

Freemasonry and Government: The Political Meaning of Civil Society in Eighteenth Century Europe

Margaret C. Jacob, UCLA

This essay begins with a paradox that has never been fully explained. Why in the eighteenth century did an entirely private society, a form of voluntary association – which is what the masonic lodges were – adopt all the customs, habits and forms of government? One standard explanation has been that because the lodges arose in England and Scotland they simply imitated constitutional government. But that circular reasoning only begs the question, offering no explanation as to why this imitation happened in the first place, nor suggesting any reason for the imitation or interest that freemasonry sparked on the Continent.

In this essay I begin from the observation that the eighteenth century lodges, both Dutch and foreign, have left the most remarkable records we possess for tracing the prehistory of nationally identified formal institutions of representative government, most of which only emerge throughout Continental Europe late in the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. The lodges brought onto the Continent distinct forms of governance: constitutions, voting by individual, and sometimes by secret ballot, majority rule, elected officers, “taxes” in the form of dues, public oratory, even courts for settling disputes; eventually the lodges even sent representatives to nationally organized Grand Lodges. The eighteenth century European lodges functioned as schools for government, local but especially national. Even in the eighteenth century Dutch Republic where representative institutions were largely local and deeply oligarchic, centralizing, one-man-one vote, representative national government was distinctively innovative.

The lodges became schools because voluntary associations in western Europe, first in England and then on the Continent, were populated by literate men impressed by the process of state formation that they witnessed around them. In other words developments at the center riveted attention on the actual institutions and practices of government. Movement and change at the core had a magnetic effect; at the periphery it provoked concern, as well as a weighing of the benefits versus the burdens that governments could place. Early modern nation building undertaken by kings and ministers led to thinking about nations and systems of government. Not just among great theorists like Grotius, Hobbes and Locke, but also among lesser mortals, state officials themselves, merchants, lawyers, teachers, and the ever-present aristocracy.

In England the process of state formation resulted in revolution during the 1640s and 1650s. Precisely at that moment private voluntary associations there began to write constitutions for themselves, petition parliament, participate in the turmoil first of civil war, then of restoration, only finally to flourish after 1689 in the relatively open society permitted by the revolution settlement. The settlement of 1688-89 left kings to govern the nation through parliament. It is not accidental that beginning in the 1690s we see an rapid development of all sorts of voluntary associations first in London, then in the provinces: the first four lodges date from the reign of Anne, as do various reading societies, political

clubs, eventually provincial scientific and philosophical societies. The earliest English and Scottish freemasons about whom anything concrete is known — Elias Ashmole, Sir Robert Moray, Robert Clayton, Sir Christopher Wren — were men of letters or science, army officers, politicians and architects – all with a stake in state formation, all in some sense its beneficiaries.

The process of state formation experienced by these first English and Scottish freemasons during the second half of the seventeenth century was also underway in other parts of western Europe. There, too early, modern history reveals the growth of state bureaucracies as well as the increase in trade and hence in taxation. Only the Dutch Republic presents something of an exception to this pattern. In the special Dutch case, after 1701 there was a growing awareness that the institutions of the state were in need of reform and renewal so as to better equip them to meet competition from other more powerful, larger, more centrally governed neighbors. Thus, whether in Paris or Rotterdam, European elites with similar interests and relationships to the state found masonic practices congenial. Not least they came from Britain, widely regarded in western Europe as politically advanced, a country with a relatively free press, religious toleration, parliamentary elections.

The argument being made here about the governmental nature of the lodges calls forth an interrogation of masonic records as they illustrate the governmental, constitutional and representative character of the lodges. Searching Belgian and Austrian, Dutch and French lodges from the 1730s to the 80s reveals the governmental structure thriving decades after the first London lodges came into existence. From those eighteenth century moments, it is possible to go back to the records of seventeenth century English, and presumably Scottish freemasonry, to show the earliest stirrings of the constitutional and governmental forms later so vibrant in western European freemasonry. But before we go backwards we must first go forward.

