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FROM THE NETHERLANDS TO BATAVIA: THE FOUNDATION OF FREEMASONRY IN NUSANTARA DURING THE 18TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Freemasonry in Nusantara predates its documented expansion in the 20th century, which saw the involvement of Dutch and *priyayi* (Javanese aristocracy) elites. Its origins can be traced to the mid-18th century, specifically to the establishment of the *Groot Loge* (Grand Lodge) in the Netherlands in 1756. This research investigates the early dissemination of Freemasonry in Nusantara, marking the foundational phase of the movement. It explores the spread of the movement through member networks and how emerging community associations were later restructured into formal lodges or *kring* (circles) during the era of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Freemasonry was introduced by European communities with the establishment of the first lodge, *La Choisie*, in Batavia (now Jakarta) in 1764, founded by Radermacher, a key figure who also co-founded the *Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* (Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences), an institution that later became highly influential in the Dutch East Indies. This research employs the historical method, encompassing the stages of heuristic research, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Primary sources include the *Woordenboek voor Vrijmetselaren*, *Geschiedenis der Vrijmetselarij*, various Masonic history books, and archival materials from lodges in Java. The research findings indicate that the establishment of Freemasonry lodges across various cities in Java and Sumatra served as the main avenue for disseminating Enlightenment ideals and fostering social networks among the colonial elite. Early challenges faced by Freemasonry included resistance from both colonial authorities and the church. The founding of lodges such as *La Choisie* (1764), *La Fidèle Sincérité* (1769), and *La Vertueuse* (1769) illustrates the social dynamics prevalent in Batavia, where European officials, traders, and entrepreneurs formed connections through Masonic networks. This research contributes to the field of social history, where spiritual associations are often underrepresented in conventional historical analyses. Additionally, this study provides a deeper understanding of colonial history and highlights the role of transnational networks in shaping the societal dynamics of colonial Southeast Asia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Freemasonry, frequently characterized as a secret society, possesses a long and intricate history deeply intertwined with the intellectual and social transformations of 18th-century Europe. Its influence subsequently extended to the East Indies, where it made significant contributions. Before a detailed examination of its development within the Dutch East Indies, it is crucial to establish the context for Freemasonry's initial expansion by referencing general information from the *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië*. This authoritative encyclopedia on the Dutch East Indies indicates that following the establishment of the Grand Lodge of the Netherlands in 1756, the earliest evidence of Freemasonry in the East Indies emerged in India. This included locations such as Bengal, Negapatnam on the Coromandel Coast, Ceylon, and other territories that subsequently transitioned out of Dutch dominion (Johannes François Snelleman, 1906, pp. 667–668). According to Esquivel, the global spread of Freemasonry was driven by European commercial interests. This made it an international social network, influencing the dynamics of empires or power outside Europe (Martínez Esquivel, 2018).

Freemasonry is recognized for its role in disseminating Enlightenment ideals, characterized by an emphasis on rationality, equality, freedom of thought, and secularism. Although frequently associated with elite classes, Freemasonry's membership extended beyond the educated or aristocratic, functioning as a significant social network that connected individuals from diverse societal strata. Kenneth Loiselle notes that in 18th-century France, Freemasonry served as a crucial institutional environment that fostered the Catholic Enlightenment, highlighting Christian values in a more simplified and practical manifestation (Loiselle, 2022). Other research on Freemasonry in England during the same period shows how the organization changed with social and political shifts. This reflects how modern values and Enlightenment ideas interacted within society (Kiyasov, 2022).

Freemasonry further contributed to social and ideological transformations in the New World, encompassing America and other British colonies. In America, it was associated with liberal advancements and social reforms. Its involvement in the struggle for independence and the formation of new nations underscores its significant social and political influence during the 18th century (Прилуцкий, 2022). In Europe, particularly within nations significantly influenced by the Enlightenment, Freemasonry emerged as a conduit for disseminating progressive ideals centered on rationality and social reform. The organization additionally served as a nexus for the exchange of scientific concepts, thereby fostering advancements across various disciplines, including public health and education. This is exemplified by the contributions of medical figures such as Joannis Baptistae Lalangue in Croatia (Vidosavljević et al., 2024, pp. 66–75).

The proliferation of Freemasonry beyond Europe, including in the East Indies, demonstrates the organization's capacity to transcend geographical boundaries. It functioned as a crucial link between European metropolitan centers and colonial territories. In India, for instance,

Freemasonry played a significant role in fostering a sense of social continuity among British colonial officials, who utilized Masonic lodges to establish social and cultural networks abroad (Deschamps, 2017). In the East Indies, Batavia became the main hub for the spread of Freemasonry. The first lodge in Batavia, *La Choisie*, founded in 1764, marked the beginning of Enlightenment ideas spreading in this region. Over time, other Freemasonry lodges were established, such as *La Fidèle Sincérité* and *La Vertueuse*. These attracted colonial elites to join and discuss new ideas developing in Europe (Alting, 1884). This demonstrates that Freemasonry was not merely a secret organization; rather, it functioned as an agent of change that influenced the social and political order in the colonial East Indies.

