ho-Ho birds with a long tail.⁹² An almost identical box from the collection of Willem Jeron Maria van Ogtrop (born 1903) appeared at auction.⁹³ There is one member with this surname listed in the membership records of the CMC: Jacobus G. Ogtrop, initiated in lodge La Paix in Amsterdam in 1816. He got three degrees in one session, indicating he was about to leave for a journey.

More famous is a third variation in the collection of the National Heritage Museum in Lexington, USA (Fig. 6.18). This too has an octagonal shape, but the decoration is executed in raised gold lacquer and the design is oriented horizontally instead of vertically (type 2d). Details like the architectural elements on the front of the Temple are very finely executed, suggesting depth to the scene, while others are highlighted in pearlshell. The sides of the box are decorated with diagonal bands of sprinkled gold dust in *nashiji* style and flowers (gingko, chrysanthemum and lotus blossom). It is also one of the few boxes of which the provenance is thought to be known. According to a letter kept with the box (Fig. 6.19), it was a gift by George Washington (1732-1799), himself a freemason, to general General Ebenezer Stevens (1752-1823) of New York.⁹⁴ (We will come back to Washington later.) The museum's own research suggests a slightly different history: the box was ordered and *intended* as a gift to Stevens, but Washington died before he could do so.

Earlier museum catalogues suggested that the box may have been acquired on behalf of Washington by one of his Dutch contacts, such as Van Braam Houckgeest (chapter 7).⁹⁵ More recent research suggests that the box was acquired by captain James Devereux of the American ship Franklin from Salem (Massachusetts), sailing under a Dutch flag. On board was also the aforementioned freemason Hendrik Doeff). The ship arrived at Batavia on 28-4-1799 and returned to Boston from Nagasaki on 18-12-1799, just after Washington's death on the 14th of that month. Stevens was somehow presented with the box. The surviving letter suggests it now contained a leaf from a bush growing over Washington's grave. The box was later passed on by Stevens to general John Winslow of Boston. He in turn gave the box to Benjamin Whitman in 1819, who passed it on to his son George Henry Whitman in 1835.

Based on this provenance and taking the travel and production timelines into account, the print would have to have been taken to Japan 'hot of the press' after its publication in 1797, for the box to have already arrived in 1799. Lacquer ware of this type is generally dated a little later in the available literature. However, earlier editions of *Jachin and Boaz* played an important role in American freemasonry, and it is likely that the new 1797 edition was also widely available.⁹⁶ That Devereux was involved in a commission on Washington's behalf however, is not very likely. The Dutch hired the ship Franklin on the spur of the moment, because the ship Eliza chartered earlier had sunk. So no one could have foreseen that Devereux would be on his way to Japan.⁹⁷ That makes it more likely that a Dutch contact was involved in the commission, as the original museum provenance suggested.

Together the Washington/Stevens box and the inscribed Dutch box suggest that the small format or tobacco boxes were produced for freemasons from circa 1797 until well into the first quarter of the 19th century. During the first half of the 19th century the same decoration scheme was also applied to wooden

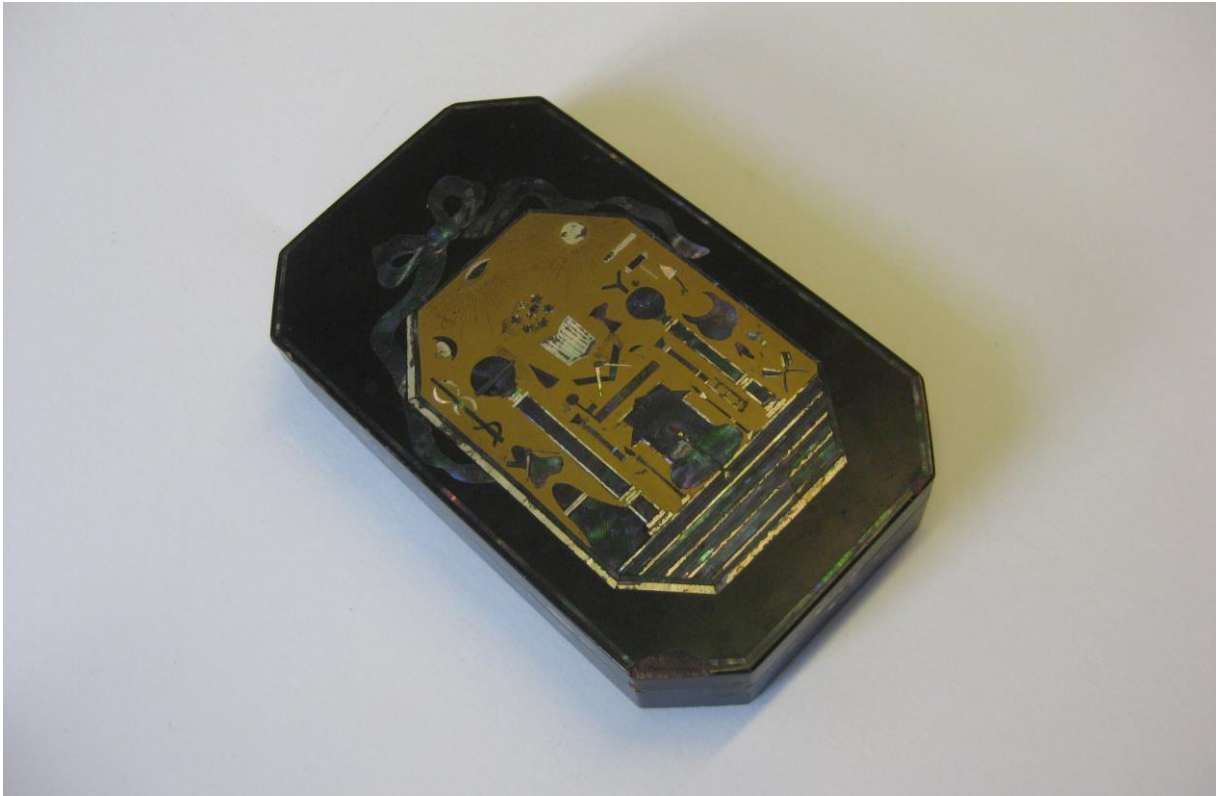


Fig. 6.17: Tobacco box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797). Black and gold lacquer with pearlshell on copper, 1800-1820, 13 x 9 x 2.5 cm. Collection CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague. Photo: Kroon & Wagtberg Hansen, The Hague.



