

Masonic Diplomacy in London around 1800

*Interactions between Swedish and
English Freemasonry in Times of Crisis*

Bro. Prof. Andreas Önnorfors

'Let us banish those novelties which furnish materials to dangerous enthusiasts'

ON 8 MAY 1799 GEORGE, PRINCE OF WALES (LATER KING GEORGE IV) and Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England (Moderns), signed a letter to Duke Charles of Sudermania, Grand Master of the Swedish Order of Freemasons since 1774. In this the Prince of Wales expressed gratitude for correspondence he had received in January 1798 and in which the Swedish Grand Master had proposed a closer relationship between the two Masonic bodies. This proposal was now endorsed vividly by Prince George – he explicitly stressed that the aim of both Masonic orders was philanthropy and that there was no room for dark conspiracies under the veil of Freemasonry

To be Presented to the Lodge 14 November 2020

(as expressed in the title quote above). The entire letter, written in French, is presented below. But what were the reasons behind such language?

What on the surface appears to be an innocent exchange of Masonic courtesy (covered in Preston's *Illustrations* ever since) has deeper dimensions related to the position of Freemasonry in British society and Europe at the time. The exchange of letters between the Masonic royalties happened against the backdrop of a dramatic increase of anti-Masonic sentiments across Europe and Britain in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Tensions were running high: a host of authors claimed that radical political change in France had been orchestrated by secret (Masonic) elites aiming to overthrow the old order of church and crown. This, together with revolutionary tendencies on the British Isles erupting in the Irish rebellion and the formation of organizations like The United Irishmen, The United Scotsmen, and The United Englishmen eventually resulted in the passing of the 'Unlawful Societies Act' in 1799.¹ In this paper, I shall present evidence from deciphered Swedish diplomatic correspondence shedding new light on the process leading to this particular piece of legislation.² The Swedish envoy to London, George Ulrik Silfverhielm (1762–1819), described in his dispatches to Duke Charles (1748–1818) how the position of Freemasonry in British society had changed for the worse and how British Freemasonry profited from the Swedish diplomatic initiative. Whereas it is difficult to assess the impact of Swedish advances, the diplomatic correspondence reveals new insights into the tense atmosphere related to Freemasonry in Britain at the time, the motives of key players involved in the events of 1799, and the significance of fraternal relationships between European Grand Lodges in times of crises.

Swedish-English Masonic Relations up to the Union of 1813

As a matter of introduction, it is worthwhile briefly to address the development of Swedish-English Masonic relations up to the union of 1813 at which a high-ranking Swedish Freemason and diplomat, Count Jakob Gustav De la Gardie (1768–1842), was present as a distinguished visitor. He was a close ally of the Swedish Grand Master, Duke Charles, and a member of his intimate circle.³ Generally speaking, since the seventeenth century

¹ A. Prescott, 'The Unlawful Societies Act of 1799', in M. Scanlan, *The Social Impact of Freemasonry on the Modern Western World* (London: Canonbury Masonic Research Centre, 2002), 116–122.

² This paper draws from A. Önnorfors, 'Frimurerisk diplomati i London', in D. Eklund, S. Svensson and H. Berg, Hertig Carl och det svenska frimureriet, (Uppsala: Eckleff, 2010), 263–276, translated to German as 'Freimaurerische Diplomatie in London' in *Herzog Carl und die schwedische Freimaurerei* (Flensburg: Frederik, 2018), 353–372 as well as from 'Schwedische chiffrierte diplomatische Korrespondenz über die britische Unlawful Societies Act (1799) in A.-S. Rous and M. Mulsow, *Geheime Post: Kryptologie und Steganographie der diplomatischen Korrespondenz europäischer Höfe während der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2015), 209–223. All translations in this paper by the author.