The presence of Freemasonry in the East Indies introduced novel social dynamics, precipitating conflicts with ecclesiastical authorities and the colonial government. At that time, both the church and colonial authorities perceived Freemasonry as a threat to existing social stability. This perception was primarily driven by the reformist ideas propagated by Freemason members, who often advocated for freedom of thought and social progress (Прилуцкий, 2022). Despite the tension between Freemasonry and colonial authorities, its influence in establishing social networks among Batavia's elite was substantial. Numerous colonial officials and European traders actively participated in lodge activities. Therefore, this research aims to explore how Freemasonry, as an association, disseminated its ideas and notions in the Nusantara during the 18th century, and how it fostered social and intellectual networks among the elite.

Ultimately, Freemasonry transcended its role as an organization providing a space for social and intellectual discourse. It also contributed to shaping the broader sociocultural foundations in the Dutch East Indies, which were intrinsically linked to a European or Dutch identity. While comprehensive research on 18th-century Freemasonry exists in Th. Stevens' book, *Tarekat Mason Bebas dan Masyarakat di Hindia-Belanda dan Indonesia 1764-1962* (Freemasonry and Society in the Dutch East Indies and Indonesia 1764-1962), this study aims to specifically contribute to the understanding of its early dynamics (Stevens, 2004). This research aims to integrate additional historical sources with contemporary studies on Freemasonry. Based on existing scholarship, Freemasonry was initially introduced to the Nusantara region by Dutch colonial officials in the mid-18th century, coinciding with the strengthening network of European secret societies during the Enlightenment era (Harland-Jacobs, 2014; Jacob, 1991). In 1762, the first Masonic lodge in Batavia was founded by J.C.M. Radermacher, a VOC official who was also the founder of the *Bataviaasch Genootschap* (Stevens, 2004; Van der Veur, 1976). Following that, Freemason lodges spread to colonial urban centers in Java, Sumatra and other parts of the Nusantara by the end of the 18th century (Jordaan & Carey, 2017; Kroon, 2015). Initially, this movement was exclusive to Europeans and Indo-Creoles (people of mixed European and indigenous descent). However, it gradually garnered the interest of Western-educated local elites; historical records even indicate that several Javanese princes were invited to Batavia lodges by the late 18th century (Karpriel,

2001). Several studies emphasize that Freemasonry in the Dutch East Indies constituted part of a global phenomenon of secret societies. This situated it alongside groups such as the Illuminati in Bavaria or the Rosicrucian tradition in Europe, thereby introducing cosmopolitan ideas, rationalism, and humanism to the colonies (Jacob, 1991; Kroon, 2015). In the Dutch colonial context, these lodges served as crucial social and intellectual network nodes, connecting the Nusantara with the currents of modern European thought (Kroon, 2015).

Recent literature indicates that Freemasonry in the Nusantara during the 18th and 19th centuries significantly impacted the political-colonial, cultural, and intellectual spheres. Politically, the Masonic network was intimately linked to the colonial structure. The colonial government exhibited relative tolerance, perceiving Freemasons as partners in the "modernization" of the indigenous elite, despite occasional suspicion from the church and European conservatives (Kroon, 2015). Freemasonry's propagation and activities successfully recruited numerous *priyayi* and local nobles, thereby distancing them from the influence of *santri* (devout Muslims) and Islamic movements perceived as threats to Colonialism (Arifin, 2018; Thohir et al., 2021). From a cultural and intellectual perspective, Freemason lodges served as venues for the exchange of ideas between Europeans and educated indigenous individuals. Within these spaces, concepts such as Secularism, universal Humanism, and Western science were introduced and deliberated (Harland-Jacobs, 2014).

Historians acknowledge Freemasonic contributions to the establishment of schools, libraries, press publications, and scientific societies within the Dutch East Indies. These initiatives collectively accelerated the development of an educated class and fostered national discourse in the Nusantara (Harland-Jacobs, 2014; Kroon, 2015; Oostindie & Paasman, 1998). Transnational connections were also evident, with lodges in the Nusantara affiliated with the Grand Orient in the Netherlands and corresponding with other lodges across Asia. This facilitated the flow of colonial ideology and the formation of cosmopolitan elite networks (Harland-Jacobs, 2014; Kroon, 2015). Recent historiography tends to characterize colonial Freemasonry as an ambivalent agent of Westernization. While it supported the colonial ethical policy and the formation of Dutch patronage networks, it concurrently contributed to the dissemination of critical thinking and modernity among the indigenous elite (Thohir et al., 2021).

Sourced from colonial documents, this research tends to present a historiography that positions Westerners as primary actors or pioneers, thus fostering a Western-centric or Eurocentric perspective (Nurhuda & Syaputri, 2023). This perspective also arises from the fact that early Freemasonry in the East Indies did not include indigenous people; their widespread initiation only began in the 20th century. Therefore, despite this Eurocentric view, this research aims to delve deeper into the role of Freemasonry, its internal and external dynamics in the East Indies, and the existence of Freemasonry lodges during the 18th century. This period is crucial because, from the early 20th century until the end of Dutch rule, Freemasonry evolved into a "secret" society with

over 1,400 members, encompassing Dutch, Chinese, and indigenous individuals (Thohir et al., 2021). This research is expected to enhance the understanding of Freemasonry in the Nusantara, while simultaneously offering broader insight into the interaction between Colonialism, Enlightenment ideas, and the social transformations that occurred during that period.

