“Monsters of irreligion and dissoluteness”: a French lodge in Mexico City in the 1790s.

(“Monstres d’irreligion et libertinage” : une loge française à Mexico dans les années 1790.)

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Traditionally, masonic historiography has claimed that the founding of the very first lodge in Mexico City -and for that matter in all of what used to be New Spain and today we call Mexico- was in the year 1806. The authors that have stuck to this claim have done it so without offering a single shred of evidence, nor documental neither bibliographical, and some have even gone as far as saying that in this mythical lodge Miguel Hidalgo -the “father of the Mexican Fatherland”- became a freemason before starting the Mexican War of Independence in 1810. Most professional historians have contested these allegations and are convinced this lodge never existed and that there were no lodges or any form of organised freemasonry in New Spain before the late 1810s, and they tend to regard any masonic activities prior to that date as merely anecdotal, despite the documental evidence left by the institution in charge of prosecuting freemasons and other kinds of heretics in New Spain: the Inquisition.

During the Bourbon Reforms, many foreigners settled in New Spain. Amongst them, came many freemasons, mostly from France. In 1793 one of those Frenchmen, Juan Lausel, who came to work as the personal cook of viceroy Revillagigedo, stood accused before the Inquisition of being a freemason. During his interrogations he shed light on how and when he became a freemason, on how he and a group of his fellow Frenchmen smuggled forbidden books and, especially, on how they got together to feast and perform ceremonies which very closely match those of the table lodges of the 18th century.

In the paper I’m proposing for the 2019 edition of the World Conference on Fraternalism, Social Capital, and Civil Society, I intend to analyse the masonic activity of these Frenchmen, prior to their arrival in New Spain and, most importantly, the masonic meetings and rituals they performed once they were working and living in Mexico City as per their
confessions to the Inquisition; and I will also try to make a case for their table lodge to be considered, if not as a precursor in the strictest sense of the word, at least as the first sign of an organised masonic body in Mexico.