³ G. A. C. Kupferschmidt, 'Notes on the Relation between the Grand Lodges of England and Sweden in the last Century', *AQC* 1 (1888), 202–209; A. Prescott, 'Relations Between the Grand Lodges of England and Sweden During the Long Eighteenth Century', *Journal for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism*, 3:2 (2012), 185–222.

and up to the time of the French Revolution Sweden had been a close political ally of France. The rise of the Hanoverian dynasty increased political tensions between Sweden and Britain owing to competition in the Old German Empire and Swedish support for the Jacobite cause until 1746, if not longer.⁴ Sweden attempted to disrupt British East Indian trade, was on the side of France in the Seven Years War 1757–1764, and participated in the French-backed American struggle for independence, becoming the second country in the world diplomatically to recognize the United States. This general political orientation was also reflected in Freemasonry.

Constituted with French patents in 1738 and 1751, the Swedish Grand Lodge (formally founded in 1760) was not particularly concerned with establishing regular contacts with any of the British Grand Lodges until the middle of the 1760s. It was then that Charles Tullman (biography unknown), an employee at the British embassy in Stockholm, claimed authority over Sweden, and with a patent from the Moderns Grand Lodge founded a Provincial Grand Lodge with lodges in the capital and the Western port town of Gothenburg. This split between two Masonic authorities on the same national territory (with clear political overtones) was only resolved through correspondence between the Swedish Grand Master, Count Carl Friedrich Scheffer (1715–1786), and the self-confident English (Moderns) ‘Provincial Grand Master for Foreign Lodges’, John Joseph de Vignoles, an extremely interesting character worth a separate study.⁵ Vignoles’s position and activities are an early example of the ambitions of the Moderns Grand Lodge to exercise authority over international Masonic affairs in Europe and elsewhere or, as Prescott has put it, ‘apparently for the first time sought to articulate, however crudely, a form of Masonic foreign policy.’⁶ Much of de Vignoles’s vast correspondence hammers out principles of territorial authority and recognition that were only codified much later and thus merit much closer attention. In 1766 de Vignoles also founded the notorious lodge *L’Immortalité de l’Ordre* No. 376 in London, meeting at the Crown and Anchor tavern in the Strand, working in French and later in German. It was one of the most exclu-

B. Åkerrén, ‘London in December 1813: The Place and Time of a Momentous Encounter of English with Swedish Rites’, *AQC* 115 (2002), 184–204. J. W. Daniel, ‘Anglo-Swedish Relations’ in *Masonic Networks & Connections* (London: Library and Museum of Freemasonry, 2007), 34–67 and sources quoted therein. On De La Gardie, see A. Önnersfors, ‘La Gardie, Jacob Gustaf Pontusson de’ in C. Porset and C. Révauger, *Le Monde maçonnique des Lumières*, vol. II (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), 1680–1683.

⁴ A. Önnersfors, ‘From Jacobite Support to a Part of the State Apparatus – Swedish Freemasonry between Reform and Revolution’, in *Franc-Maçonnerie et politique au siècle des Lumières: Europe-Amériques*, *Lumières* No. 7 (Bordeaux: 2006), 203–225.

⁵ On Scheffer, see A. Önnersfors, ‘Scheffer, Carl Fredrik’ in C. Porset and C. Révauger, *Le Monde maçonnique des Lumières*, vol. III (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), 2499–2500. W. Wonnacott, ‘De Vignoles and His Lodge L’Immortalité de l’Ordre’, *AQC* 34 (1921). The letters of Vignoles are preserved in ‘Inkomna skrivelser till Storsekreteraren 1746–1847’, Archive and Library of the Swedish Order of Freemasons (SFMO) and await a more thorough analysis.

⁶ Prescott, ‘The Grand Lodges’, 200.

sive lodges in Europe at the time, counting cross-dressing flamboyant diplomat and spy Chevalier d'Eon (1728–1810) among its members.⁷

But back to Swedish-English Masonic affairs: following Scheffer's and de Vignoles's correspondence, the authority of the original Swedish Grand Lodge was confirmed by London and Tullman's lodges were dissolved. However, the Grand Lodge of Sweden during the 1770s increasingly acted as a completely autonomous and independent Masonic Grand body, extending its degree system way above the three Craft degrees and massively influencing European Masonic affairs. The relationship to the Moderns Grand Lodge was up to the 1790s characterized more or less by silence and in some cases, such as in the Russian Empire and Germany (concerning the regularity of the *Grosse Landesloge der Freimaurer von Deutschland*, established in 1770) by open competition and conflict.⁸ Also, at the onset of the new century it appears as if De la Gardie on behalf of the Swedish Grand Lodge was suspicious of the initiation of brethren of lower social class and other religious denominations than Christian – as it was practised in English lodges.⁹