Fig. 6.18: Tobacco box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797). Black and raised gold lacquer with pearlshell on copper, after 1797-1820, 13.6 x 9 x 2.5 cm. Collection of the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, Special Acquisitions Fund, inv.no. 78.20.1. Reproduced from: nationalheritagemuseum.org.

This Lacquer Box was given to Gen^l Stevens of New York - a revolutionary Officer, by Gen^l George Washington - Commander in Chief of the American Army, of our revolution - and after the death of Washington, was by Gen^l Stevens, given to Gen^l John Winslow of Boston and in it, was placed a leaf, that grew on a burr, that grew over the tomb of Washington, the first year after he was deposited in the Tomb - and in the year 1819 a short time before Gen^l Winslow died, he gave the same precious Memorial to me - and I now give the same to my beloved son, George Henry Whitman, whose former name was ~~John Winslow~~ ~~Whitman~~ John Winslow Whitman, having been named for my esteemed friend, Gen^l John Winslow -
 Attest Benjamin Whitman
 Boston, May 5th - AD 1835

Fig. 6.19: Statement given by Benjamin Whitman, Boston, Massachusetts in 1835 regarding the lacquer box in fig. 6.18. Collection of the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, Special Acquisitions Fund, inv.no. A78/002/1.

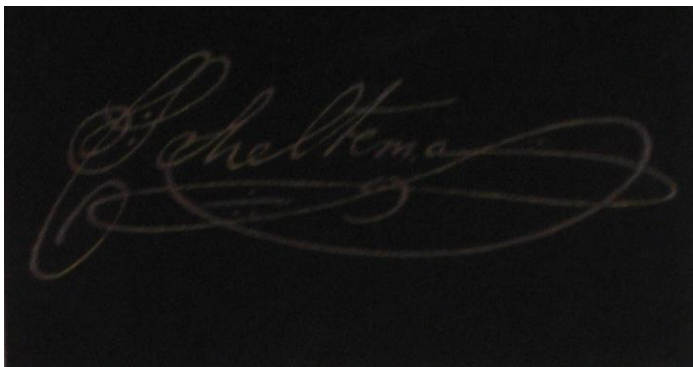


Fig. 6.20 (and detail): Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797), inscribed 'C. Scheltema' on the inside of the lid. Black and gold lacquer on wood, inlaid with pearlshell, 1800-1830, 32 x 17 x 8 cm. Collection CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, inv.no. 1801. Reproduced from: vrijmetselarij.nl (box) and Impey/Jörg 2005, p. 211 (autograph).

lacquered boxes of a larger, oblong format, usually no bigger than circa 32.5 x 17 cm. A lock and key were added, making the boxes suitable for storage of private or precious items. There are several boxes of this type in the collection of the CMC (type 2d). Figs. 6.20-6.21 were executed in black lacquer with pearlshell inlay, with details highlighted in gold. Apart from the central medallion and a thin band of pearlshell around its edges, the lid was left undecorated, while subtle motifs of flowers and birds were applied to the sides of the box.⁹⁸

While dozens of these boxes can be found in collections worldwide, only in rare cases their provenance was recorded. Fig. 6.20 in the CMC is inscribed on the inside of the lid: 'C. Scheltema'.⁹⁹ Several members of this family were members of lodges in the Dutch East Indies. A similar box belonging to merchant Hendrikus Veuger (1786-1842), a member of lodge La Paix in Amsterdam (the same lodge as the aforementioned Ogtrop) appeared at auction in 1994.¹⁰⁰ (We will come back to him in chapter 7). The well-known Dutch composer Frederik Willem Johannes Pijper (1894-1947), a member of lodge De Drie Kolommen in Rotterdam, also had a box of this type in his possession.¹⁰¹

Figs. 6.23-6.24 are variations of the design executed in gold lacquer (type 2e) and red lacquer (type 2g).¹⁰² While the tracing board is usually oriented towards the long side of the box, a box in the Museum



Fig. 6.21: Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797). Black and gold lacquer on wood, inlaid with pearlshell, 1800-1830, 32 x 16.6 x 7.5 cm. Gift by mrs. Vermeulen-Kool, collection CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, inv.no. 6326. Reproduced from: vrijmetselarij.nl.



Fig. 6.22: Box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797). Black and gold lacquer with pearlshell on wood, 1800-1830, 32.2 x 16.7 x 8 cm. Collection Museum für Lackkunst, München. Reproduced from Impey/Jörg 2005, p. 211.

Fig. 6.23: Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797). Black and gold lacquer on wood, inlaid with pearlshell, 30.5 x 16.8 x 7.4 cm, 1800-1830. Collection CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, inv.no. 17617. Reproduced from: vrijmetselarij.nl.

für Lackkunst in Münster shows the design oriented towards the short side (type 2f, fig. 6.22). As the century progressed, lacquer ware in general became more influenced by western styles. The masonic boxes' additional decorations of flowers, birds and butterflies became more prominent. The boxes also became bigger and in more variations of oblong shapes.¹⁰³



Fig. 6.24: Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797). Red, black and gold lacquer on wood, inlaid with pearlshell, ca. 1830, 32 x 16.5 x 8.2 cm. Lock plate is missing. Collection of the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, Special Acquisitions Fund, inv.no. 78.20.2. Photograph by David Bohl.



