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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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## 8. CONCLUSIONS AND REMAINING QUESTIONS



*Fig. 8.1: Stereo photograph, depicting a candidate before entering a lodge room, ca. 1855-1865. Collection: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.no. RP-F-F10773. Reproduced from: rijksmuseum.nl.*

Freemasonry and the Dutch trade in Asia once seemed worlds apart. Scholars have described the role of East India Company employees in the export of art works to Europe, not for a moment realizing many of the men involved were freemasons. Among the lodge members were ship's captains, tradesmen, diplomats and government officials, some registered in several lodges along the trade route. Their activities were noted in lodge archives and masonic publications. A letter by one lodge officer to another often turns out to be a letter of one Company employee to another. References to 'brethren' and masonic activities are easily overlooked in formal correspondence, as is the importance of a first meeting in a lodge for later friendships or commercial enterprises. By combining and comparing information from two fields of study, our view of the history of the Dutch exchange with Southeast Asia takes some unexpected turns.

It is comparable to rediscovering two halves of a 19<sup>th</sup> century stereo-photograph that have become separated a long time ago. On its own, each half is equally interesting and provides historical information on the scene and the people depicted, but it remains a flat and two-dimensional object. You won't even realize something is missing, until you discover the other half in a dusty pile of forgotten documents. Only by gluing both halves back together and looking at them through the proper stereo-viewer, a vivid three-dimensional picture is restored. The scene depicted suddenly seems fresh, the people almost alive. Hopefully readers will be surprised by the new viewpoint offered by this book and continue to look with fascination at the subject.

That lovely mental image aside, what about the questions which prompted this study? Have they been answered? As is the case with most PhD-research, the answer is both 'yes' and 'no'.

### ◆ *Freemasons within the VOC*

Was there a connection between the activities of the VOC and the founding of masonic lodges in the Dutch overseas trade posts? Of course there was. The trade was one of the main reasons Europeans flocked to these ports and wherever Europeans went in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, freemasonry simply followed. As explained in chapter 3, Dutch freemasons were relatively late to the game, compared to the British. But that was precisely the time when it had become fashionable to be a freemason, as the Order had both an intellectual

and socio-economic appeal - with particular advantages for travellers. So freemasonry in the Dutch trade posts went hand in hand with the heydays of the VOC and became part of an intricate, flexible, worldwide masonic network which far outlasted the Company's existence.

What number of freemasons was active within the trade posts? We don't know precisely because only a fraction of the available membership records has been explored. However, chapter 7 and Appendix II indicate that between 1757 and 1800 up to 20-30 % of the VOC-elite may have been involved in freemasonry. Considering that the sources on lodges overseas which produce these numbers are fragmentary, and that the membership lists of lodges founded in the Netherlands are yet to be explored, the real percentage may well be higher. As discussed in chapter 3, previous researchers have pointed at the dominance of particular prominent families within the VOC and trade post government, such as the Radermachers. These family networks significantly overlap with those of the lodges, where many members were fathers and sons or sons-in-law. The link between freemasonry, VOC and the government of Dutch settlements is evident, and some fortunate careers seem to have benefitted from or coincided with a lodge membership. This leaves us with a chicken-or-egg question: what came first? Did the initiation into a lodge precede a (social) promotion, or would a promotion be followed by an invitation to join a lodge? To what extent did the Order influence international careers and politics? Those are questions political historians may want to try and answer in the future.

What was the background of individual lodge members? The membership lists of Southeast Asia mention everyone from junior sailors and soldiers, to the directors and governors of the trade posts. Identifiable groups among the members were ship's captains and crew; merchants; doctors; civil servants and government decision makers with administrative, judicial and commercial responsibilities, as well as artists, cartographers, architects and burghers or private citizens. Although almost all were Europeans, a substantial part of these men was born in Asia. Further genealogical research will probably confirm many of them were of Eurasian descent. Even though they were not formally admitted into the Order until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, chapter 5 shows that Asians were intimately involved in lodge life in Batavia from the founding of the first lodges in the late 1760s onwards. Some were slaves, others employed as servants or hired as workmen, musicians and artists. As such, they were partly responsible for the (symbolic) decoration of the masonic halls, supplying precious regalia and other objects, catering and even attending at (ritual) meetings and meals. Although it remains to be confirmed if the initiation of women also took place in the trade posts, the frequent mention of the participation of wives, daughters and even 'sisters' in lodge celebrations, show that European (and Eurasian?) women were very much part of 'lodge life'. The fact that they visually distinguished themselves at social gatherings as associated to a lodge or lodge member, indicates this was a desirable status. Here too, genealogical research of lodge records could help to further identify the groups involved.