However, having recently studied material related to membership development in Sweden during the first part of the nineteenth century, I do not find the arguments related to 'false brethren' being admitted in Britain being reflected in the Swedish archive material and at the same time the social stratification of Swedish Freemasonry itself became increasingly diversified.¹⁰ During the eighteenth century (1735–1800) around 4,300 members joined Swedish lodges. Between 1801 and 1817 alone no less than 3,415 were initiated and in the ensuing period of the next Grand Master, Charles XIV Johan (1818–1844), 2,430. Why the numbers decreased after 1818 is discussed extensively in the cited source. One obvious reason was the territorial loss of Finland and Swedish Pomerania due to the Napoleonic wars (1809 and 1815 respectively, resulting in the loss of three very active lodges), which was not compensated by recruitment to lodges in the new Norwegian part of the dynastic union (after 1814). Another reason was a decrease in identification of the new Bernadotte-dynasty with Freemasonry, as well as the growth of the liberal reform movement in larger segments of society, which despised the old state elites and their culture of the past (to which Masonic affiliation belonged). A letter from 1823 written by a high-ranking member of the Swedish Masonic leadership laments the almost military-style

⁷ P. Romanski, 'Éon de Beaumont', in C. Porset and C. Révauger, *Le Monde maçonnique des Lumières*, vol. II (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), 1112–1116.

⁸ Kupferschmidt, 'Notes', 204–205.

⁹ As suggested by Prescott, 'The Grand Lodges', 209–211.

¹⁰ Prescott 'The Grand Lodges', 211, furthermore suggests that 'the lower classes being stripped out of English freemasonry' may have been 'one of the more surprising and unexpected contributions of Sweden, and particularly Swedish freemasonry, to British history', an assessment that remains to be established properly. A. Önnersfors, 'Mellan nedgång och unionsideologi: det svenska frimureriet under Karl Johanstiden', in M. Willén, *Svenskt frimureri under 1800-talet* (Uppsala: Eckleff, 2018), 118–143, a chapter for which I continued to study national membership records and statistics for the period 1800–1844.

draft to the Stockholm lodges without discrimination – numbers appeared to be more important than quality. So, even if there was some critique related to a more diversified recruitment, it was not specifically about Swedish Freemasons being initiated abroad, but in the capital Stockholm. There are also no complaints recorded about Swedish brethren producing their foreign membership certificates and asking for Masonic relief or the like (apart from one case – a merchant, presented below). So, if there was a tension regarding the practice of Swedish initiations into British lodges, it must have remained at the level of De la Gardie's personal opinion.

Still it comes perhaps as a surprise that the rhetoric at the end of the eighteenth century had improved so drastically, given the previous and rather neutral relationship. However, this change in inter-Masonic relations was aligned with completely new political alliances in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the ensuing anti-French coalition and Napoleonic wars up to the Congress of Vienna in 1815. At one point consideration was even given to negotiating a marriage between Gustav IV Adolf (King of Sweden 1796–1809) and a British princess. In 1802 and 1803, Prince William Frederick, Duke of Gloucester and Edinburgh (1776–1834), travelled to Scandinavia in order to investigate the political situation in Northern Europe. Meeting the Swedish King Gustav IV Adolf in Finland, which at the time belonged to the Swedish realm, he and two officers (Soutown and Hamilton) in his entourage visited the lodge *St Augustin* in Helsinki. Two further British officers, Thomas Baker and Thomas Dalton (travelling together with the Prince), were initiated, passed, and raised in the Swedish rite in early August 1802 in the presence of the Swedish King.¹¹ In Stockholm William Frederick and Hamilton were initiated as Knights Templar in the Swedish Masonic Great Chapter in early 1803.¹² However, the Prince's involvement in Freemasonry and other secret societies together with an inability to negotiate on behalf of the British government made him unpopular at court. Still other sources claim that he must have made such an impression during his stay that in 1812 he was even proposed to become the new King of Sweden.