II. METHOD

This research employs the historical method, deemed appropriate for investigating past phenomena (Arifin, 2023; Brundage, 2018; Madjid & Wahyudhi, 2014). The historical method comprises four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The heuristic stage involves the identification and collection of diverse historical sources (Howell & Prevenier, 2001). This stage involves tracing various historical sources, including physical documents from the National Library of Indonesia (Perpustakaan Nasional RI) and the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia - ANRI), as well as digital documents from platforms like Delpher and other digital archive providers. This heuristic process yielded several key documents, such as *Woordenboek voor Vrijmetselaren* (Dictionary for Freemasons), *Geschiedenis van de Orde der Vrijmetselaren in Nederland* (History of the Order of Freemasons in the Netherlands), *Geschiedenis der Vrijmetselarij in de Oostelijke en Zuidelijke deelen des aardbols* (History of Freemasonry in the Eastern and Southern Parts of the Globe), alongside various Freemasonry history books and related articles. Subsequently, source criticism is performed by verifying the authenticity of these sources through external criticism and evaluating the relevance and accuracy of their content through internal criticism (Abdurrahman, 2011). The interpretation stage combines the verified information for analysis, focusing on the dissemination of Freemasonry in the Nusantara, the role of lodges in establishing social networks, and the interaction of Enlightenment ideas with social and political dynamics in the Dutch East Indies. In the historiography stage, the analytical findings are structured into a narrative that reconstructs historical events (Sjamsuddin, 2012). This research focuses on the 18th-century development of Freemasonry in the Nusantara, aiming to highlight its contribution to forming social networks among the colonial elite in Batavia and other regions. Through a historiographical approach, this study provides a deeper understanding of the role of transnational movements like Freemasonry within the context of colonial history and socio-political dynamics in Southeast Asia.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

VOC, Economic Networks and Freemasonry

Freemasonry in the Dutch East Indies, or the East Indies as it was then known, was officially established in 1756, though early indications of its presence in the Dutch East Indies predate this (Alting, 1884). Carpentier Alting further notes a significant event on December 28, 1758, when Jan Elias Larwood van Schevickhaven was appointed as the Provincial Grand Master for the East

Indies. Larwood van Schevickhaven, a ship captain for the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and a member of the *Concordia Vincit Animos* lodge in Amsterdam, had his appointment mark the official commencement of Freemasonry's development in this colonial territory. At that time, Batavia served as the largest city within the Dutch Colony and a central hub for trade in the East Indies (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872).

The proliferation of Freemasonry in the East Indies aligns with Esquivel's perspective that its global dissemination was intrinsically linked to European commercial interests (Martínez Esquivel, 2018). In this context, the VOC and its extensive networks transformed the East Indies from merely a commercial territory into an integral part of an international spiritual network extending beyond Europe.

Before detailing the first lodge in the East Indies, it's crucial to highlight the establishment of various lodges along European trade routes to Southeast Asia, illustrating Freemasonry's global network. The first lodge founded under Dutch authority was "*De Langgewenstheid*," opened on November 9, 1773, in Negapatnam, on the Coromandel coast. This lodge was specifically established to serve the Dutch community in that region. Also, several other lodges were founded in other Asian territories, including "*De Getrouwheid*" in Colombo, Ceylon, in 1770, and "*De Oprechtheid*" in Point de Galle, established in 1772.

These lodges subsequently encountered significant challenges due to the loss of Dutch colonial territories to the British, which ultimately resulted in their dissolution or absorption by the Grand Lodge of England (Alting, 1884). In the English context, Freemasonry functioned as a unifying force within the British Empire, particularly between England and India. Within this domain, Masonic lodges facilitated the exchange of ideas and fostered a sense of cultural continuity, thereby strengthening imperial ties (Deschamps, 2017). Among the lodges assumed by the Grand Lodge of England after the Dutch ceded their colonial territories were *De Langgewenschede* Lodge in Negapatnam, Coromandel Coast (opened November 9, 1773), and several lodges in Sri Lanka: *De Getrouwheid* Lodge in Colombo (founded in 1770), *De Oprechtheid* Lodge in Point de Galle (founded in 1772), and *De Vereeniging* or *Virtus Nostra Dutrix* Lodge in Colombo, established by the island's Governor-General, Gerard van Angelbeek, in 1794 (Alting, 1884). After 1806, the Dutch Grand Orient received no further information regarding these Masonic workplaces. However, it's undeniable that the proliferation of Masonic lodges in the East Indies, according to Hageman, is inextricably linked to the presence of English Freemasons (Stevens, 2004).

La Choisie Lodge, Radermacher, and East Indies Freemasonry

Prior to discussing the establishment of the first lodge in Batavia, it is important to reference Hageman's notes regarding the legal prerequisites for granting lodge permission. Hageman recorded that old regulations concerning local Masonic work, detailed in the constitution book of

5760 (1760 CE), stipulated that only the Grand Master or a specifically mandated representative could conduct the inaugural ceremony, illuminate the Masonic light, and examine Masters and Wardens on their knowledge of Freemasonry (Hageman JCz., 1866). Tested members were required to demonstrate their worthiness, moral integrity, honesty, and unwavering commitment to the global Freemason brotherhood. A lodge would only be officially established as a Masonic workplace after all such requirements had been fulfilled.