Fig. 6.25: Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797), the inside lid decorated with flowers. Black and gold lacquer with pearlshell, 1820-1840, 35 x 23.4 x 8 cm. Collection: CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, inv.no. 17618. Reproduced from: vrijmetselarij.nl.



Fig. 6.26: Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797). Black and gold lacquer with pearlshell, inside gold lacquer, 1820-1840, 43 x 34 x 7.5 cm. Collection: CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, inv.no. 1806. Reproduced from: vrijmetselarij.nl.



Fig. 6.27: Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797), owned by Gerrit Valewink, 1934 in Bandung, the Dutch East Indies. Black and gold lacquer with pearlshell, 1820-1840. Private collection, displayed online by Haags Historisch Museum, The Hague. Reproduced from: mijndenhaag.org. Photographer: Maaïke van Grol Fotografie, The Hague.



Fig. 6.28: Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797), black and gold lacquer, 1820-1850, 41 x 30.9 x 13.7 cm. Displayed at auction at Christie's, online sale 8/19-12-2014, lot 24. © Christie's Images Limited, 2015.



Fig. 6.29: Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797), black and gold lacquer with pearlshell, 1820-1850, size not listed. Collection: Musée de la Maison des Maçons, Paris, inv.no. A2-572. Reproduced from: glmf-musee.fr. (Also reproduced in cat. exhib. Paris 2010, p. 68.)

Fig. 6.30: Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797), black and gold lacquer with pearlshell, inside lid with floral design in pearlshell, 1820-1850, 39.3 x 22.8 x 12 cm. Collection of the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, Special Acquisitions Fund, 78.20.4. Photograph by David Bohl.

Some variations stand out. Fig. 6.25 in the CMC collection shows a cartouche in gold around the edge of the lid, while the flower sprays in pearlshell have additional, elegantly curling branches in gold (type 2h).¹⁰⁴ Fig. 6.26 shows a large, flat box in the same collection, which has an additional border with an inlaid zigzag pattern on the lid, as well as flowers in each corner (type 2i). Within the medallion the design of the Temple, here consisting of open arches, is less massive than usual. The lock shows a chrysanthemum motif.

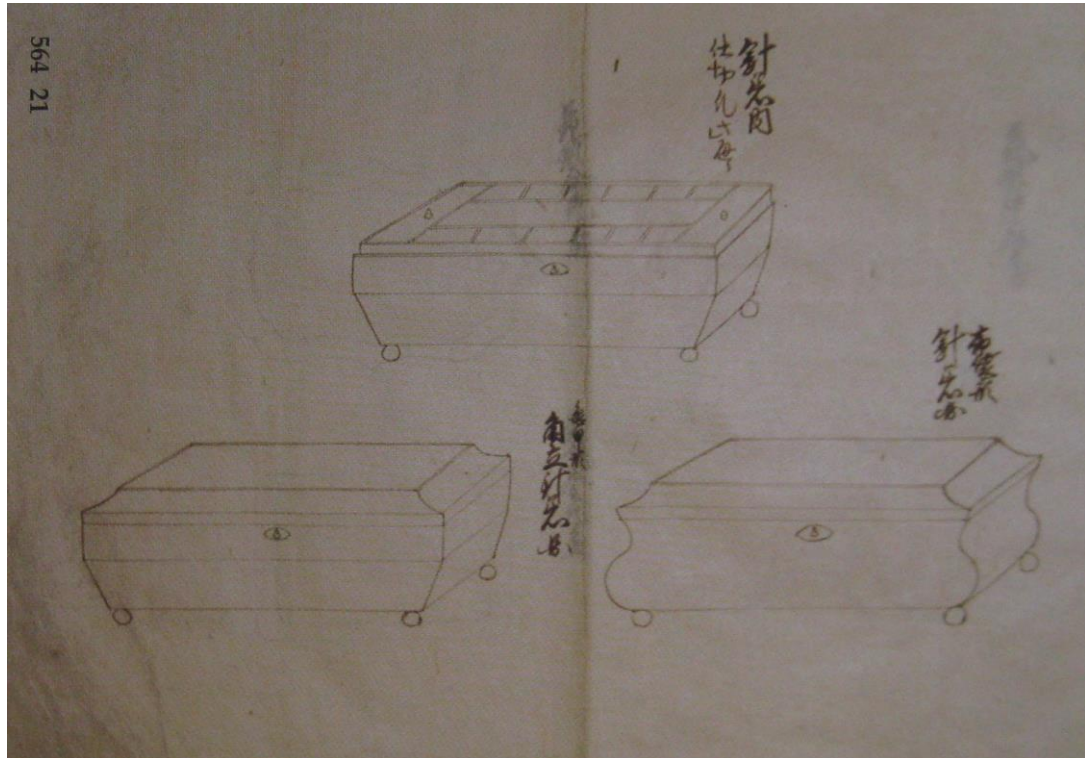


Fig. 6.31: Design from the Aogai makeie hiinagata hikae (Memorandum of designs for lacquer with inlaid pearlshell) of the Assada workshop in Nagasaki, 1856. Collection Nagasaki City Museum, Japan. Reproduced from Impey/Jörg 2005, p. 275.



Fig. 6.32: Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797). Black and gold lacquer with pearlshell, inside gold lacquer, 1820-1850, 40.5 x 30.5 x 13.5 cm. Collection: CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, inv.no. 1809. Reproduced from: vrijmetselarij.nl.



Fig. 6.33: Japanese box with a butterfly lock and a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797). Black and gold lacquer with pearlshell, 1820-1850. Collection: Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London. Reproduced from: McNulty 2006, p. 131.
 Fig. 6.34: Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797), probably belonging to Daniel Jan Bijleveld (1825-1883). Black and gold lacquer with pearlshell, inside gold lacquer, 1830-1850. Private collection.
 Photograph kindly supplied by Peter Bijleveld.