How did freemasonry spread to the overseas trade posts? Individual freemasons happened to be employed by the VOC in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but because Grand Lodge records between 1735 and 1756 are fragmentary we cannot identify them in any substantial number. The idea that a handful of freemasons on a foreign shore would stumble upon each other and decide to found a new lodge out of masonic ideals is somewhat romanticized. Grand Lodge correspondence and documents presented in chapters 3, 4 and 5 suggest, that from 1757 onwards it actively commissioned representatives to travel eastwards and found new lodges to expand its jurisdiction after the example of the English Grand Lodge. Once the first Provincial Grand Lodges had been founded, requests from overseas members for letters of constitution started to pour in. The missionary zeal to spread the ideal of brotherhood across the globe is mentioned in letters of the Grand Lodge, but in the same breath with requests for contribution. The foreseen extra income from new lodges overseas was at least an added motivation. Likewise, almost every lodge that was founded in a new area tried to obtain the title of Provincial Grand Lodge (Salomon, De Getrouwigheid, La Choisie). Two rival lodges in Batavia, La Fidèle Sincérité and La Vertueuse, even actively competed for it. The Grand Lodge experimented with investing the power of regional representation alternately in individuals and in lodges, to finally decide on a Provincial Grand Master rather than a Provincial Grand Lodge by 1798. By then the trade posts in India and Ceylon had been given up to the British, and as Dutch lodges were never (at least not formally) established in Dejima or Canton, Java remained the only regional seat of power.

What was the attraction of lodge membership? Archives show a pattern of men hurriedly being initiated 'by communication' without (parts of the) usual ceremony, both in the Netherlands and abroad (chapters 2, 4 and 5). The term *recipiendaire passant* (passing candidate) was used to indicate travellers (both Dutch and foreign), only in town for a night or two, wanting to be initiated before moving on to another destination. Lodges in Batavia performed such 'quickie' ceremonies for men stopping over on their way to India, China and Japan. Travelers could even receive the first, second and/or third degree in the same meeting, meaning some candidates were only freemasons for one day before they left. There was a clear advantage to join the Order before embarking. The membership and the masonic certificate which proved it, served as a social and economic passport as well as travel insurance. Its advantages were clear from the moment one set foot on a ship. It guaranteed access to a network of personal and commercial contacts on board, at each stopover and at the point of destination. First and foremost, it guaranteed practical help: being welcomed as a brother into a new town, being introduced into local society and commercial networks as a trustworthy contact. It also guaranteed financial assistance for those who got stranded or sick, and - if the worst should happen - support for the wife and children left behind. An added bonus was access to a 'safe route' for correspondence, finances and even objects, carried along by the captains of ships, who as brethren were a better bet to put your trust in than complete strangers. Combine that with a ritual practice which offered you a moral compass and strong bonding, familiar surroundings and customs reminding you of home; as well as all the friendships, diversions and comforts of a gentlemen's club, including the well-stocked wine cellar, copious banquets and the regular feasting with (unmarried) ladies. No wonder that hundreds of travellers were lining up to become freemasons. Some of the ships of the East India Company and its successors were almost literally floating lodges.

#### ◆ *Freemasonry's material culture*

In the past masonic objects were considered as *curiosa* by art historians. As discussed in chapter 2, since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the academic study of western esotericism is rewriting much of art history. Scholars have pointed at the relevance of esoteric currents to both the creative processes of individual artists and the networks influencing the dissemination of art theories, as well as the buyers and collectors markets. Of all modern esoteric currents, freemasonry has produced the largest and most diverse material culture. This book demonstrates that, when comparing masonic archives with sources on the international trade with Asia, here too history has to be partially rewritten. A worldwide network of lodges facilitated the mixing of sociability, commerce and art, and contributed to the exchange between different cultures, resulting in a fascinating and often beautiful material heritage.