Our first example of the governmental comes from the Austrian Netherlands. One of the best-known events in the late eighteenth century history of freemasonry in the Low Countries was the decision made by the Austrian government in 1786-87 to close various lodges in its western colony. After that date only three lodges were to be permitted in Brussels, and the number of lodges in, what I shall call the Belgian provinces, was severely curtailed. This act of repression was initiated in Vienna, and it coincided with Joseph II's growing realization that his colony to the west had become restive, that many of its factions were increasingly disaffected from the central government. At the same moment other clubs and societies were also repressed.¹

¹ For those records, see Archives generales du Royaume, 3 rue de Ruysbroeck, Brussels, MS A 124 1104, "confréries supprimés", 1786- 87.

What is not generally known is that in the case of the masonic lodges the National Grand Lodge in Vienna assisted in the execution of His Majesty's Edicts.² As documents in the Archives Generales in Brussels reveal, the Viennese Grand Lodge authorized which three lodges should be permitted, closed down other lodges, and drew up lists of members for the remaining ones. In a letter of 23 July 1786 the Vienna lodge proudly informed the Austrian government that "the General Government of masonry is now in conformity with your edits." On this occasion a fraternal organization, commonplace in European civil society, assisted the state in remaking the contours of another society under its jurisdiction.

The Vienna Grand Lodge acted, as it said, to bring masonic government into conformity with royal edits. However, no amount of assistance from the private societies in the kingdom saved Joseph II's government from rebellion in its western colony. Not surprisingly, the democratic revolutions in western Europe from Amsterdam to Paris went on to spawn new clubs and societies that broke with the established pattern of loyalty,³ so commonplace to voluntary associations found in the eighteenth century and earlier.

The Viennese records of freemasonry raise the issue of just how well the eighteenth century relationship between civil society and the state worked. They suggest that in this period voluntary associations could imitate governance quite effectively, on the whole encouraging loyalty to the central authority. Yet in so doing, they could also foster independence and self-reliance among the beneficiaries of the state's expanded role. They could set men to thinking about their capabilities. The General Government of Masonry. The Austrian Government. How many governments were there in this story? Could there have been in Vienna, both an Austrian government and a masonic government? Was there an Austrian government and a masonic government in Brussels? What if the pupils in the new schools of government were to graduate into societies they believed to be badly governed? The strength of civil society in the West by the late eighteenth century posed problems for state governments perceived to have failed to foster industry, or promote trade, or wage war effectively.

The same question about the nature of the schooling given by the Austrian lodges can be asked of Dutch freemasonry. Recall that in 1756 when Dutch freemasons organized their national system of authority and governance, the Grand Lodge of The Netherlands, they adopted, as they said, "the form" of the Estates General of the Republic. In the Dutch example of the symbiotic relationship between the state and secular voluntary societies, manifested itself in the imagined national and masonic community that took shape in The Hague in 1756.

² Archives generales, Brussels, MS IIOS A 124, Conseil privé, 1786. "Le sousigné chargé de la part de la Grand Loge National de la Monarchie Autrichienne établi à Vienne, de veiller à l'execution des Edits de Sa Majesté emanés le 9 Jan. & Is May 1786 relativement aux affaires maçonnique de la Province des Pays-Bas Autrichiens ..."

³ See Janet L. Polasky, *Revolution in Brussels 1787-1793*, Académie Royale de Belgique, published by University Press of New England, Hanover, N.H., 1987, chapter II.

Looking back some years later, the Provincial Grandmaster, De Vignoles, reiterated the characterization of the Grand Lodge's structure as being that of the Estates General. Indeed he recommended it as the best form of governance to German lodges that were having difficulty arriving at a comparable system of national cohesion. He admonished them to adopt an Estates General as “the sovereign tribunal of the Nation.”⁴ When he wrote of the nation, De Vignoles meant the masonic nation. Just like the Dutch Estates General where each province retained a high degree of sovereignty, in the lodges the form of decentralized governance permitted each Dutch lodge to retain its independence. The evidence from De Vignoles' description and the information we have about masonic rituals of the period used by the Grand Lodge in The Hague, suggest the same symbiotic relationship between the eighteenth century Dutch lodges and the Dutch government that we found in Vienna. The Dutch lodges also imitated the institutions of central government, fostering loyalty to it and by mirroring it, imitating its strengths and its weaknesses.