Andrew Prescott has argued that the friendship between the two Grand Lodges at the end of the 1790s 'presented an opportunity to work together to resist the growth of radical and republican tendencies within freemasonry' and that the Swedish Grand Lodge

¹¹ A. Gräsbeck, *S:t Johanneslogen S:t Augustins Matrikel 1762–1808* (Helsingfors: n/a, 1954), 108. See also F. Nyberg, *S:t Johannes Logen S:t Augustin 1756–2006* (Helsingfors: S:t Augustin, 2005), 62–63, who provides further details. In the entourage of William Frederick there was a captain of the navy Soutown and Hamilton, who were already Freemasons. The prince attended the lodge together with the king when Baker and Dalton were initiated. Two days later both attended their passing into the Fellowcraft degree.

¹² The General Membership Record of the Swedish Order of Freemasons (new series) lists William Frederick as No. 278 and the notice 'adopted into the Swedish Grand Lodge as Honorary Member' with the date of initiation into the KT-degrees given as 26 January and 10 February 1803. No. 279 with the same dates is Ralph Hamilton, 'Major in the Royal English Lifeguards'. Baker and Dalton are listed as No. 192 and 193 (since they were previously initiated into St. Augustin) respectively but were also initiated into the higher degrees. Thanks to Stefan Schierbeck, Grand Archivist and Librarian of the Swedish Order of Freemasons, for providing images of the membership record.

might have been 'concerned that Freemasonry in Britain might be a front for radical activities.'¹³ My treatment of the correspondence between the Swedish envoy to Britain, Silfverhielm, and Duke Charles sheds new light on the reasons behind the rapprochement between the two Masonic bodies and I arrive at a more complex interpretation at the end of this paper.

The European Context of the 'Unlawful Societies Act' in 1799

Prescott's treatment of the chronology leading up to the passing of the 'Unlawful Societies Act' in July 1799 is exhaustive and just needs a short recapitulation.¹⁴ The establishment of radical bodies in Britain, such as the United Irishmen, United Scotsmen, and United Englishmen, together with the Irish rebellion of 1798 occasioned a number of repressive governmental interventions such as the 1797 Act against 'administering or taking of unlawful oaths.'¹⁵ In March 1799 the House of Commons secret committee received intelligence from the government pointing at a French-backed revolutionary overturn of Great Britain and Ireland, 'in conjunction with domestic traitors.'¹⁶ The committee members were told that Radical organizations, allegedly linked through the London Corresponding Society (LCS), bound their members by an oath of fidelity and secrecy communicated through secret agents and organized in a hierarchical manner with ordinary members ignorant about the composition of their leadership.

The House of Commons debated the report in April 1799 during which the Prime Minister, William Pitt (1759–1806), announced the measures proposed by his government aimed at the eradication of the 'fatal spirit of Jacobinism.'¹⁷ Not only were a host of potential associations targeted, but also public lectures as well as printers. A bill to that effect was published the next day and received its first reading on the 22 April. The LCS and various United Organizations were outlawed, but the bill also defined as an unlawful combination and confederacy 'every society the members thereof shall . . . be required or admitted to take any oath or engagement.'¹⁸ Moreover, every society was urged to register its officers and members for open government inspection. Breaches against these regulations constituted a criminal offence. Similarly, lecture activities and printing were heavily regulated. Due to the sweeping character of the legislation it soon emerged that Freemasonry could fall under the definitions of unlawfulness.

On the day of the second reading of the bill, 30 April 1799, Pitt had received a request for a meeting with Grand Masters and Officers of the two English and the Scottish Grand

¹³ Prescott, 'The Grand Lodges', 208.

¹⁴ Prescott, 'The Unlawful Societies Act'.