As noted in the foreword, the practical purpose of this study was identifying objects in the CMC collection in The Hague: Chinese porcelain and Japanese lacquer with masonic decorations. Comparison with other collections confirmed that the CMC boasts the largest collection of masonic lacquer pieces, including tobacco boxes and apron coffers, in the world. The Dutch dominated the trade in Japanese lacquer, including these objects, which complex symbolical decorations are similar to those on Chinese export porcelain. Both types of export goods would have appealed to a wider international masonic market. The punch bowls in the CMC collection can now be identified as mass produced for the foreign market, most likely traded via American merchants. While the CMC boasts two bowls not represented in collections elsewhere in the Netherlands, the Library and Museum of Freemasonry in London showcases what is probably the largest and most diverse collection of masonic export porcelain worldwide.

What was the market of commissioners and buyers of masonic export objects? Chapter 6 and 7 have made clear that individual Dutch freemasons in Dejima and Canton - most notably Titsingh, Romberg, Grill and Van Braam Houckgeest - were involved in ordering and exporting such goods. The first masonic commissions from Japan were ritual objects (tracing boards) for the lodges in Batavia from 1788 onwards. These were quickly followed by decorative lacquer boxes, which would be produced until well beyond the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although there is little or no documentation of direct orders of such masonic lacquer wares, the presence of various examples in collections worldwide suggests this was a lucrative private trade, destined for a European and later American masonic market. Chinese porcelain was produced with masonic decorations from the 1760s onwards, which had an equally wide appeal. Many Dutch lodge members ordered armorial porcelain and there is ample evidence of connections between Dutch, British, Scandinavian and American freemasons that would have facilitated the trade in masonic

porcelain. Yet there are no surviving records of Dutch commissions of masonic pieces.

Why was Chinese export porcelain produced for a masonic market, but not Japanese porcelain; and why Japanese, but not Chinese lacquer? The Dutch in Dejima and Canton had every opportunity to order such objects. Was it too costly or too complicated, or were there 'territorial' agreements to be respected? Or was it simply a matter of quality? Japanese export lacquer was regarded superior to Chinese, while commissioned Chinese porcelain had a better paste, glaze and enameled decoration than Japanese. Perhaps the men involved were simply satisfied to trade lacquer and porcelain amongst each other, or to take orders on each other's behalf. This is one of the remaining questions.

Through which channels were such objects acquired? The lodges in Batavia must have fulfilled a central role in the private trade in masonic objects. Most freemasons on their way to Asia passed through there, when ships stopped over for trade, maintenance or supplies. The lodge records show that freemasons stationed in Dejima or Canton in VOC-service before 1800 were often members of the lodges La Fidèle Sincérité or La Vertueuse in Batavia. British visitors, as well as French from Mauritius, were among the many nationalities passing through these lodges, disregarding the changing political positions and even conflicts between their respective countries. They could travel on to India and Ceylon, where Dutch, British and French lodges were active. Swedish freemasons in service of the SOIC maintained successive lodges in Canton until 1813 and the few remaining records show they accepted members of Dutch and other nationalities. Doeff founded a lodge, irregular as it may be, in Dejima in 1804. Through men like Mesterton, Grill, Titsingh, Van Braam Houckgeest and Schouten, we can trace direct lines of masonic communication between the Netherlands and the whole of Asia. In other words, travelling freemasons were in the unique position to facilitate the order, transport and sale of masonic and other objects on an international scale - not being restrained by the international politics that did affect the VOC.

Were they commercial commodities or rarities in their time? The role of masonic export objects changed over time. As discussed in chapter 6, the first lacquer commissions were for ritual, not decorative objects, which were certainly precious rarities, even in their time. Lodge accounts show that pieces of masonic export porcelain were often donated to a lodge by a travelling lodge member to mark his affiliation and brotherly affection (chapter 7). Like the lacquer ware, such services and punch bowls also had a practical function: they could be used at the table lodge, which was a formal part of the ritual. However, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was fashionable in Europe to be a freemason and carry a masonic snuff box, watch or other personal object. It is within this context, that lacquer boxes, tea services and punch bowls with masonic decorations must have become attractive commercial commodities. They combined the status attached to displaying a fashionable, exotic and precious object with the intellectual and social status attached to being a freemason. A rare price list, as well as the number of surviving pieces decorated with the 'five masonic motifs' (chapter 7), suggest that by 1790-1810, masonic porcelain was sold *en masse* on the American market. Although the masonic market was a wealthy one, it was conservative, not at the forefront of fashion. A trend follower, rather than a trendsetter.