These efforts to govern in the form of a nation, but to do so within the framework of voluntary association, were particularly characteristic of freemasonry. Many other voluntary associations functioned as if they too were part of imagined national communities, serving the interests of the whole in scientific, charitable or antiquarian matters. But none, to my knowledge, instituted such an elaborate system of government, one that tied local lodges to national Grand Lodges, which in turn appointed ambassadors and negotiated foreign treaties with other Grand Lodges. As the German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, has argued the lodges were one vital piece in the new eighteenth century social experience we call civil society.⁵

Yet the lodges were in many respects different from the other clubs and associations. In a more formal and all-consuming way, freemasonry provided a system of constitutions, elections, majority rule, pluralities, annual assemblies, sealed ballots, even taxes and eventually “courts,” where disputes between lodges and brothers could be adjudicated. By 1710 English lodges had also elected a Grand Master, Sir Christopher Wren, and by the 1720S the Grand Lodge in London could claim affiliated lodges in other cities and towns. In 1736 thirty-three Scottish lodges sent representatives to an assembly that created the Grand Lodge of Scotland. They also elected a Grand Master, but only after the candidate renounced any hereditary claims on the office.

⁴ *Living the Enlightenment. Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth Century Europe*, New York and Oxford, UK., Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 85 quoting from Kloss MSS 190 E. 47.

⁵ Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment. Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth Century Europe*, introduction. This essay is intended to expand upon its thesis.

The parallels between state and masonic institutions are not raised in order to accuse the eighteenth century lodges of attempting to replace one, or another, national government. I do not wish to conjure up the ghost of the abbe Barruel, or the other right-wing conspiracy theories of the late eighteenth century and beyond. They accused the freemasons of plotting to instigate the French Revolution. By explicit contrast, my intention is to ask us to examine freemasonry in London, The Hague, Brussels and Amsterdam for what the lodges can reveal about the stability, as well as the fragility, of the eighteenth century relationship between civil society and the state. Before they could flourish, voluntary associations, the matrix of civil society in the West, needed the sovereign state to be firmly in place. If for nothing else, it was the fascinating source of most news and much gossip. In addition, through informal associations, the power of governmental officials could be made more accessible, even if or when, their monopolies on power made actual participation in the functioning of the state largely impossible. Yet at moments the associations also provided a refuge, an escape from censorship or, in the case of the lodges, a place for assistance and charity, which the state or the churches could not, or would not, provide.

With the state as the structural backdrop, but not as the initiator of assemblies and associations, they could still spend their meeting time discussing just about everything else except politics. The magnetic pull of the political, in the form of the state, encased the social, and bracketed its societies and associations off from the religious and the familial. But within that framework, politics did not determine the content of public discussions or the stated, and often pursued, purpose of the vast majority of associations, lodges, clubs and salons. Whether collecting antiquities, improving agricultural techniques, reciting poetry, doing theoretical science, or paying tribute to the Grand Architect of the Universe, the societies and lodges did their specialized work believing that they were part of an imagined and larger public realm.

In many places actual politics remained largely remote from the social, as remote as the courts or the oligarchs with whom one might occasionally socialize. Of course, there were plenty of government officials to be found in the urban academies and lodges all over western Europe. But the tacit separation of the social from the political was accepted and even coveted by the voluntary societies. The separation had many uses. It could, for instance, actually help to consolidate a magnate's or grandee's power and influence. How better to seem approachable than to be called a brother, or to break bread with lesser men, if only for a few hours a month? The separation also meant that, by and large, the state left the societies to themselves. In the 1740s French and Portuguese police arrested and interrogated freemasons, and in Portugal they were tortured for their "confessions." But even there they were released. By the middle of the century in most European countries such persecution had largely ceased.

The societies and lodges could also be a refuge, a place where no one man or event seemed that important. The masonic records in particular often speak of the lodge as a place of tranquility, as a refuge from a hostile world. Social life outside of home, church, town council, guild or confraternity, helped to refocus thought away from financial and personal obligations, as well as from both commercial and political life. All these pressures helped to clear a space for the social in early modern Europe. Trade and

commerce were also magnets that drew men and some women away from the traditional institutions, from home and church. Yet it was the institutions of governing, and not the practices of the trading companies, that captured the imagination of the lodges just as they fascinated the larger public, the spectators of wealth and power.