In Batavia, the first officially established Freemasonry lodge was *La Choisie* Lodge, founded in 1764. Following its legal establishment, a 'division of power' occurred concerning regional authority within the Indies. The *Salomon* lodge in Bengal was granted jurisdiction over the West Indies and its environs, including the Mongol and Persian empires, the Coromandel and Malabar Coasts, and the island of Ceylon. Concurrently, *La Choisie* Lodge in Batavia was assigned authority over the East Indies and its vicinity, encompassing Java, Sumatra, Malacca, Makassar, Ternate, Amboina, Banda, and adjacent areas (Stevens, 2004). based on the constitution book related to the *Groot Loge van de Vereenigde Nederlanden*, from Resolution 18. X. 5757, the Code Maçon of 1773, that the section '*Lyst der Loges, Gehorende onder het Grootmeesterschap in Holland*' (List of Lodges, Belonging under the Grand Mastership in Holland) lists the year, place, and name of the lodge as: 1764, Batavia, *La Choisie* (Hageman JCz., 1866). Based on this document, Hageman asserts that *La Choisie* Lodge existed until at least 1772, despite a historical review by Redenaar from the '*De Ster in het Oosten*' lodge suggesting its lifespan was only three years. Hageman recorded this establishment as a bold decision, as quoted below:

“This was a bold undertaking; for at that time, those in power in this region—no less than the rulers in the homeland—were strongly hostile toward Freemasonry; and especially the church, which consistently used its often substantial influence to portray those who called themselves 'children of light' as dangerous entities to both the state and the church.” (Hageman JCz., 1866, pp. 34–42).

Hageman suspected the lodge's brief existence was attributable to the narrow perspectives of both secular and ecclesiastical authorities, coupled with the departure of its founder and various other contributing factors (Hageman JCz., 1866). Hageman notes that J. C. M. Radermacher left Batavia for the Netherlands in 1764, seemingly arriving by December of that year, as he was elected Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge in The Hague on December 23, 1764. In 1766, Radermacher obtained a Doctor of Law degree from the University of Harderwijk. He subsequently became an honorary advisor to the city of Vlissingen, and in January 1767, he returned to Batavia.

Jacob Cornelis Matthéus Radermacher was a pivotal figure in the establishment of *La Choisie* Lodge and the early development of Freemasonry in this region (Hageman JCz., 1866). Born in The Hague in 1741, Radermacher departed for the East Indies at the age of 16, contributing to Dutch efforts to expand their regional influence. He held a prestigious social standing as the husband of Hugo van Eyssel's daughter, a member of the Council of the East Indies. Radermacher

founded *La Choisie* Lodge at the age of 23 (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872). Beyond his Masonic affiliations, Radermacher was known as an intellectual who actively championed the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas among colonial officials and European traders. *La Choisie* Lodge symbolized the initial spread of Freemasonry in the East Indies and exemplified Radermacher's role as an intermediary between Dutch Freemasonry and the colonial world. Furthermore, Radermacher is also recognized for his active involvement in various other intellectual endeavors in Batavia, including the establishment of institutions such as the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen in 1778 (Hageman JCz., 1866).

Radermacher's role extended beyond merely establishing lodges in Batavia; he also contributed to the founding of other intellectual institutions. In 1778, Radermacher established the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, an institution dedicated to promoting scientific and cultural research in the East Indies (Hageman JCz., 1866). This institution became a primary intellectual center in the Indies, with many of its members also being Freemasons. Consequently, the *Encyclopædie van Nederlandsch-Indie* reasonably posits that, due to its initiation by Freemasons, the institution can be considered a Freemasonic foundation (Johannes François Snelleman, 1906). This illustrates how Freemasonry and intellectual activities often went hand-in-hand in the colonial territories, with Freemasons actively involved in research and the writing of history, science, and culture.

Under Radermacher's influence, lodges in Batavia flourished, attracting members from diverse backgrounds, including merchants, military officials, and civil servants. According to Gelman Taylor, lodge membership in late 18th-century Batavia was associated with a European identity, demonstrating "very Dutch behavior" where these lodges in the East Indies resembled "Dutch-speaking clubs in non-Dutch surroundings" (Stevens, 2004). Records indicate that van der Voort served as the Master of *La Choisie* Lodge for three years until 1766, despite its short lifespan attributed to inherent divisions present from its inception (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872).

La Choisie Lodge conducted its various activities at a building called the Heeren Logement within the city of Batavia. The management of this building was carried out by a Casteleyn, appointed by the government and paid eight percent of all sales commissions. The Heeren Logement was under the full control of the government, and its management was regulated in *Het Heeren of Stadslogement* (Hageman JCz., 1866). The government's full management and control also indicate that governmental power could directly influence the continuation of *La Choisie* Lodge's activities.

La Choisie Lodge only lasted for a few years. Before the requested constitution letter from the Dutch Grand Lodge arrived, the lodge was forced to close. This closure was due to the political and social challenges of the time that hindered the development of Freemasonry in the Dutch East Indies (Alting, 1884). According to Hageman, Freemasonry at that time was often regarded as a suspicious and subversive organization, particularly by ecclesiastical and political authorities in

both Europe and the colonies. In Batavia, local authorities were likely concerned that Freemasonry's activities would challenge the existing social and political order, which was dominated by colonial power and the church (Hageman JCz., 1866). Maarschalk notes that by the late 1760s and early 1770s, *La Choisie* Lodge had already closed, just like other lodges in several places in the Netherlands (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872).