What are the characteristics of masonic export objects? Inventories of the lodges in Batavia suggest that both export porcelain and lacquer were used in the lodge, for ritual and/or decorative purposes. However, when displayed outside the lodge in a freemason's home, these objects provided the owner with the means of subtly revealing himself as a member of the Order. He could display their symbolic decoration in a private circle or to a visitor, hoping the onlooker would also identify himself as a brother. If not, no harm was done. The decorations were ambiguous in such a way that the uninitiated would simply interpret them as a biblical or allegorical references, and one could always muse on the beauty of the object and its exotic origins.

What is the meaning of their symbolic decoration and which visual sources were used as examples? As discussed in chapter 6, there are four main types of decorations found on masonic lacquer ware, three of which can be traced to prints of tracing boards in ritual manuals: *L'Ordre des Francs-Maçons trahi* (1745), *Jachin and Boaz* (ed. 1797) and *The True Masonic Chart* (1819). The fourth is a simple depiction of tools, as one would find on an apron or lodge jewel. Masonic export porcelain shows a much wider variation in decorations from both British, Scandinavian and American freemasonry, ranging from depictions of tools and tracing boards, to lodge and Grand Lodge emblems, as well as copies from popular masonic prints and even advertisements with masonic elements. They are listed in full in chapter 7. What almost all of these

objects have in common is that the symbolism, however decoratively applied, is directly derived from the tracing boards and myths of the masonic ritual. The means of transfer were European and American aprons, lodge jewels and illustrations in masonic manuals, which a travelling freemason took with him to Asia to have faithfully copied by a local artist. (In other cases, a freemason made his own design inspired by those sources and had it copied.) The design reminded the commissioner or buyer of the object of masonic labour, virtues and ideals, as well as the bonds of friendship and brotherly love.

Who were the artists and craftsmen involved?

The Dutch lodges on Java ordered paintings and interior decorations, as well as silver ware and regalia from both European and Asian artists (see table 8.1.). Although a large number of receipts signed with Chinese stamps and Asian signatures is available for further identification, for now most of those local artists unfortunately remain anonymous. The same goes for the painters of masonic export porcelain. We do know the Chinese merchant Syng Chong was involved as a go-between in at least one masonic commission. All of this implies that Asian artists working in Batavia, Canton and Dejima were given European images of tracing boards and other masonic symbols to copy. That begs the question:

Did local artists in Asia understand masonic symbolism? If so, were any of them initiated into a Dutch lodge? That is highly unlikely. Trade in Dejima and Canton was restricted, with Japanese and Chinese officials and merchants serving as go-betweens. The lacquer workers and porcelain painters probably never came into direct contact with the commissioners of their products, let alone freemasons among them. But we do know that men leaving for Japan and China would ask to be quickly initiated in a lodge in Batavia. Why do so, if they knew there was no Dutch lodge at their destination? We also know, that men like Titsingh intimately befriended some of the scholars among the Japanese, and that someone like Doeff felt such a need to form a lodge in Dejima that he overlooked the rules. So one can wonder how far the rules may have been bent at any particular occasion, if the circumstances called for it. An entertaining thought, but there is no evidence whatsoever to support it.

What other examples of material culture directly resulted from the involvement of freemasons in the Asian trade? As surviving documentation and objects from other regions in Southeast Asia are lacking, this question can only be properly answered for the Dutch East Indies. Like in the Netherlands, lodges produced a rich material culture, encompassing ritual objects, regalia, furniture, interior decorations and architecture, as well as personal and decorative objects. Many of these served as the props, costumes and settings for the ritual 'performance'. The whole of the material culture of freemasonry is characterised by the decorative use of a specific iconography, derived from the myths of the rituals of the various degrees. Most common is imagery relating to the building, destruction and rebuilding of the Temple of Salomon and the fate of its architect Hiram Abiff, as well as imagery concerning masonic virtues.