The impulse to turn toward the center, away from local events or customs, can be illustrated quite clearly in the actual rituals of the Dutch lodges. Like the towns and provinces, the lodges both actually and symbolically coveted their separateness while constantly trying to invent a center, an imagined national community. In the 1750s the Grand Master in The Hague, the Baron de Boetzelaer, spoke about “the brother deputies of the respective lodges who have assisted at the national assembly held at The Hague...”⁶ At these national assemblies the ceremonies placed brothers standing in rows, the first row symbolizing the “Staten van Holland,” the legislative body of the province of Holland. Behind them stood the next row of brothers described in the minutes as representing the National Grand Master. Finally, standing in the row in back of them, were the officers of the lodge, visitors, and all the other brothers. So arranged, they joined in communal singing and affirmed their symbolic unity. But were they unifying the nation as well as the lodges? I am suggesting here that perhaps unconsciously, they were attempting to do both.

The gestures imitative of national government occurred in absolutist as well as republican settings, and the desire to constitute the nation can also be seen in the records of French freemasonry. In 1738 in Paris the Chevalier Ramsay gave what became a famous oration, subsequently translated into Dutch, which said that freemasonry attempts to create “an entire spiritual nation.”⁷ Copies of the oration turn up in Reims, Dijon, and The Hague. In the 1760's a piece of French masonic jewelry confiscated from its engraver by the authorities in Brussels, displayed “the arms of France illuminating the attributes of freemasonry.”⁸ By the 1770s the French lodges were focused on the institutions of central authority. In their proceedings they seldom mention forms of local power or governance, *parlemenrs* or *intendants*. Neither the representatives of the monarch nor the institutions of local power appear to have aroused much interest or much identification in the French lodges. When they seek to organize nationally, they are left to invent new forms. They chose to establish a national assembly with each representative having one vote. In 1779

⁶ Archives of La Bien Aimee, Brieven archief, no.50 letter of Baron de Boetzelaer, 7 January 1757; the library of the Grand Lodge, The Hague.

⁷ For a facsimile copy of the oration, see G. van Veen, "Andrew Michael Ramsay," *Thoch*, v. 28, no. 2, 1977, pp. 27-57.

⁸ Archives generales, Brussels, MS 1105 A 124; a document entitled "Francs-Masons et jeux de hazard" and dated 1766. In a letter of 7/8/1770 from Neny to Crumpipen we learn that the engraver, Castille, was a Jew who has now left the country.

an orator in Grenoble lamented that “in our modern institutions where the form of government is such that the majority of subjects must stay in the place assigned them by nature, how is it possible to contribute to the common good?”⁹ In the 1770s the French Grand Lodge sought to have a public presence in Paris, both to be near the government and to allay suspicions.

Yet even in the French lodges for women a new consciousness about governance and political power is evident by the 1780s. In one version of the Amazonnerie Anglaise ritual “the Queen” officiates, holds the constitutions, and queries the “Grand Patriarch:” what is the most important order of business for the day? How do men keep women under them? She then urges her sisters to be courageous, to cast off the bondage imposed by men and to regard those men who refuse to obey their orders as tyrants. Now follows a discussion of how it is that men assert their dominance over women. Recognizing the growing importance of scientific knowledge, the answer prescribed in the ritual asserts that male dominance is built upon the dignity conferred “by the study of the sciences,” but also “by the duties of the state and by the maintenance of arms.”¹⁰ In that same decade a Parisian lodge of adoption filled with ladies of the court dominated cannon to the king's arsenal and addressed all the other lodges of adoption calling upon the women to be good citizens and patriots. When we witness the agitation of the early 1790s for French women's political rights, we may justly conclude that women's freemasonry helped to lay the foundation for a new political consciousness, a nascent feminism.

But the French women's lodges were unique in their power and number. In most countries freemasonry remained a masculine prerogative. In the second half of the century, the Swedish king and court were deeply masonic, and the palace served as a setting for many feasts organized by the Swedish Grand Lodge. The fit between membership in the leading Stockholm lodges and proximity to king and court could not have been tighter. Only Berlin to the south rivaled the linkage between freemasonry and the central government. The masonic ambiance of Frederick the Great's court in Berlin has often been noted, and Prussian masonic orators were almost sycophantic in their devotion to the conqueror of Silesia. When we see the German Illuminati imitate masonic forms in the 1770s, we should hardly be surprised given the highly political nature of the devotion that Frederick instilled in the lodges.

For our last look at this masonic fascination with the state, whether Dutch or French, we must now finally return to where it all began, to seventeenth century England. A new document from the archives of the Royal Society in London sheds important light on the early history of English freemasonry. It only came to my attention when I was just finishing *Living the Enlightenment* (1991) and there it is discussed very briefly. Entitled

⁹ Bibliotheque Municipale d'Erude et d'Information, Grenoble, MS Q 5°, f. 3.