¹⁵ 39 Geo. III. C. 123: 'An Act for more effectually preventing the administering or taking of unlawful oaths.'

¹⁶ Prescott, 'The Unlawful Societies Act', 209.

¹⁷ Prescott, 'The Unlawful Societies Act', 210.

¹⁸ Prescott, 'The Unlawful Societies Act', 211.

Lodges. This meeting took place on 2 May 1799 in a good spirit, provided that Masonic lodges promised not to act as a front for revolutionary activity. Since the lodges were promising extensive self-regulation, the bill was amended with a clause exempting Freemasonry from legislation but with certain stipulations such as vetted lists of licensed lodges and their members. It went to a first and second reading in the House of Lords on 10 May and 3 June 1799 respectively. But during the debate on the third reading, on 20 June 1799, prominent conspiracy theories against the Freemasons as being governed by the Illuminati (based upon the writings of Barruel and Robison) were voiced during the debate. In the end the bill was amended again and passed, but had for constitutional reasons to go back to the House of Commons where a revision of the bill was processed, receiving royal consent on 12 July 1799. Whereas the effectiveness of such a repressive piece of legislation as the ‘Unlawful Societies Act’ can be discussed in the British case, it has rarely been placed into its European context.

Already in 1798 Prussia had passed similar legislation, the *Edict wegen Verhütung und Bestrafung geheimer Verbindungen, welche der allgemeinen Sicherheit nachtheilig werden können* (‘Edict concerning prevention and persecution of secret societies which can be detrimental to general security’).¹⁹ This is not the place to discuss the ‘Edict’ and its thirteen paragraphs extensively, but the similarities to the British legislation are so striking that it appears unlikely that British legislators were unaware of the Prussian initiative. Five criteria for prohibition were listed in the ‘Edict’:

1. If the aim of such societies was to discuss the constitution and administration of the state and how changes thereof could be achieved;
2. If an oath was taken and administered, swearing fidelity towards ‘unknown superiors’;
3. If an oath was taken that went against the interests of the state or of morality;
4. If taciturnity concerning internal secrecy was practised;
5. If these societies had secret aims or aims that were secretly communicated in cipher.

The three Prussian Masonic Grand lodges (*Zu den drei Weltkugeln*, *Royal York* and *Grosse Landesloge*) were exempted from criteria 4 and 5. Any breaches against the ‘Edict’ were prosecuted. Paragraphs 9–13 listed detailed instructions for the Prussian Grand lodges, for instance to hand in membership records to the authorities and to name the place and date of lodge assemblies.

Taken together, the ‘Edict’ and the ‘Unlawful Societies Act’ both referenced occurrences outside their own borders and treacherous alliances with domestic collaborators

¹⁹ A. Önnersfors, ‘1803 års statliga reglering av ordenssällskapen’, in M. Willén, *Svenskt frimureri under 1800-talet* (Uppsala: Eckleff, 2018), 16–40.

as the main reason to legislate against freedom of assembly and of organization. During recent times societies had been established of a new and dangerous nature. Their members took oaths of secrecy and fidelity to unknown leaders, and secret modes of organization and communication were part of these networks with branches extending across the nation and organizing a huge number of people. As in the Prussian ‘Edict’, British legislation was also concerned to quell any open discussion, lectures, or debates about the (re-)form of government. When in the end the exemption concerning Freemasonry was amended in the British bill, it was very similar to what was stipulated in the Prussian ‘Edict’, which in turn has similarities with Emperor Joseph II’s *Freimaurerpatent* of 1785 in the Habsburg territories, and in terms of regulating the national scope of Freemasonry inside domestic borders with a decree issued by the Danish king in 1780.