In India, Ceylon and the Dutch East Indies lodges made sure they had appropriate meeting places. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century these were often the country houses or office buildings of members, who were government officials in daily life. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings were rented and converted to accommodate a lodge room, dining room, kitchen and/or bar area. By the turn of the century, lodges could afford to invest in the building of their own accommodation, and more rooms with different functions were added. By then, India and Ceylon were out of the picture, but the lodges in the Dutch East Indies continued to bloom. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they owned proper masonic halls, combining

**Table 8.1: Artists and craftsmen working for Dutch lodges in Southeast Asia, 1757-1853**

**European artists**

- Abraham van Campen, silversmith, schienkpiering and regalia for lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia, 1784
- Jean Giraud, painter, paintings and other interior decorations for lodge La Fidèle Sincérité in Batavia, 1821-1837
- Willem Cornelis Jacobs, silversmith, regalia for lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia, 1815
- R. Kimmel, painter, series of 12 paintings for lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia, 1828
- Nicolas Piron, painter, series of 12 wall paintings and interior decorations for lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia, 1795
- Reemer, jeweller, regalia for lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia, 1791-1800
- Martin Wyszinsky, silversmith, regalia including sawasa and a precious crown for lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia, 1788-1798

**Local artists**

- Anonymous, Chinese painter, tracing board for lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia, 1781
- Giu Ki, Chinese painter, tracing board for lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia, 1788
- Oey Kieko, Chinese painter, tracing board for lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia, 1788
- Oeij Tianko, Chinese gold- and silversmith, regalia and seal cases for lodge La Vertueuse in Batavia, 1813-1815

office and ritual space with dining and meeting rooms. When the accommodation was not used by the lodge, local organisations were allowed to hold meetings there or provide lectures. Thus lodge buildings developed from purely private spaces to important community centres.

Were there lodge buildings and temple interiors, comparable to those in the Netherlands? Yes, their development fully reflected what was happening in the Netherlands. Dutch freemasons were bound by the rules of the Grand Lodge in The Hague, which not only prescribed the proper procedures for founding lodges and electing officers, but also for the ritual practice, regalia and lodge settings. Although the Grand Lodge had less control over the lodges in Southeast Asia than those at home, the rules were mostly followed. The decoration of lodge interiors therefore developed in much the same way as in the Netherlands. However, as described in detail in chapter 5, the lodges commissioned both European and Asian artists for building and decoration works. They commissioned such ritual objects as tracing boards, such essential furniture as the throne, as well as symbolical paintings from local artists. The lodge inventories and financial accounts show that they made use of locally sourced building materials, bought Asian furniture, as well as imported goods such as porcelain, silk and lacquer. Inevitably, lodge buildings therefore showed the same mix of styles as do other 'colonial' interiors. It is quite extraordinary that here the mixing of styles, influences and cultures affected not a domestic, but a ritual setting. Therefore the lack of surviving visual sources of lodge buildings and interiors predating photography is to be lamented, but hopefully this book will stimulate further research and contribute to new discoveries.

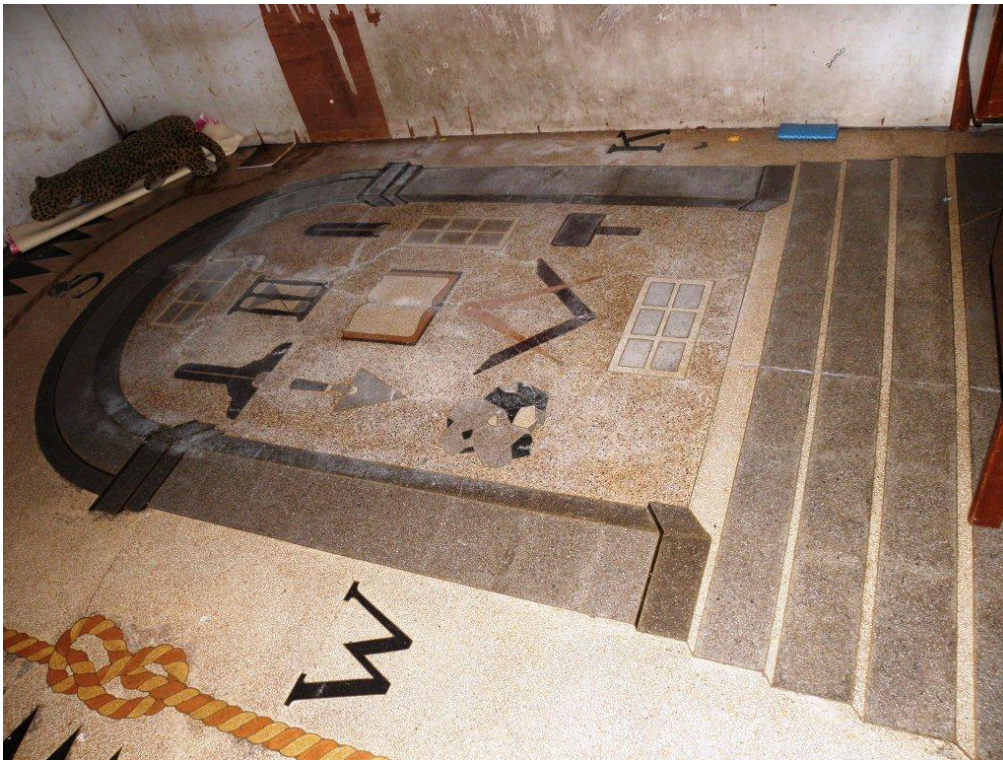
Interesting from the perspective of the study of freemasonry is that the inventories provide so much insight into the development of the Dutch ritual in the trade posts. As described in chapter 5, the shift from ambulant to permanent lodge furniture and decoration is well illustrated, as is the introduction of higher degrees. French visitors from Mauritius were involved in the founding of a *Rose Croix* Chapter in 1794-1796. The fact that so many freemasons of other nationalities passed through the Dutch lodges or operated in their vicinity, also clearly left its mark. The inventories list regalia and props, which do not yet appear in the Netherlands around the same time, suggesting that lodges in the Dutch East Indies practised not only Dutch rituals, but also some originating in France with British elements mixed in. The ritual practise of Dutch freemasons is perhaps best described as 'hybrid', especially where it concerns the higher degrees.