¹⁰ B.N. MS FM 4 76, a collection of Scottish rite rituals, all from the second half of the century, see ff.36-41. Note that a lodge in Montpellier adopted for their master “the man more versed in the sciences and physical speculations.” See B.N. FM 2 3°9, 24 June 1782.

“A Narrative of the Free Masons Word and Signs,” the document is signed and dated 1659. Its author is Thomas Martin about whom little is as yet known. This manuscript from the archives of the Royal Society belongs with a family of related manuscripts, all dating from the period of the English Revolution, and these are among the oldest and longest narrative histories we now possess about English, as distinct from Scottish, freemasonry.¹¹

The narrative provides a largely mythical history of “this Craft ... founded by worthy Kings and Princes and many other worshipfull men.” It describes the practices and oaths of working, operative masons, their signs and words, their dedication to the seven liberal arts, particularly geometry. It makes mention of Hermes, “the father of Wisemen and he found out the two pillars of Stone whereon the Sciences were written and taught them forth, and at the making of the Tower of Babylon there was the craft of masonry found, and made of.” The document's debt to earlier sixteenth century texts, now lost, is also suggested by its reference to astronomy. That science “teaches to know the Course of Sun and Moon and other ornaments of the Heavens.” For the sun to course in the heavens like the moon requires a pre-Copernican, geocentric universe.¹²

“A Narrative of Free Masons Word and Signs” gives away its contemporary milieu, the 1650s and government by parliament, when it states: “You shall ... truly observe the Charges in the Constitution.” As the *Oxford English Dictionary* shows the use of the term *constitution* to mean rules or laws adopted by a body has few, if any precedents, prior to the 1650s. In that decade after the execution of Charles I in 1649, parliament created or adopted laws for the newly constituted republic. Precisely at that moment, voluntary societies with constitutions, however loosely conceived, came into existence. At one point the 1659 document speaks of a French king as having been “elected,” and at another it speaks of a Biblical time when “the King of the Land made a great Councill and parliament was called to know how they might find meanes” to provide for unemployable and overabundant male children born to Lords of the realm.

Strip away the myths, and what the document reveals is the existence of lodges of working masons who have been charged by a constitution. They have done so in a political universe where both kings and parliaments may be imagined as ruling. Within this context, operative English masons of the mid-seventeenth century identified with the nation-state. They saw themselves as practitioners of the Royal Art, and they also knew that “King David loved the Masons well, and cherished them well, and gave them good

¹¹ I am using the copy in Royal Society, London, MS Register Book (C), IX, ff. 24^o-52; Evert P. Kwaadgras has made a comparison of the manuscript with British Library Sloane MSS, 3848, 3323, 3329 which are identical with portions of it. This Royal Society copy may have been made later than the date on the manuscript. For Sloane 3323 and 3848 see *Quatuor Coronatorum Antigrapha*, vol. III, 1891, edited by G.W. Speth. I am very grateful to Mr. Kwaadgras for his important assistance with this text.

¹² Royal Society, London, MS Register Book, (C), IX, ff. 24^o-52. On the concept of a “constitution,” see Graham Maddow, “Constitution,” in Terence Ball, James Farr, Russell L Hanson, eds., *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

payment ... and Solomon his Son performed out the Temple his father had began, and he sent afterwards Masons of diverse Lands and fathered them together, so that four thousand workers of stone and they named masons and he has 3000 of them which were ordained masters and governors of the work.” These English working masons of the 1650s have given their allegiance to a constitution within the context of believing that their livelihood and dignity derives from the state as embodied in royal authority. When educated gentlemen joined the lodges later in the century, they only reinforced the identification with governmental authority. Men who could vote in national elections more easily imagined government as an entity intended to serve their interests. For them the habits of elections, majority rule, constitutional government seemed all the more natural and desirable. All those habits were brought to the lodges and in turn transmitted to the Continent. Perhaps now we can better understand why as late as the 1770s French freemasons believed (erroneously) that Cromwell had been the founder of their order.