According to Gedenkboek Vrijmetselarij, despite its brief existence, *La Choisie* Lodge laid the foundation for the continuation of Freemasonry in Batavia. After its establishment, Freemasonry flourished in the East Indies, with several new lodges being formed in Batavia and surrounding areas. By 1781, Batavia had two main lodges, *La Fidèle Sincérité* and *La Vertueuse*, with a total of 130 members. This growth reflected Freemasonry's appeal among the colonial elite, who saw it as a means to build social networks, expand political influence, and discuss ideas of social reform. These lodges also frequently served as venues for discussions on economic and political developments in the Indies, as well as policies implemented by the colonial government. One influential lodge established after *La Choisie* was *La Fidèle Sincérité*, formed in 1767, which became a central hub for Freemason activities in Batavia. Although *La Choisie* Lodge closed, Freemasonry was revived in Batavia in 1767 with the establishment of the new lodge named *La Fidèle Sincérité* (Alting, 1884). However, according to Hageman, Radermacher did not participate in the founding of this second Masonic workplace.

***La Fidèle Sincérité* Lodge and *La Vertueuse* Lodge in Batavia**

La Fidèle Sincérité Lodge was established by several Freemason figures, most of whom had previously been members of the earlier *La Choisie* Lodge. Hageman provides brief profiles of these individuals:

1. Johan Ulrich Schneider, a German-born military lieutenant in Batavia, served as the first chairman of *La Fidélité Sincèrite* Lodge. His military career saw him steadily rise through the ranks, becoming a captain and second commander of forces in Ambon by 1772, a major in 1779, and ultimately the chief military commander from 1783 onward.
2. Johan Martin Beemer (or Rhemer), who later became the lodge's second chairman, was noted in 1769 as a militia captain on the east side of the city, indicating his civilian status. By 1772, he had risen to become a Schepen, an alderman or member of the city council.
3. Regarding P. Röhrbom, A. Musquetier, and J. Van der Wijck, Hageman found no information about their positions. By 1772, according to Hageman, they were either no longer alive or no longer in the East Indies.
4. A. Musquetier is recorded in 1769 as one of the founders of the third Masonic workplace.
5. J. Van der Wijck is recorded as the third chairman (Hageman JCz., 1866).

Based on official records, commemorative Masonic works from the 5839 (1839 CE) yearbook, and research by Orator van Teutem, Jan Ulrich Schneider was elected the first chairman of *La Fidélité Sincèrite* Lodge. He then selected the other lodge officers: Faidus Röhrborn and Jan Marien Beemer as the first and second Overseers, Jacob van der Wijck as Secretary, and Arnoldus Musquetier as Treasurer (Hageman JCz., 1866). The lodge's new constitution charter was received on June 9, 1770, after which the first St. John's Day celebration was held. However, the formal installation did not take place until July 1772, when it was officially sanctioned by Abraham van der Weyden, a deputy and delegate of the Provincial Grand Master (or acting Provincial Grand Master), who was also a VOC ship captain (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872 ; Loge "De Ster in het Oosten" Weltevreden et al., 1917).

La Fidèle Sincérité Lodge drew its members not only from high-ranking colonial officials but also from European merchants and entrepreneurs conducting business in the East Indies. According to Hageman's research of the Batavia lodge archives, between 1764 and 1774, there were at least 124 active Freemasons, with the lowest number being 116 in 1767. No records are available for the period between 1774 and 1778. However, data from 1781 indicates a total of 130 active Freemasons across Batavia's two main lodges: *La Fidèle Sincérité* Lodge, with 78 members, and *La Vertueuse* Lodge, with 52 members (Hageman JCz., 1866). The membership numbers suggest that *La Fidèle Sincérité* Lodge was among the largest lodges in the Dutch East Indies. This lodge was instrumental in disseminating Freemasonry's principles and in fostering a robust social network among the colonial rulers. Hageman notes that Freemasons within *La Fidèle Sincérité* Lodge comprised military personnel, foreigners, sailors, and civilians. The presence of foreign sailors, such as Bougainville in 1768 and Surville in 1769, sparked curiosity and a desire for discreet involvement, thereby attracting many individuals from various other social classes to Freemasonry (Hageman JCz., 1866).

The initial meetings of *La Fidèle Sincérité* Lodge were held at the Heeren Logement in Batavia, the very location where *La Choisie* Lodge had previously operated. These gatherings were initially shrouded in secrecy, but over time, they gradually became more open. Eventually, their presence in the heart of the city was no longer well-protected (Hageman JCz., 1866). This lodge underwent several changes in location, adapting to situations, conditions, and the consensus of its officers and members. After initially holding meetings at the Heeren-Logement, they moved to Van Heijs's house. In 1770, they relocated to a garden belonging to Brother H.C. de Lopez. By 1773, they moved to a building on Amanusgracht, where they remained until 1815. Subsequently, the lodge moved to a house on Tijgergracht, which was a donation from Van Riemsdijk. Following Van Riemsdijk's death, the lodge moved to Jacatra, staying there until 1837. According to Maarschalk, an interesting aspect is that the Freemasons of *La Fidèle Sincérité* Lodge were not from prominent and wealthy circles. Consequently, this lodge consistently faced financial difficulties, despite being better able to meet its financial obligations to the Groot-Loge in the Netherlands compared to the