Have examples of this heritage survived? From the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Grand Lodge displayed historical documents and objects in the masonic hall in The Hague, including those from lodges in Asia. In the 1860's, masonic historian Hageman attempted to retrace former lodge buildings in the Dutch East Indies and was unable to do so. Lodge buildings that survived the Second World War were nationalized by the Indonesian government in 1960 and in the ensuing chaos much was lost. The masonic hall at the Vrijmetselaarsweg in Batavia dating from 1856 is now the Kimia Pharma office. Other masonic halls, dating from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have also been converted into offices. The current ownership of what may be the oldest surviving masonic hall on Java, that of De Vriendschap (built 1811), is unclear. In recent years it was partially used as an office, and partially used by squatters. Details of the interior, like the terrazzo tracing board survived, but maintenance left a lot to be desired (fig. 8.2). In the recent efforts to conserve and restore joined heritage of the Netherlands and Indonesia, masonic heritage was not considered a point of attention. Fortunately, most of the lodge archives were transported to the Netherlands and are now in the CMC collection. Among the regalia and other objects currently in the collection some (such as a few membership jewels of lodge De Ster in het Oosten) have been identified as pieces originating from the lodges in Asia, while others still deserve to be rediscovered.

The Dutch assets in India and Ceylon were taken over by the British by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and masonic historians have always assumed that no trace of the Dutch lodges in the region was left. A recent inventory of Dutch overseas archives by the Tanap project did not result in the rediscovery of significant masonic archives, although a handful of documents was retrieved. In China and Japan no lodge buildings or archives are assumed to have survived. On the other hand, as no efforts have ever been made to specifically inventory masonic heritage in Southeast Asia - which would require training heritage experts to recognize masonic objects or symbolism - it seems unwise to rule the possibility out.

#### ◆ *Impact and cultural mediation*

The membership of the Order offered what we would now call 'a fully immersive experience'. After the emotionally evocative initiation, not just the design of the lodge building but everything in one's intellectual



*Fig. 8.2a-b. The former masonic hall in Surabaya, beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.  
Photos with kind permission of Theo Spierenburg, Den Haag.*

living environment suddenly appeared to allude to masonic concepts. Masonic symbolism was omnipresent: in the decoration of such personal objects as pipes, snuffboxes and dining services, music (and by the time Mozart became a member, opera), art, books, satirical prints; even a walk through a garden could turn out to have an intentional masonic design. Thus, the experience of 'seeing the light' in the lodge would have a ripple effect into ordinary life with 'aha'-moments around every corner, each time

one encountered familiar words, signs or symbols in the 'profane' world. Acquaintances one made in polite society would reveal themselves as brethren by offering snuff from a tell-tale box or by phrasing their words so they resembled a ritual text. Revealing oneself in the same subtle manner to others could open doors and benefit careers. You were not just reborn in the lodge, you stepped into a new, much bigger world. As this book has hopefully illustrated, a network encompassing the globe was now at one's disposal.