The point of examining in detail this document of the 1650s is not to try to tease out the political allegiances of English stonemasons during the Interregnum. Rather it is to suggest that in seventeenth century England the relationship between a newly emergent civil society and the creation of new forms of central government were intimately linked. After 1689, voluntary societies, reading clubs, dissenting academies, and a literature full of news and gossip, occupied the broad space permitted by the relative freedom of the English press and by the ebb and flow of parliamentary politics. There was a center in London to which society looked. The English social gaze was nascently modern, and it prefigures the role we assign to central government in our own political life, in the content of our newspapers or nightly television, and in the all-consuming nature of modern parliamentary or presidential elections. The English Revolution was the framework within which masonic constitutionalism developed.

Take the constitutional impulse onto the Continent, and I would suggest that the culture of elections, constitutions, voting and ballots organized its new participants to look at larger and more complex forms of political organization. In the Dutch Republic the typical forms of governmental life were intensely local: *schutterij*, *vroedschappen*, and *landdagen*. Yet none of those local bodies are mentioned in any of the records of Dutch freemasonry with which I am familiar. In the Austrian Netherlands, where records are preciously few for the period before the 1780s, what little we have, suggests a devotion to the central government in Brussels, and after 1780 an identification (despite his suspicions) with Joseph II and government-sponsored enlightened reform. The Austrian Netherlands possessed webs of local authority, urban and clerical. Urban magistrates may have joined the lodges in large numbers, but the lodges look to the center, toward Brussels, more precisely toward Vienna. When the Marquis de Gages wrote from Mons to the Grand Lodge in The Hague in December 1769, he identified himself as a true chamberlain of “the Roman Imperial and Royal Majesties.” He sent the colors and Great Seal of the Grand Lodge of the Austrian Netherlands, and asked to open formal communication between the two Grand Lodges. He could have been writing to a foreign power; and in a sense, he was.¹³

¹³ MS 41:48 (2), December 24, 1769; Library of the Grand Lodge, The Hague.

Being nations, the various Grand Lodges also made foreign alliances and treaties. In 1771, the minutes of the Grand Lodge in The Hague record that “England promises not to grant constitutions anymore to lodges within this territory.” The London Grand Lodge had declared the Dutch Grand Lodge “free and independent,” and recommended that the Dutch lodges operating under an originally English constitution, join the Dutch body. The Provincial Grandmaster of England, de Vignoles, is thanked at those same proceedings for having seen to it that “each Empire [realm] or State will have its own supervision.”¹⁴ This settlement became possible because the British Grand Lodge finally recognized that the Dutch lodges were different “due to the laws of the country.”¹⁵

Part of the Anglo-Dutch agreement had an imperial dimension. Each Grand Lodge would allow lodges in the other territories to appeal only to the home country for a constitution. Is The Dutch Grand Lodge approved lodges in the slave colony of Surinam, and indeed had its own ambassador, brother van Hoogwerf, who was appointed foreign deputy Grandmaster. He was instructed to visit lodges in the West Indies, in Surinam and Curacao. He reported back that the lodges there were doing well, and that they were part of “our National Household.”¹⁶ Like the nation-state, civil society also aided European conquest and domination.

Although committed to respecting each other empires, national lodges could nevertheless recognize successful rebels. In May 1782 the Amsterdam lodge, ‘La Bien Aimee’ “made a proposal to conclude an alliance with the lodges of North America, now declared independent by this Republic.” At that moment, the deputy Grand Master begged off a formal alliance,¹⁷ for reasons, I suspect, that had something to do with the tensions of the 1780s between Amsterdam and the Orangist government in The Hague. At that moment the formal recognition of rebels may not have been in the interest of the Grand Lodge. Possibly as part of an effort to solidify the nation, just three years earlier the Grand Lodge had concluded with the German masonic nation “a treaty of alliance which ... could be very useful, both regarding the general interest of the two Nations and of traveling brothers in particular.”¹⁸ There are moments in these procedures when it is not clear which nations, the masonic or the Dutch and German, have been designated.

¹⁴ MS 41:48 April 14, 1771; the Library of the Grand Lodge. For the comment about “free and independent,” see MS 41:48 (2) August 19, 177°.

¹⁵ MS 41:48 (2) August 19, 1770; the Library of the Grand Lodge, The Hague.

¹⁶ MS 41:48 April 14, 1771; the Library of the Grand Lodge, The Hague.

¹⁷ MS 41:48, May 19, 1782; The Hague; the Library of the Grand Lodge.