As Prescott suggests, governmental regulations (if not outright prohibitions such as in the Russian empire in 1822) can both be interpreted as an infringement of and at the same time paradoxically as an acknowledgement of Masonic activities (and for instance the principle of exclusive territorial jurisdiction). The same applies to a Swedish royal regulation of fraternal orders from 1803. As in the Prussian and British cases, the threat of these orders was identified in the practice of administering and taking oaths, of secret forms of activities and communication and of the potential danger to religion, government, and societal norms. Freemasonry (and later on also other fraternal orders under royal protection) were exempted. Government agencies were entitled to control these fraternal orders and get access to their documents and meetings (with the obligation not to expose their activities in public). Any breaches against the royal regulation constituted a criminal offence. Thus what we can see is that the entire period between 1798 (arguably since 1785) and 1803 was characterized by attempts from different governments in Europe to outlaw forms of fraternal organization that were posing a (real or imagined) threat to political stability, but at the same time to grant Freemasonry continued governmental protection (and arguably approval) under certain obligations. The ‘Unlawful Societies Act’ is thus not an exception in the European context, but a piece of legislation that reflects the uncertainties related to the self-organization of civil society in the revolutionary age. However, that Swedish Masonic diplomacy might have impacted domestic negotiation and decision-making processes has hitherto been unknown.

Anti-Masonic Sentiments in Britain during the 1790s

The first signs that the attitude towards Freemasonry had changed dramatically in Britain after the French revolution are to be found in the *Freemasons’ Magazine* (1793–1798), a publication which is pivotal in mapping self-perceptions and perceptions of British Freemasonry in the immediate period before the ‘Unlawful Societies Act.’²⁰ On the surface

²⁰ A. Önnorfors, ‘The Freemason’s Magazine 1793-1798’, in J. Wade, *Reflections on 300 Years of Freemasonry*

the *Freemasons' Magazine* appears as a harmless channel of communicating Masonic news and to position this news in a readership with diverse interests ranging from theatre to biographical anecdotes, poetry and science. But when we look deeper into the articles in the magazine it is possible to discern an ambition to propagate the loyalty of Freemasonry and that all attacks against the fraternity must be rejected. Already in the first issue, published in summer 1793 at the height of the rule of terror in France, we find an 'Address to the King' on two pages. The address states that although Freemasonry was unknown to the law, it has always obeyed it. Even if it was declared that religion and politics were not discussed within Freemasonry, this basic principle now had to be dropped in order to explain that

our first duty as Britons superseding all other considerations, we add, without further pause, our voice to that of our fellow-subjects, in declaring our common and fervent attachment to a government of Kings, Lords, and Commons, as established by the glorious Revolution of 1688.²¹

Another contribution to the journal treated the persecution of Freemasonry in Naples, repeated or perhaps even reprinted from the Austrian Masonic journal *Journal für Freymaurer* (1784–1786). The 'Sufferings of Coustos' under the Portuguese inquisition, one of the pivotal publications on mid-eighteenth-century Freemasonry, was reprinted in an abridged version, possibly also taken directly from the Vienna journal. In both cases these texts on the maltreatment of Freemasonry in different parts of Europe can be related to anti-Masonic sentiments in the respective contexts of the time. In Austria Freemasonry was facing suppression during the 1780s and was finally prohibited in 1792, and in Britain in the 1790s Freemasonry had to struggle for recognition and exemption from the governmental prohibition and this despite the fact or possibly precisely because the Moderns were headed by the Prince of Wales.

Silfverhielm's diplomatic career in Britain

During the early 1790s and between 1795 and 1807 George Ulrik Silfverhielm was repeatedly stationed in London, first as Secretary, then as *Chargé des Affaires*, Minister-Resident and finally as *Envoyé Extraordinaire* and *Ministre Plénipotentaire*.²² In the shifting alliances against the new French republic and Bonaparte, Sweden was initially neutral, which frequently implied a complex position between enemy lines. The weaker the continen-

(London: Lewis Masonic, 2017), 593–608 and "Perfection by progressive Excellence": An initial analysis of the Freemason's Magazine 1793–1798' in R. Péter and A. Önnersfors, *Researching British Freemasonry 1717–2017* (Sheffield: CRFF, 2010), 159–180.

²¹ *Freemasons' Magazine* (1)1793, 17.