"richer" *La Vertueuse* Lodge (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872). Ultimately, in 1837, this lodge merged with *La Vertueuse* Lodge, which had been founded in 1769, to form a new lodge called De Ster in het Oosten. This merger was undertaken to strengthen the presence of Freemasonry in Batavia (Loge "De Ster in het Oosten" Weltevreden et al., 1917). According to Maarschalk, *La Fidèle Sincérité* Lodge remained active and existed continuously, except for the period from 1793 to 1796, when it was closed due to political events (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872). It remains unclear which specific political events Maarschalk refers to, but it's plausible that this phenomenon is linked to the French Revolution (1789-1799). During this period, conservative and colonial groups harbored suspicions of organizations like Freemasonry, viewing them as dangerous or subversive. They feared these groups could covertly spread revolutionary and anti-monarchical ideas. Ultimately, in 1795, the Batavian Republic (in the Netherlands) was formed with French support, replacing the 'old' Dutch Republic.

At the end of the 18th century, Freemasonry in the Dutch East Indies continued to expand, notably with the establishment of *La Vertueuse* Lodge on October 10, 1769. This lodge was founded at the request of Petrus van der Vorm, a member of the Council of Justice, along with Jan George Daniël Hasselaar and others (Alting, 1884). While Th. Stevens states that *La Vertueuse* Lodge held its official ceremony on December 24, 1769, other sources indicate that its inauguration day was commemorated on May 24, 1770 (Stevens, 2004). Hageman notes that a spirit of separation among VOC officials led to the founding of this new lodge, *La Vertueuse*, which adopted the color yellow. Hageman identifies several important founding figures of this lodge, along with their brief profiles:

1. Jan Georg Daniël Hasselaar was an Administrator in the grain warehouse and a high-ranking entrepreneur. Hasselaar became the first Grand Master of *La Vertueuse*.
2. Petrus van der Vorm was a member of the Council of Justice starting in 1766. Van der Vorm later became the second Grand Master of *La Vertueuse* Lodge.
3. Anthony van Helsdingen was a prominent entrepreneur and a member of the local council. In 1773, he became a commissioner for indigenous affairs.
4. Lieve Nicolaas Meyboom was a high-ranking entrepreneur.
5. Adriaan Boesses served as the Secretary of the *Boedelmeesteren*.
6. Johannes Theodorus Visscher van Gaasbeek was a high-ranking junior entrepreneur.
7. Hendrik van Stockum was a high-ranking senior entrepreneur. He later rose to become the fourth Grand Master of *La Vertueuse* Lodge, and eventually held the influential position of Director-General.
8. Arnoldus Musquetier was previously a co-founder of *La Fidèle Sincérité* Lodge.
9. Hageman did not have information regarding the occupations of F. Toert, J. C. van der Veen, G. L. Hartog, and P. C. Cras in 1769. By 1773, it is presumed that they had either passed away or departed from the East Indies (Hageman JCz., 1866).

The Constitution Charter for *La Vertueuse* Lodge was dated August 1, 1769 (1769 CE) and arrived in Batavia on March 24, 1770 (1770 CE). However, this third Masonic workplace was formally inaugurated earlier, on December 24, 1769 (1769 CE), by Provincial Grand Master, George Steendekker, who operated under a provisional Constitution (Hageman JCz., 1866). Compared to *La Fidèle Sincérité* Lodge, *La Vertueuse* Lodge appeared to hold a privilege or special right, thus gaining priority as its statute was issued relatively quickly. *La Fidèle Sincérité* Lodge, conversely, had to wait two years, and in terms of lodge ranking, *La Vertueuse* held greater priority under Dutch regulations. The constitution letter was granted on October 10, 1769, under the name *La Vertueuse* Lodge, distinguished by its yellow color. Among its recorded members were Pieter Cornelis Cras (Lawyer), Joan Casper Werner (Surgeon), Hendrik van Stockum (Merchant), Jan Warner van der Velden (Merchant), Petrus Brakel (Merchant), Pieter Paulus Charpentier (Colombo Guard), and van Randwijk (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872). These lodges became centers of closed and secretive social activity, as secrecy was a core value of Freemasonry, reinforcing the exclusivity of its members. This secrecy also reflected the prevailing conservative influences of the 18th century. Their meetings were organized and meticulously documented. *La Vertueuse* Lodge quickly gained recognition as one of the primary lodges in Batavia, marking a new chapter in the history of Freemasonry in the region. Initially, this lodge held its meetings secretly in the private homes of its members. In 1780, Kreijsman, a ship captain, offered his house in Molenvliet as a meeting place. The lodge was officially inaugurated on February 24, 1770, by the Provincial Delegate Grand Master, George Steendekker (who was also a Ship Captain and the second Grand Master for the Indies), and Abraham van der Weijden (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872).

The Freemasons of *La Vertueuse* Lodge remained in Molenvliet until 1785, when they relocated to a building on Amanusgracht. Finally, in 1786, a new temple was erected in Jacatra (now Jakarta), on the site of a former Moorish hospital, with the cornerstone laid on March 18, 1786, by Weijden (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872). This construction cost 12,000 rijksdaalders, raised through a tontine of 48 shares, each valued at 250 rijksdaalders. The temple's inauguration on October 16, 1786, was attended by Governor-General Willem Arnold Alting (Who governed from 1780-1786, according to *The Java Half-Yearly Almanac and Directory, for 1815. Batavia: .*, 1815), yang memberikan pengakuan formal terhadap keberadaan Freemasonry di Batavia dan Hindia Belanda (Alting, 1884). His presence provided formal recognition of Freemasonry's existence in Batavia and the Dutch East Indies, signifying that the organization had reached a point where it was officially acknowledged by the colonial authorities (Loge “De Ster in het Oosten” Weltevreden et al., 1917).