Afb. 4 Wand tableau van de rangorde der loges onder de Grootloge van Londen. Staalgravure uit Bernard Picart, *Ceremonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (8 dIn; Amsterdam 1743).

¹⁸ MS 41.48 (2) June 6, 1779; The Library of the Grand Lodge, The Hague.

But Western global expansion took its toll on explorers, conquerors, and foot soldiers. For international travelers or military men, the national character of the lodges permitted an appeal that could compensate for the failure of states to reward or care for their citizens and servants. In 1778 a Corsican brother who had been in the French regiment on that island, but who later fought with other Corsicans against the French, found himself and his family in dire straits. Living now in Amsterdam, he appealed for charity to The Hague, telling the Grand Lodge how the King of France had denied him a pension. His appeal, made across lines of national loyalty, asked that the order “render a service all the greater to humanity.”¹⁹ The lodges, like the scientific academies to which they were often compared, permitted European men to imagine that they were representing all of humanity. Masonic cosmopolitanism contributed to the creation of Western hegemony,²⁰ with consequences for women and people of color, which to this day must constantly be addressed, negotiated, and ultimately changed. Simultaneously, the lodges articulated an entirely secular and beneficent ideal of brotherly love, which they also said, pertained to all humanity. As a masonic orator in Amsterdam said in 1752: “A man who does not love another man like himself can hardly be recognizable as a man, because he has no common humanity. [Een mensch dus, die een ander mensch niet liefheeft, maar haat, is redelyk aangemerkt zynde geen mensch, want hy handelt tegen de menschelykheid en bemint zich zelven niet.]”²¹

True to their humanitarian ideals, the charitable activities of the lodges increased markedly in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. This happened in the Dutch Republic, but more so in France. The correspondence of brothers, and sisters from the French lodges of adoption, reveal men and women caught between two worlds. On one hand brothers and sisters appeal for charity as if it is their due. They have been faithful masons, as they tell the Paris Grand Lodge, and when prosperous they paid for their degrees and ceremonies generously. On the other hand, the tone of the letters is deeply humble and beseeching. They tell of literal starvation, of near homelessness, of a society where the institutions of the state are nowhere to be seen.²² The French state and its vast bureaucracy had many priorities, but the dispensing of charity to these brothers and sisters was not high on the list. As these charity funds grew in size and importance, they may have encouraged both supplicants and benefactors to question the very institutions of the state with which they had so readily identified.

¹⁹ Letter dated Amsterdam, Fevrier, 1778 from Le Comte de Leca Istria, Capitaine Corse, Brievenarchief, no.288; the Library of the Grand Lodge, The Hague.

²⁰ See James McClellan, *Colonialism and Science. Saint Domingue in the Old Regime*, Baltimore, MD, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992. In this island colony by 1789 3°,000 whites presided over 500,000 slaves and one in three white men were freemasons.

²¹ [Anon.] *Redevoering over het gedrag der Vry-Metselaaren, Jegens den Staat*, p. 29; located in University Library, Amsterdam, Redev. D.32 Publication listed at end of tract as Amsterdam, "By P.H. Charlois," 1752.

²² Discussed in greater detail in Margaret C. Jacob, "Money, equality, fraternity: freemasonry and the social order in eighteenth-century Europe," in Thomas L. Haskell and Richard F. Teichgraber, III, eds. *The Culture of the Market*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, pp. 102-135.

The charitable activities of the French lodges assist our effort to articulate more precisely the relationship between civil society, in the form of the lodges, and the eighteenth century French state. The issue is particularly vexed because the French right-wing after 1789 and right up until today, believes that the freemasons were particularly implicated in revolution. In the 1970s Francois Furet claimed that “freemasonry transformed a social phenomenon into politics and opinion into action. In this sense, it embodied the origin of Jacobinism.”²³ Pierre Chanu claimed in 1987 that philosophes such as Voltaire and Babeuf were united in their “having been masons” and as such in having subscribed to “egalitarian, communitarian and libertarian anarchy.”²⁴ But that entirely biased framework distorts the relationship between civil society and the French state as it is revealed in the writings, decrees and archives of both entities.