Fig. 6.35: Japanese box with a design after Jachin and Boaz [...] (ed. 1797). Black and gold lacquer with pearlshell, 1820-1850, 34 x 27.5 x 12.5 cm. Private collection, Groningen. Reproduced after Impey/Jörg 2005, p. 211.

Pott notes that the face of the moon is typical for the depiction of Europeans in Japanese prints of the time.¹⁰⁵

Fig. 2.27 shows a smaller box, its lid richly decorated in a lattice pattern in gold, in which spaces are left open for the medallion and two slim fields with flower sprays (type 2j). This example belonged to Gerrit Valewink in Bandoeng in the 1930s and is now in a private collection.¹⁰⁶ In the Musée de la Maison Maçons in Paris is a box abundantly decorated with various patterns in gold in a curious combination with other decorative elements: apart from the medallion, fields in different geometric shapes have been filled in with pearlshell designs of geishas, flower sprays and flower pots (type 2k, fig. 6.29).



Fig. 6.36: Japanese box with a design of masonic tools. Black and gold lacquer with pearlshell, 1800-1830, 31.5 x 16.5 cm. Reproduced from: Auction cat. 2001, lot 492, p. 126.



Fig. 6.37: Japanese box with a design of masonic tools. Black and gold lacquer with pearlshell, 1800-1830. Collection: lodge In Vrijheid Een, Bussum.

Transition pieces towards the middle of the 19th century are of larger and taller size, have softly rounded edges and/or a lid with sloping sides, of which figs. 2.28 and 2.30 show variations executed in gold lacquer and pearlshell (types 2l-2m).¹⁰⁷

By the middle of the century a large shape, not so much a box as a chest, with curved sides and small flat feet became popular. That particular shape is seen on a drawing in the papers of the Asada lacquer workshop in Nagasaki, dating from 1856 (fig. 6.31).¹⁰⁸ The surviving examples of boxes of this shape are large, circa 30 x 40 cm, providing more room for storage and had a decorative scheme filling almost all the available surfaces. As they were mass produced, the inlay work is less often executed in great detail. A number of symbols, most notably the western tools, were unfamiliar to Japanese artists and therefore appear somewhat distorted. It is possible that copies were no longer made after an original print, but after

an earlier box (a finished product), thus allowing mistakes to be more easily recopied. Fig. 6.32 in the CMC collection, decorated with additional flower sprays on the sides and sloping edges of the lid (type 2n), is but one example; others are found all over the world.¹⁰⁹ Fig. 6.33 in the collection of the Grand Lodge of England is decorated with flower sprays and birds on the sides, and various fans on the sloping edges of the lid.¹¹⁰ A slightly smaller variation executed in gold lacquer is held in a private collection in Groningen (type 2o, fig. 6.35). It has details such as little red flames on the candlesticks.

Again the provenance is known in rare cases only. Fig. 6.34 probably belonged to Daniel Jan Bijleveld (5-11-1825/18-6-1883), who was initiated into lodge La Bien Aimée in Amsterdam on 27-8-1852.¹¹¹ He transferred to Java and was given the Fellow-Craft degree in lodge La Constante et Fidèle in Semarang on 14-3-1855. Bijleveld married on 13-8-1855 to Alida Anna Wilhelmina Klein (1836-1910), and left the lodge on 13-1-1858. This was probably because the couple moved to Batavia, where Bijleveld became a member of lodge De Ster in het Oosten between 1858 and 1859. His profession was listed as merchant at the time. Bijleveld is listed again in lodge records in 1879-1880, 1881-1882, and 1882-1883. On 2-8-1881 he became a member of the Masonic Society in Bogor, then travelled to Vienna in 1883, only to settle in Leiden in 1886 at Rapenburg 77. Several later generations of the Bijleveld family also included freemasons.

▪ Type 3: Masonic tools

A third type of decor is found less frequently and only on oblong boxes of the first quarter of the 19th century (fig. 6.36). It is executed in black lacquer and pearlshell on a wooden base. The design on the lid shows a simple combination of crossed acacia sprigs encompassing masonic tools, topped with an all-seeing eye. The eye refers to the Grand Architect of the Universe, while the acacia sprigs (easily mistaken for laurel leaves) refer to Hiram's death and the ritual of the Master's degree. The tools - a pair of compasses resting on a square, crossed with a plumb - not only refer to masonic labor, but also to their place on the bible on the altar and to the main officers within a lodge.

A specific print which may have served as an example has not (yet) been found. This decorative scheme is very similar to that of aprons and officers' jewels of the end of the 18th and first half of the 19th century, and may well have been derived from such a personal object in the possession of a travelling freemason. In the Netherlands, examples of this decor are rare. There is a box in the collection of lodge In Vrijheid Een in Bussum (fig. 6.37) and others have appeared at auction.¹¹²

▪ Type 4: The True Masonic Chart (1819)

In 1819 Jeremy Ladd Cross (1782-1861) published *The True Masonic Chart or Hieroglyphic Monitor*. This was one of the first American manuals for freemasons, which included explanations of various masonic symbols with illustrations by the artist Amos Doolittle (1754-1832).¹¹³ The book appeared in many editions throughout the first half of the 19th century and therefore had a large impact on the iconography of American freemasonry. P.H. Pott already noted that Doolittle's illustrations were copied on lacquer boxes around the middle of the 19th century.¹¹⁴ These are large, oblong wooden boxes with black lacquer and pearlshell.

The design on the lid consists of an altar with an open bible, flanked by two candlesticks with burning candles. These are the usual components of a lodge interior. Above the altar is the all-seeing eye, below the altar is a five pointed star, of which Pott noted that it has the same segmented build up as the illustration of this symbol in Cross. Near the right candle are a winged hourglass, a pair of compasses and two hands clasped together. The hourglass is of course a reference to fleeting time and therefore mortality, while the hands refer to friendship or brotherhood. Near the left candle are a beehive on a stand, a square and a trowel. The beehive is a reference to masonic labor. Together, this decoration can be seen as a simplified version of a tracing board.