The trade with Southeast Asia had a huge impact on both western and eastern cultures. As discussed in chapter 3, influences were not so much exchanged from one culture to another. They were absorbed, interpreted, altered and then reintroduced to each other repeatedly over a number of centuries. So what was the significance, if any, of the involvement of freemasons in the exchange between East and West? That is one of the hardest questions to answer. After all, this was just a first look at the presence of Dutch freemasons in Asia, not a definitive one. What has become clear from the research presented in this book, is that a masonic network was intricately interwoven with the Dutch overseas government and the VOC, as well as with the family networks in places of power. It is therefore difficult to see freemasonry's impact on trade and cultural mediation as separate, because it often concerns the same people in different capacities. But it is fair to say that freemasonry's contribution to the exchange was probably more substantial than we ever expected.

- Lodges had substantial spending power and were a part, if not a driving force, within the local economies of the trade posts. They employed the local population as servants, labourers, musicians and artists. They had buildings erected and decorated, and regularly needed regalia and catering. By also employing widows of former members, they provided an early form of social security.
- Lodges were publicly visible not only as employers and commissioners, but also as organisers of banquets, festivities and illuminations, advertisers in newspapers, etc. Their buildings were prominent presences in town. Around 1800 freemasons also used objects with masonic decorations outside the lodge. Masonic prints were supplied to Asian artists and ritual objects commissioned.
- Lodges admitted Eurasian men, familiarizing them with European rituals, objects and symbols. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century this contributed to the acceptance of this part of the population by European society. It preceded the acceptance and admission of Asian men into the lodges in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

All this meant that between 1757 and 1854, Dutch/European culture and customs with distinct masonic elements were introduced into local society. The masonic presence must have been accepted, or there would have been more documentation of negative reactions from the community. But those only came from the odd preacher and from the Dutch government (Daendels, see chapter 5).

Meanwhile, Asian materials and furniture were introduced into the lodge and the ritual environment. The result was a specific material culture which connected Dutch, masonic and Asian elements. It also caused a specific development in the art market, which started catering oriental export goods to an exclusively western masonic audience.

So to conclude, the lodges along the trade route formed a socio-economic network that facilitated trade, including that in masonic export objects. These same channels were probably used for the transmission of ideas, for instance about equality, morality and colonial politics, and for exerting political influence. Those aspects deserve to be studied further, as does the involvement of women and (Eur)Asians. Another conclusion is that freemasonry produced a fascinating material culture, examples of which do not deserve the label of *curiosa*. Instead, this material culture could be seen as an example of 'shared heritage': an exciting mixture of private and public, profane and esoteric, eastern and western elements, which deserves to be explored, studied, exhibited and preserved.

#### ♦ *Masonic, esoteric and ritual heritage*

As the masonic ritual has a distinctly theatrical character, different elements of the lodge interior can be compared to elements used on stage: props with a 'passive' role (furniture), props with an 'active' role (ritual objects), costumes (regalia) and set pieces (architecture, wall and ceiling decorations). Even props with a passive role, such as the throne, often have an important symbolical meaning. A separate category comprises objects with symbolic decorations for practical use in the lodge (such as table wares at the table lodge) or for personal use outside the lodge (such as smokers' requisites). Especially the latter may not

seem to have a theatrical element, but in fact it does: these objects can be used to (subtly or dramatically) reveal the membership of one person to another.

From the material presented above it is clear that no element, object or decoration within a lodge interior was without symbolical function or meaning. Function, form, colour, iconography and symbolism interact to allow various complex layers of allusion. The material culture of freemasonry therefore asks to be studied from a cross-disciplinary perspective, combining viewpoints from various disciplines, including art history, anthropology and religious studies.

Within religious studies and anthropology, freemasonry is defined as an initiation society with a ritual and social character, *not* as a religion. Lodge buildings and communal masonic halls are therefore not religious buildings, such as churches, mosques or synagogues, although they do share some characteristics. There is no worshipping involved in a lodge building, but there are ceremonies and rituals being performed. Freemasons' Halls include spaces with combined social and ritual functions that are not found in any other category of buildings. The Chamber of Reflection, the Forecourt and the Lodge Room (or Temple) are characteristic for freemasonry, and although the dining room and meeting room may seem similar to 'profane' examples, the fact that the *table lodge* and the Dutch *compartie* and *bouwstukken* are performed there, again sets them apart.