A more useful and relevant framework of analysis for the French situation appears in the writings of Lynn Hunt. She notes that “not all freemasons became revolutionaries, and there is no evidence to suggest that the lodges plotted out the course of the Revolution from closed doors.” My research entirely supports that conclusion. But she further describes the exceptionally high participation of French freemasons in the political life of the 1790s, from royalists to Jacobins. After 1789 freemasons, many of them once marginalized in the political life of their localities, can be found arrayed in every gradation of the ideological and political landscape.²⁵ Prior to the Revolution, the new politicians had rarely been overtly political. Marginalized by the existing system of political power, they were inordinately active in freemasonry, the one institution of civil society prior to 1789 that sought to be both constitutional and governmental.

In eighteenth century France, civil society was simultaneously drawn to the state and indifferent, even occasionally hostile, to its actual workings. The lodges talked about civic virtue and the need for merit and talent as criteria for true leadership. They were also places where deep social tensions were expressed and adjudicated. More than the English, Dutch or Belgian lodges, the French lodges were places where violent quarrels erupted. The issues were usually social: which brother had status or deserved a higher grade, which lodge had the purest form of masonry, who would be excluded because of social rank or occupation. The quarrels began as early as the 1760s and went on into the early 1790s. But by 1792 the lodges all but ceased to meet. Other clubs and societies as well as the dramatic pace of events had made them irrelevant.

²³ F. Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. E. Forster, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 197.

²⁴ In his preface to Andre Delaporte, *L'Idee d'Egalite en France au XVIII silicle*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1987, p. xi.

²⁵ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*, California, University of California Press, 1984, p. 199.

The Reign of Terror has been analyzed from many perspectives, and I do not pretend to be able to offer any insight into its inner dynamics. Yet its unique character seems relevant to the understanding the interaction of society and government embodied in masonic discourse and ritual. Eighteenth century western European civil society could and did focus on the state; sometimes, private societies like the lodges could even imitate its forms and conventions. From London to Vienna masonic brothers elected officers, orators, ambassadors, even judges. They voted, taxed, admitted, expelled, adjudicated, formed and reformed their nations. The institutions of civil society held within themselves the untested, but real potential of becoming new kinds of government. All that was required would be a collapse of the state.

When that happened, as it did in France after 1792, the Jacobin clubs became alternative institutions of governance and surveillance. Civil society swamped the state, and government became the work of local committees. Not a single lodge has been identified as the core of a Jacobin club. But the clubs and philosophical circles of the 1790s, as well as the rituals used at the feasts of the Supreme Being, did in some cases imitate masonic forms. These imitative gestures should hardly be surprising. Where else but in the eighteenth century lodges could an entire system of governance be found, complete with voluntary social gatherings where an ideology of merit, as well as feasts and rituals, reinforced an identity that transcended the local and reached out to the nation, indeed to all of humankind? The lodges prefigure the Jacobin clubs to the extent that the Enlightenment prefigures the French Revolution.

When the Grand Lodge in Vienna aided in the suppression of the Belgian lodges, we might imagine that in a revolutionary situation it could have become a very useful and effective instrument of government. But it would have remained merely a mirror of absolutist government, with new authority wielded by men with little or no actual experience of governance. They had been schooled in governments invented in magnificent and closed meeting rooms that excluded the profane. In Vienna the music might have been brilliant, but no setting so intensely private could become an appropriate site for the location of state power.

In 1795 the brothers in 'La Bien Aimee' welcomed other brothers who had arrived in Amsterdam with the triumphant French army. Together they joyfully sang the Marseillaise. Had the system of command emanating from Paris collapsed, would Dutch brothers have attempted to govern along with their French allies? The analysis presented here suggests that they too might have been at the forefront of new revolutionary committees. The experience of the lodges prepared them for the political; the practice of actual state power would require new institutional, formal and informal settings. Although private and non-political, the Dutch lodges, like their French counterparts, had given men and a very few women decades of experience with elections, committees, orations, with the difficult art of national government. Through periods of decline, revolution and renewal the practices found in the Dutch lodges served the brothers well; they were prepared to participate as representative institutions slowly and fitfully evolved in Dutch political life.

In the 1790s, right up until 1940, history was kind to the Dutch lodges. They could practice masonic government freely and in private without ever having to choose between the pleasures of sociability and the demands of an authoritarian state. What they may not have always realized was how those governmental practices fueled myths and hatreds. In the hands of evil and anti-democratic men the myths and conspiracy theories would be used after 1933 to imperil all forms of European civil society.