There are again subtle variations between the boxes of this type, which point to production by a different artist's hand or different workshops. Fig. 6.39 has a flat lid that closes with two little hooks on the front (type 4a).¹¹⁵ The all-seeing eye is executed in pearlshell with a thin eyebrow. Other examples have a lid with sloping edges, decorated with flowers (type 4b). The all-seeing eye on these boxes is executed with a whole eyelid in pearlshell (fig. 6.40).¹¹⁶ A third and last variation has the same style eye, but carries additional masonic symbols on the sloping surface of the lid (type 4c). These are usually a radiant sun, a moon with three tiny stars, several five pointed stars, as well as a square crossed with a pair of compasses

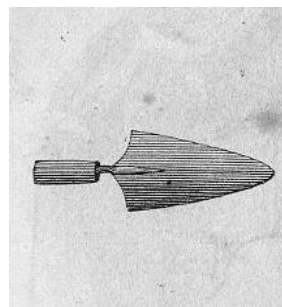
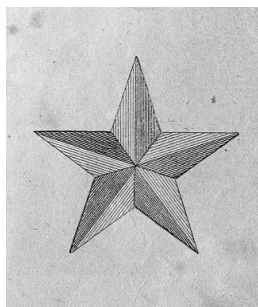
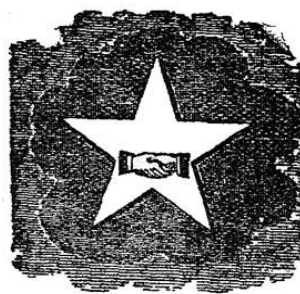
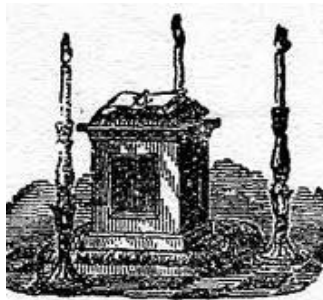
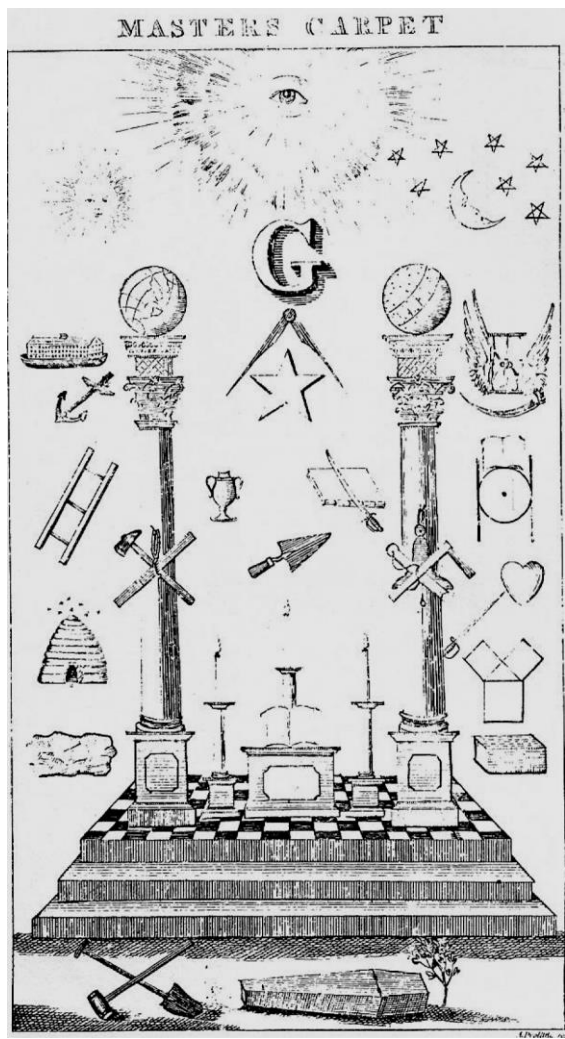


Fig. 6.38: Illustrations by Amos Doolittle for Jeremy L. Cross, *The True Masonic Chart or Hieroglyphic Monitor*, reproduced from the 1819 and 1845 editions in the Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London / CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague.



Fig. 6.39: Japanese box with a decoration of a simplified tracing board. Black lacquer with pearlshell, 1820-1850, 43 x 35 x 9 cm. Private collection, The Hague. Photo: Kroon & Wagtberg Hansen, The Hague.



Fig. 6.40: Japanese box with a decoration of a simplified tracing board. Black lacquer with pearlshell, 1820-1850, size not listed. Collection: Musée de la Maison des Maçons, Paris, inv.no A2-614. Reproduced from: glnf-musee.fr.

Fig. 6.41: Japanese box with a decoration of a simplified tracing board. Black lacquer with pearlshell, 1820-1850. Auctioned at Du Mouchelles, Detroit. Reproduced from: liveauctioneers.com, lot 091078.

(fig. 6.41). The sides are usually decorated with flower arrangements. The execution of these decorations is somewhat less refined than the earlier types.

While the hourglass was not normally an element in Dutch masonic designs, a depiction of *tempus fugit* would have appealed as a *memento mori* relevant to the Master's degree, and together with the other elements of the decoration would have appealed to freemasons all over the world. It is also possible that

Table 6.A: Production of masonic lacquer ware, 1785-1850

Decoration	Date	Shape	Production
Type 1 <i>Les Francs-Maçons trahi</i> [...] (1745)	1785-1825	small + oblong	high quality, few commissions
Type 2 <i>Jachin and Boaz</i> [...] (ed. 1797)	1800-1830 1830-1850	oblong large + curved	commercial production for wider audience
Type 3 Masonic tools	1800-1830	oblong	few commissions
Type 4 <i>The true Masonic Chart</i> [...] 1819	1820-1840 1830-1850	oblong sloping sides	lesser quality mass production

these boxes were at least partially aimed at the American market. As the next chapter will illustrate, the Americans traded with China from 1783 onwards, resulting in commissions of masonic export porcelain. The Dutch may have traded masonic lacquer against masonic porcelain through Batavia.