The ceremony was attended by prominent lodge officials, including Pieter Gerardus van Overstraten (chairman), Frans Hakker (first Overseer), Dirk van Hoogendorp (second Overseer), Philippus d'Elwijk (secretary), Daniel Kreysman (Archivist), Johan Hendrik Holle (Ceremonial

Master), Gerlach Cornelis Johannes van Massau (a prosecutor), and Samuel van Hoesen (a merchant). Their presence further underscored the growing recognition and influence of Freemasonry within the colonial administration and society (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872).

Beyond the lodge officials, a diverse array of other Freemasons also attended this significant gathering, highlighting the broad base of support for the movement. These included Nicolaas Engelhard, Willem Adriaan Willems, Jan Reynier Coortsen, Jan Frederik Baron van Rhee de tot den Parkeler, Adriaan Boesses, Leendert Rolff, and Isaac Titsingh. Their presence underscored the crucial role of the business community in supporting and expanding Freemasonry in the region. In addition to merchants, the meeting was also graced by several figures from other professional backgrounds. Jacob Abegg, Albertus Willem Antonius Frans van Idsinga (Bank Commissioner), Johannes Nicolaas Bestbier (notary), and Johannes Siberg (member of the Council of the Indies) were also in attendance, signifying support from various influential circles. From the business world, Hendrik Caspar Romberg, Gotfried Christofel Fetmenger, Jacob Hacker, and Hendrik Isaac Guitard were present. Other professionals like Ignatius Aantorgh (doctor), Willem Garrison (accountant), and Johannes Martinus Marinus Schmidt (Artillery Major) also attended, showcasing the varied backgrounds within Freemasonry. With the presence of such a diverse array of important figures from different fields, this meeting unequivocally affirmed that Freemasonry in Batavia was not only backed by the merchant community but also enjoyed an extensive network within the military, legal, banking, and colonial administration.

Following the completion of the "temple" building, several Freemasons contributed their own gifts. Isaac Titsingh (Director of Bengal) presented a beautiful carpet, and Hendrik Caspar Romberg (Head of Trade in Japan) donated a satin panel adorned with gold (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872). van Overstraten eventually left his position as chairman of *La Vertueuse* Lodge in 1790 when he was appointed Governor of the East Coast of Java and had to leave Batavia. The Freemasons presented him with a jewel-studded St. Andrew's cross as a token of gratitude for his hard work and dedication (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872). Later, in 1796, van Overstraten returned to Batavia as Governor, where he passed away in 1801, and the Freemasons commemorated him with a solemn Rite of Mourning. Based on Maarschalk's records, the following individuals served as chairmen of *La Vertueuse* Lodge until the end of the 18th century:

1. Jan George Daniel Hasselaar, 1770;
2. Petrus van der Vorm, 1770;
3. Reynier van Vlissingen, 1770-1771;
4. Jan George Daniel Hasselaar, 1771-1774;
5. Hendrik van Stockum, 1774;
6. Isaac Titsingh, 1774-1779;
7. Hendrik August Rossel, 1779;
8. Jacobus Cornelis Matheus Radermacher (The founder of *La Choisie Lodge*), 1779-1780;

9. Gerrit van Grol, 1780-1784.
10. Pieter Gerardus van Overstraten, 1784-1790 (Secretary of the High Government, later an Extraordinary Councillor of the Indies and Governor on the Northeast Coast of Java, then became Governor-General from 1796-1801).
11. Jan Reynier Coortsen, 1790-1791.
12. Pieter van de Weert (Secretary of the Dutch East Indies Government), 1791-1795.
13. Gotlieb Christoffel Fetmenger, 1795-1796.
14. Nicolaas Engelhard, 1796-1798 (then appointed as 'Deputy Grand Master National' Gedeputeerd-Grootmeester-Nationaal in 1789).

The appointment of Engelhard as Gedeputeerd-Grootmeester-Nationaal, overseeing both the eastern and western Dutch East Indies, marked a new era for Freemasonry, significantly enhancing its authority in the region. According to Maarschalk, Engelhard's extensive duties included leading all Symbolic and High Degree meetings on behalf of the Grand Master, managing all lodges, and resolving disputes in accordance with Freemasonry's fundamental principles, escalating unresolved issues to the Grand Master. He also held the authority to establish new lodges and chapters, compile membership lists, and ensure annual financial contributions to the Grand Lodge. Furthermore, he was responsible for the proper exchange of documents, providing lodges with Grand Lodge constitutions, certificates, books, and documents, while conversely ensuring all lodge documents, papers, reports, and lists concerning their status were sent to the Grand Lodge. His responsibilities extended to providing the annual password to lodges under his jurisdiction, signing documents, holding meetings, corresponding, and offering assistance to these lodges. Engelhard was also entitled to his own badge of honor, tasked with executing orders from the Grand Master in the Netherlands or the Grand Lodge, and his installation required him to take an oath administered by the Chairman of the nearest Lodge during a full member meeting in Batavia (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872). Under Engelhard's leadership, the Order of Freemasonry in the East Indies grew in strength and influence. This became even more pronounced when he was appointed Governor of Java several years later.