Within religious studies freemasonry has now been categorized under 'western esotericism' for several decades, so it would be appropriate if the heritage sector adapted similar terminology such as 'western esoteric heritage' and 'masonic heritage' for the historical examples of freemasonry's material culture. When describing lodge buildings and masonic halls, especially in relation to monuments, the terms 'esoteric architecture', 'masonic architecture' or even the more neutral 'ritual architecture' seem appropriate - but not 'religious architecture'. But why plead for definitions and terminology for this specific category of heritage in the first place? Because of how our heritage protection systems work. Worryingly, masonic heritage still remains at risk in the Netherlands in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As budgets are limited, not all heritage can be protected. Government and heritage organisations can only provide a protected status and related funding to a few rare buildings, selected for their unique cultural-historical value. This value is determined on the basis of specific criteria and terminology. These criteria are then applied to particular categories of buildings, such as religious, industrial and moving heritage (boats, planes), and even 'young' monuments (built post 1945), in order to systematically evaluate which buildings are unique and deserve protection. Lodge buildings have not yet been considered as a separate category. They have never been evaluated on a national or local level, because the results of research in religious studies have not yet been disseminated into the heritage sector and art historical studies. Or to put it less politely, the Dutch heritage sector is half a century behind compared to developments in academia. How does one make informed decisions on protection, restoration or funding policies, let alone demolition permits, for a category of heritage that art historians, architects and restorers are often unfamiliar with? A plea for more cross-disciplinary cooperation between the heritage sector and scholars of western esotericism, as well as the curators of masonic collections, seems very appropriate here.

#### ♦ *The future of research into freemasonry in the Netherlands*

It is customary to point to possible future research paths in a dissertation. However, these have already been identified in previous chapters. It therefore seems more appropriate to make some remarks on the future of research into freemasonry and specific contributions that could be made by Dutch scholarship. Although the study of freemasonry has evolved into a recognized field of study within the Humanities, scholars are yet to agree on whether there is a need for university chairs for this discipline. Regardless of this debate, there is a need for a research centre or other platform in the Netherlands in which expertise from the CMC and other masonic collections, the academic field and the heritage sector is united.

There is no question that, after decades of international scholarship underlining its importance to the history of modern western society, freemasonry is now firmly on the academic agenda, that it benefits from a cross-disciplinary approach and that not just libraries and archives, but also object collections should be included in future research paths. It is therefore curious (if not downright ridiculous) that Dutch scholarship is dragging behind international developments in this field of study, while it has a world renowned collection sitting on its own doorstep. Since 1735 the small, private archive of the Order of

Freemasons under the Grand East of the Netherlands has grown into a national heritage collection of international fame. Scholars from all over the world invest and travel hundreds of miles for an opportunity to study in the CMC. The list of dissertations and other publications referencing the collection is endless. So how long will Dutch universities and museums continue to miss the evident opportunity for structural cooperation, education and research? We can't blame students for overlooking the subject, if we don't present them with more opportunities to explore the history of Dutch freemasonry.

Similarly, despite the importance of freemasonry to the social, economic and esoteric history of the Netherlands, major public collections do not include masonic (fraternal or esoteric) objects in their research or acquisition policies. Of course the CMC does have an acquisition policy, but lacks the means to keep the collection fully up to date and make major acquisitions. As a result, the collection is now at risk of becoming static. This also means important historical objects are mainly traded commercially and remain outside the view of the public, researchers and even freemasons themselves. Despite all the attention being given to religious and cultural diversity in current Dutch policies, local and national heritage and preservation schemes do not include masonic, fraternal or esoteric heritage. Meanwhile the Library and Museum of Freemasonry, located in the monumental Freemasons' Hall in London, has demonstrated how well such a landmark and collection can take a place in today's academic and heritage sector, as well as fulfil a role in the local community and successfully collaborate with the commercial sector.

In the Netherlands a new interdisciplinary platform or research centre is needed, in which curators of public and masonic collections, academic experts on freemasonry, fraternities and western esotericism, as well as art history and heritage professionals can unite their knowledge, and plan joint acquisition, research, exhibition and preservation strategies. The chair for the History of Hermetic philosophy and related currents at the University of Amsterdam (which offers BA and MA courses on western esotericism), for instance, could bring welcome expertise to such an initiative. (Especially so, if the special chair for Freemasonry as an intellectual current and socio-cultural European phenomenon at the Leiden University is not to be revived.)

In future, Dutch masonic heritage deserves to be cherished, explored and displayed - not as *curiosa*, but as an integral part of our collective national heritage.