The provenance is rarely known. An example is a box (type 4a) in the collection of the Svenska Frimurare Ordens Museum in Stockholm, having belonged to by G.M. Rosenberg (born 1821). He was initiated into the Swedish Order in 1856.¹¹⁷

◆ *The function of masonic lacquer ware*

Summarizing the development of masonic lacquer ware above, the production of these objects can be roughly divided into four decoration types and three production phases (see also Table 6.A):

- 1785-1825:
 - few private commissions of high quality,
 - tracing boards and small size boxes,
 - mainly type 1 and 2 decorations;
- 1800-1830:
 - commercial production for a wider audience,
 - mainly oblong boxes,
 - mainly type 2 and 3 decorations;
- 1830-1850:
 - mass production, lesser quality,
 - large and curved boxes,
 - mainly type 2 and 4 decorations.

What do we know about the function and use of the lacquer boxes? It is generally agreed that the small varieties were used to store either tobacco, snuff, cigarettes or cigars¹¹⁸, and could be carried on a person along with other smoking ware. Pott suggested that the small boxes had just the right size to collect sheets of paper typical for a *liber amicorum* around 1830.¹¹⁹ The larger ones are thought to have been used to store regalia (apron, gloves and jewels) and/or documents (masonic certificates, lodge minutes, ritual manuals).

As stated above, lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia indeed used a 'small lacquered chest' to store the officers' ornaments, for which the small masonic boxes of type 1 and 2 were indeed a suitable size.¹²⁰ The aforementioned Hendrikus Veuger kept his apron, discussed in chapter 7, in a lacquer box.¹²¹ After the death of Rijk Peter Vermeulen¹²², a member of La Vertueuse, the 'Sequester' wrote on 7-1-1833 to the Master of the Lodge, J.M. van Beusichem (died 1847), in order to return the lodge archives that Vermeulen had been keeping:

The accompanying Japanese lacquered chest, of which the key is enclosed, contains (as it seems to me) the deceased's own certificates and masonic ornaments, which I hereby submit to your Honor, as not eligible for sale.¹²³

The 'not eligible for sale' probably refers to the customs within the (Dutch) Order at the time. All masonic regalia, ritual manuals etc. from a deceased member were to be returned to his lodge (or the Grand Lodge) in order to prevent them from falling into profane hands. Those dealing with an estate were sometimes unfamiliar with this custom or chose to ignore it, so quite a few objects reached profane collections anyway. In this particular case, Van Beusichem replied that the chest was not lodge property (indicating a private purchase) and would therefore be returned to the estate.¹²⁴ Such examples illustrate that the lacquer boxes were used both within the lodge and in private.

Archives abroad include similar mentions of use. The inventory of the personal belongings of one of the most famous freemasons, George Washington, listed '1 Japanese box containing a masons apron' in 1799.¹²⁵ A type 4 box in the collection of the National Heritage Museum was registered as a 'Masonic Bible Box', probably on the basis of information provided by the former owner, while the large boxes dating from the 1850s are referred to as 'apron caskets' in other collections.

(Even in the faked minutes of lodge Fredericks Vreedendall, actually written in 1816 as part of a famous hoax in support of ritual reforms in the Netherlands, 'A square Japanese chest with seven silver ornaments within' is mentioned.¹²⁶)

The function of a box or chest in a lodge building or a private home is self-evident. But would the need to keep masonic items secret in a private home, locked away from prying eyes of non-initiates, not be undone by the decoration of these boxes? A mysterious design on such a precious object would draw rather than avert attention from visitors. And that is precisely the point: masonic lacquer ware was neither purely functional, nor purely decorative.

The decoration of these boxes, which to a freemason's eye contained several layers of symbolism, reminded their owners daily of masonic labor and ideals, their duty in the profane world. Displaying such a box in one's home, or carrying a smaller one about one's person, was also a means of communication. It provided a subtle way of revealing oneself as a freemason to others. Once recognized by a visitor who was also an initiate, these objects could be admired and discussed together. But even those visitors who did not speak the language would immediately recognize the symbols, and would therefore be more inclined to trust the host, to treat him like a Brother, than they would any other stranger.

The existence of the lacquer boxes raises several questions. As the laws of the Order clearly prohibited disclosure of secrets - including tracing boards - to non-initiates, it had become common practice in Europe to commission artists who were already lodge members (also an easy way of ensuring a discount if not a freebie). In other cases, the costs of an initiation were covered as a way of (re)paying an artist and assuring he would not divulge information to the uninitiated. But the situation overseas was more complicated. The Japanese government opposed western influence and the contact between the Dutch and the Japanese men in Dejima was closely watched. The Dutch were forbidden to import weapons, books or religious prints - but as long as the Christian cross did not feature in a masonic print, that would not pose a problem. The Dutchmen befriended the so-called *rangakusa*, or students of Dutch customs and sciences, who were very interested in novelties from Europe, including western prints. So one has to wonder if close Japanese relations were ever shown or explained masonic images. There is no proof, nor any evidence to the contrary, but there are clear signs that Dutch freemasons far away from the Grand Lodge and the Provincial Grand Lodge would sometimes bend the rules for practical reasons.