Towards the end of the 18th century, a group of Freemasons from Padang, Sumatra, made two proposals to La Fidèle Sincérité Lodge, in 1772 and again in 1794, with the aim of establishing a new lodge. However, both of these attempts were ultimately unsuccessful (Stevens, 2004). Beyond Sumatra, in Semarang, the East Indies Freemasonry administration granted a constitution or permit for *La Constante et Fidèle* Lodge in 1801. This is noteworthy because H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs's *Geschiedenis van de Orde der Vrijmetselaren in Nederland, onderhoorige koloniën en landen* (1872), a historical record of Freemasonry, states that this lodge in Semarang had already been in existence since 1798 (H. Maarschalk Nieuwenhuijs, 1872). Th. Stevens provides a more detailed account, clarifying that the earlier date refers to the arrival of Freemasons from *De Goede Hoop* Lodge, who held their first meeting on May 8, 1798. Two months later, on

July 15, 1798, they submitted an application for a constitution charter for *La Constante et Fidèle* Lodge to the Grand Master in the Netherlands (Stevens, 2004). Subsequently, on February 28, 1799, a second letter was dispatched, stating that light blue and white were chosen as the lodge's colors. Ultimately, this matter was handed over to Deputy Grand Master Engelhard in Batavia, who then issued the constitution in 1801.

This study concludes with the end of the 18th century, as it signifies a distinct political and social landscape marked by the collapse of the VOC and its subsequent replacement by the Dutch Colonial Government. The VOC, once a formidable force in the global economy, suffered a decline due to internal and external issues that destabilized its finances. Consequently, the VOC went bankrupt in 1795, and the Dutch government took over the administration of the Dutch East Indies, effectively ending the system of governance managed by a private company (Stevens, 2004). The Kingdom of the Netherlands in Europe began to exert its political influence by forming a centralized colonial government in its colonies, which was named *Nederlandsch Indie* or the Dutch East Indies (Akbar & Pranata, 2024).

The various Freemasonry initiatives of the 18th century laid the groundwork for its future growth, as the 19th century witnessed the establishment of numerous new lodges in major cities. In Java, these included *La Constante et Fidèle* in Semarang (1801), *De Vriendschap* in Surabaya (1809), *Mataram* in Yogyakarta (1870), *L'Union Frédéric Royal* in Surakarta (1872), *Veritas* in Probolinggo (1882), *Excelsior* in Buitenzorg (1891), *Tidar* in Magelang (1896), *Fraternitas* in Salatiga (1896), *St. Jan* in Bandung (1896), *Humanitas* in Tegal (1898), and *Malang* in Malang (1901). Outside Java, Freemasonry developed more slowly, with lodges such as *Mata Hari* in Padang (1858), *Prins Frederik* in Kota Raja (1880), and *Deli* in Medan (1888) being founded. In Makassar, Sulawesi, *Arbeid Adelt* Lodge was established in 1883. These lodges were directly overseen by a delegate from the Central Council, titled *Gedeputeerd Grootmeester*, a position first held by N. Engelhard in 1798. Engelhard served until 1823, marking a significant new phase for Freemasonry following the VOC's collapse.

IV. CONCLUSION

During the latter half of the 18th century, Batavia emerged as the central hub for the spread of Freemasonry in Southeast Asia, driven by international trade and the influx of Dutch East India Company (VOC) officials. As a vital port linking Europe and Asia, Batavia became a melting pot of diverse cultures and intellectual currents, including Freemasonry. Officials and merchants arriving in Batavia often brought Masonic values with them, which were subsequently embraced by the local European population. Hageman noted that, from the mid-1760s for the next thirty years, Batavia served as the only significant center for individuals of Western origin and thought across the entire East Indies.

The expansion of Freemasonry beyond Batavia commenced with the establishment of several lodges in Java and Sumatra, primarily driven by the influence of colonial officials assigned to these regions. By the end of the 18th century, new lodges had been founded in Semarang and Surabaya, extending the reach of Freemasonry beyond Batavia. It is believed that philosophical Freemasonry first appeared in the East Indies as early as 1717, with its introduction to Java by 1750, Sumatra by 1772, and Penang Island by 1780. These lodges played a pivotal role in extending Freemasonry's influence among Dutch military and civilian officials stationed outside Batavia. Moreover, Freemasonry in these areas garnered substantial support from merchants involved in the spice trade and other commodities, who viewed the lodges as crucial venues for forming strong social networks and advancing their economic agendas.

Freemasonry in the East Indies faced challenges from the church and colonial authorities, though it was not directly prohibited. A primary obstacle was the prejudice held by ecclesiastical authorities against Masonic activities, which were often perceived as incompatible with Christian doctrines. In Batavia, no Western clergy openly joined Freemasonry, although evidence suggests that the level of prejudice there was less pronounced compared to other regions. According to Hageman, recorded conflicts did not arise until 1821. Nonetheless, Masonic records reveal that, despite the church's lack of active support for Freemasonry, certain ecclesiastical officials are reported to have clandestinely participated in lodge meetings.

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