♦ *The CMC lacquer collection*

Masonic lacquer ware was already on display in the museum room of the former Freemasons' Hall at the Fluwelen Burgwal in The Hague in the middle of the 19th century - the time in which the lacquer ware was still being produced. But it is unclear which items now in the CMC belong to that original collection, as objects were looted during World War II, and even returned items had lost their provenance documentation. A closer inspection of the 'forgotten' collection catalogues from the 19th century by Deputy

National Librarian Noordziek (see the Foreword) provide an insight into the contents of the original collection. The descriptions are very short, but they do hint at the former owners of these objects. The earliest mention is found in an exhibition catalogue from 1859:

216. Lacquered box, suitable for the storing of masonic objects, having belonged to the V[enerable] Br[other] Riesz.¹²⁷

The caption probably refers to Carel Jan Riesz (1791-1856), grandfather of the famous Dutch author Louis Couperus.¹²⁸ Riesz made a career in the Dutch and the Dutch East Indian armies, and was appointed *Resident* of Surabaya in 1834. The date of his initiation is unclear, but he is listed as freemason in the Dutch East Indies from circa 1835. Riesz was pensioned in 1839 and in January of that year was made honorary member of lodge De Vriendschap, before he returned to the Netherlands.¹²⁹ In 1841 he joined lodge L'Union Royale in The Hague.

The exhibition catalogue of 1860 lists not one, but three boxes:

225. Lacquered box, suitable for the storing of masonic objects, having belonged to the V[enerable] Br[other] Riesz.

226. Fine large lacquered Japanese Box, used for safekeeping of masonic decorations and ornaments, decorated on top with an image of the Tracing Board lined in gold.

227. Japanese lacquered tobacco box, decorated on the top with an image of the Tracing Board.¹³⁰

The first collection catalogue, dating from 1910, also mentions these 'three black lacquered boxes with masonic decorations' as well as an interesting new item: '9. A tea tray made of [= inlaid with] Pearlshell, depicting a mas[onic] tracing board'.¹³¹

A vague picture of the museum room from 1911 provides a first glimpse of lacquer boxes that fit the description above (fig 5.42). From left to right these are a very large box with a type 2 decoration after *Jachin and Boaz* (1797) flanked by flower sprays, and a smaller oblong box with a more restraint type 2 design. The last one, on the right, is a large box with a different type of tracing board. A detailed look at this photograph reveals that this is the aforementioned lacquer box of La Fidèle Sincérité (fig. 6.4), now in a British collection.¹³²

The 1912 edition of the collection catalogue provided no new information¹³³, but the 1913 edition elaborated a little more:

Three Indian black lacquered boxes, with masonic decorations; belonging to Br[ethren] J.H. de G. (2 items) and one of br[other] J.S. On one (that of br[other] de G.) is a picture of the old city inn in Batavia on the inside of the lid. [...] Three Japanese lacquered boxes with mas[onic] decorations by the Br[ethren] R. en W. en der K.'.¹³⁴

So now the total of boxes in the original collection amounts to six. The initial 'R' probably refers to Riesz again. Pott also attributed the initials 'J.H. de G.' to Jan Hendrik de Groot (1834-1907), a book seller, initiated in lodge La Constante et Fidèle in Semarang in 1854 and lodge l'Union Royale in The Hague in 1868.¹³⁵ The *Stadsherberg* or City Inn, depicted on the inside of one of the boxes from his collection, was opened in 1849 at the harbor canal in Batavia at the so called *Kleine Boom* (Little Tree) opposite *De Uitkijk* (Watching Point) (see chapter 5, fig. 5.5).

Pott further attributed the initials 'J.S.' to the aforementioned Jan Schouten, who gifted a lacquer box, perhaps the one displayed at the time, to the Grand Master. The initial 'W' remains to be identified, as there are too many potential candidates, but the initials 'Der K.' no doubt refer to the family 'Der Kinderen', of which several members are recorded in the lodges in the Dutch East Indies during the 19th century. One of them was mr. Timon Hendricus der Kinderen (1823-1898), a member of the Council of the Dutch East Indies and Provincial Deputy Grand Master during the years 1867-1887.

Another pre-war photograph of the museum shows four lacquer boxes. From left to right, the first and largest box is identical to that on the 1911 photograph. The two following boxes - one large and curved, the contours of the other one less visible - also have the same type 2 decoration.¹³⁶ A smaller

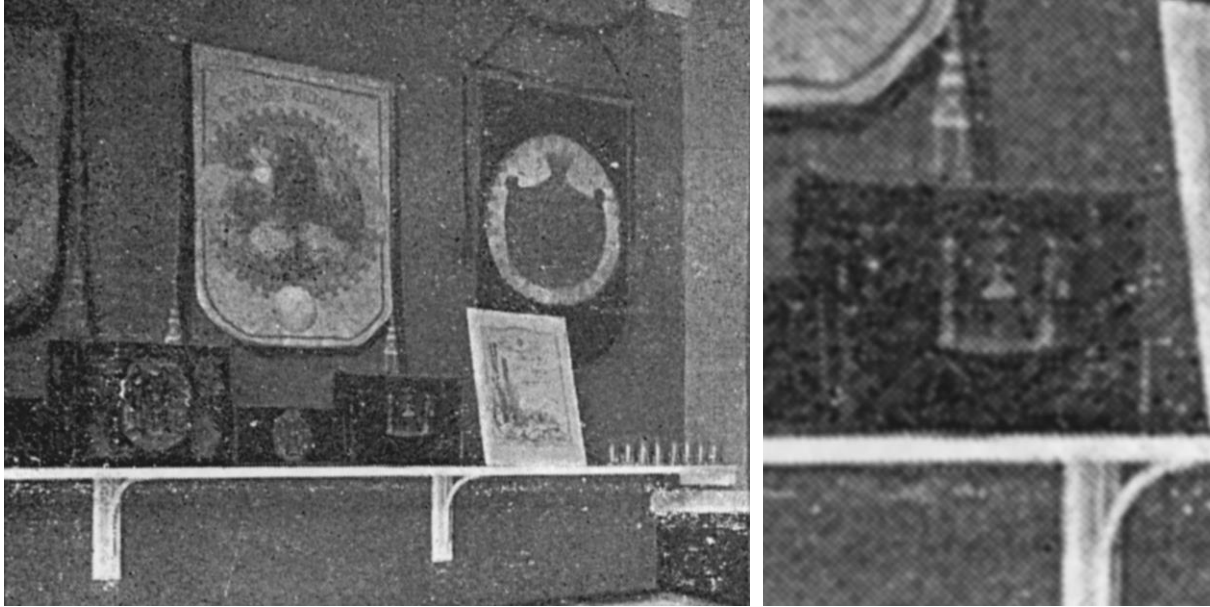


Fig. 6.42 (details of chapter 1, fig. 5a): Japanese lacquer boxes exhibited in the Freemasons' Hall at Fluwelen Burgwall 22, The Hague, circa 1911. To the right the lacquer box of the lodge La Fidèle Sincérité (compare fig. 6.4).
 Reproduced from: 'Het gebouw' 1911, p. 20.



Fig. 6.43: Carel Jan Riesz. Reproduced from: P.H.K. van Schendel, *De Militaire Willemsorde*, 1893.

tobacco box on the right is decorated after *Le secret des francs-maçons trahi [...] (1745, type 1)*, very similar to the examples still in the collection of the CMC (fig. 6.13). We may assume this object survived the war. As the box of La Fidèle Sincérité has also been located, this leaves four out of the original six boxes missing from the collection. Their fate is unclear.

It is possible they were on loan by a lodge or a member, and returned to their owner sometime after the photographs were taken. But the texts of the catalogues suggest that they were a permanent part of the Order's museum collection and became spoils of war.¹³⁷ Were they destroyed, sold or hidden just in time by a sympathizer? If they survived the war somehow, they could by now have ended up in another (lodge) or private collection in some other part of the world, with the current owner completely

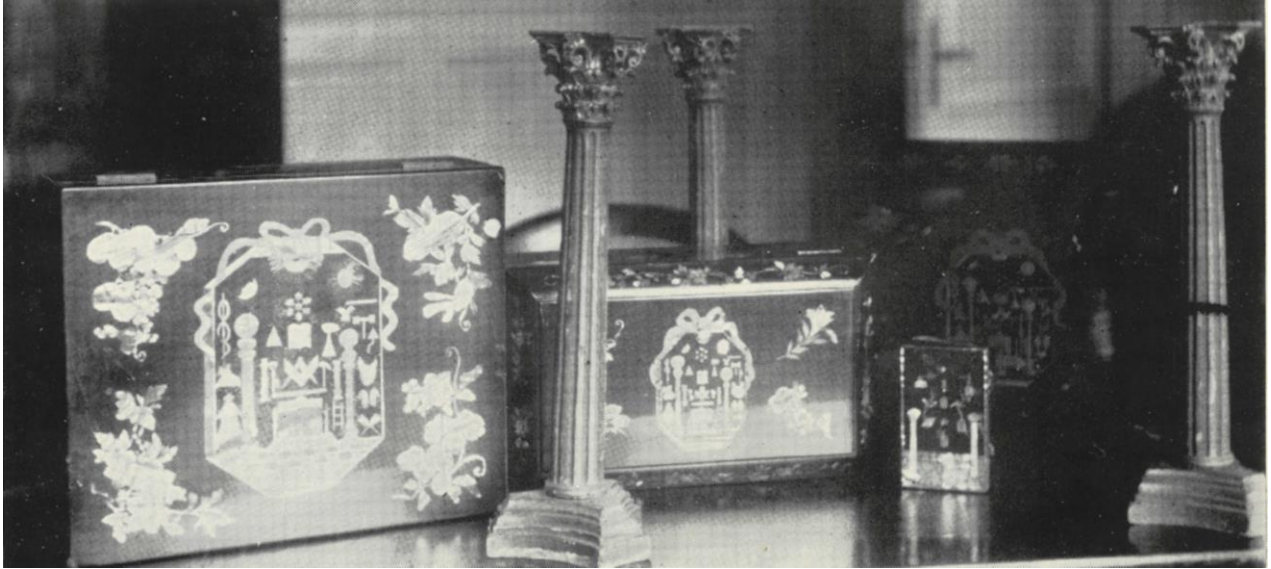


Fig. 6.44: Japanese lacquer boxes exhibited in the Freemasons' Hall at Fluwelen Burgwall 22 in The Hague, before 1940. Collection: CMC 'Prins Frederik', The Hague (photo collection).



Fig. 6.45: Leonard de Koningh (1810-1887), portrait of Jan Schouten (1786-1852) in his masonic regalia, lithography, 1852. Collection: Regionaal Archief Dordrecht, inv.no. 551_15712. Reproduced from: beeldbank.regionaalarchiefdordrecht.nl.

unaware of their history. This seems to be the case with the box of lodge La Fidèle Sincérité, now in a British collection. Perhaps the publication of these images will allow another of the missing boxes to surface so we can document its travels. As Dutch freemasonry lost such a large part of its cultural heritage in World War II, and with it an important part of its identity, masonic organizations deserve to have their looted art and ritual objects traced, if not restored.



Fig. 7.1: Anonymous, the international Factories in the harbour of Canton, painting, ca. 1825, 34.5 x 30.5 cm. Collection: Het Scheepvaartmuseum, Amsterdam. Reproduced from: maritiemdigitaal.nl.



Fig. 7.2: Detail of a 'Hong' punch bowl depicting the British and Dutch Factories in Canton (each recognizable by their flags), ca. 1780. Polychrome enamels, diam. 36.5 cm. Displayed at Polly Latham Asian Art, Boston. Reproduced from: pollylatham.com.