²² In the archival sources there is huge variation of how his name is spelled: J(G)öran (George de) (Fransson) Ulrik Sil(f)verhj(i)elm. The second first name is frequently not included. He is also mixed up with his brother Carl Göran Silfverhielm (1759–1808) since the English version of the Swedish name Göran is George.

tal powers grew, the more important became the role of Great Britain as a warrantor of European political order. Therefore, it was of crucial importance to monitor the course of events and to represent Swedish interests carefully. A Swedish envoy to London around 1800 had many issues to observe, which Silfverhielm frequently elaborated in his correspondence to Duke Charles and other Swedish dignitaries. In 1803 he signed the treaty of neutrality between Sweden and Great Britain, regulating neutral Swedish maritime trade during the time of the British continental system, which was intended to block import/export to France and its colonies.²³ A number of Swedish vessels and convoys had been seized by the British navy across the oceans. The journal *The Port Folio* characterized Silfverhielm as ‘the enlightened and amiable representative of a brave and generous nation.’²⁴ On the occasion of the launch of two remarkable merchant ships (the ‘Union’ and ‘Lady Castlereagh’) in 1803 he returned a toast and ‘expressed himself happy in being numbered amongst the friends of Old England, where Religion, Loyalty, and Law were the basis of the Constitution.’²⁵

Upon his return to Sweden Silfverhielm eventually became a member of a powerful government committee, presided over by De la Gardie. Apart from his diplomatic duties, Silfverhielm was active as an author and publisher, for instance of *Samlingar för hjertat och snillet* (‘Collections for the heart and mind’) in 1789, a collection of translations of religious sentimental literature. Two years earlier either George Ulrik or his brother Carl Göran (1759–1808) published *Samlingar för philantroper* (‘Collections for philanthropists’), a controversial work advocating the teachings of the Swedish mystic Swedenborg, who was their great-uncle. Carl Göran Silfverhielm was one of the most intimate friends of Duke Charles and magnetised him on a number of occasions as well as published works on animal magnetism.²⁶ He had also travelled to France together with the former Swedish Grand Master, Scheffer, to visit the infamous esoteric fraternity *Illuminés de Avignon*.²⁷

George Ulrik was also very much inclined towards the Swedish pre-romantic author and philosopher Thomas Thorild (1759–1808) whose work he co-edited and published. George Ulrik’s correspondence with Jaques de Geer, yet another member of Duke Charles’s intimate circle, sheds light on the intellectual atmosphere of late eighteenth

²³ The New Annual Register (1804), 112–114 and *Recueil de traités d’alliance*, volume VIII (Göttingen: n/a, 1835), 91–93.

²⁴ *The Port Folio* (1806), 231.

²⁵ *The Times*, 10 January 1803, 2.

²⁶ Biographical information on both brethren see *Silfverhielm in Nordisk Familjebok*, Vol. XIV (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1890), 1050.

²⁷ A. Önnersfors, ‘“Envoyés des Glaces du Nord jusque dans ces Climats”. Swedish Encounters with Les Illuminés de Avignon at the End of the Eighteenth Century’ in P. Y. Beaurepaire, K. Loiselle, J. M. Mercier. & T. Zarcone, *Diffusions et circulations des pratiques maçonniques, XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012), 167–196; about magnetization, politics of vision, and visionary politics, see A. Önnersfors, ‘Norge 1814: den svenska politiken mellan vision och verklighet’ in R. Hemstad and Bj. A. Steine, *Overgangstid: forargelse og forsoning hosten 1814* (Oslo: Akademisk Publiserings, 2016), 82–98.

and early nineteenth century Swedish Freemasonry.²⁸ *Das heimliche Gericht* ('The Secret Court', 1790), a work of great importance in the history of Masonic literature, was most probably translated into Swedish by George Ulrik. In the General Membership Record (*Generalmatrikeln*) of Swedish Freemasons initiated during the eighteenth century, a 'Georg' and a 'Jöran' Silfverhielm are listed (the brethren were frequently mixed up). Jöran (George Ulrik) was given the number 2991 and his occupation is listed as 'Second Lieutenant, Colonel, Minister, Baron'. Georg has the number 4086 and his occupation is listed as 'Baron, Colonel and Knight of the Order of the Sword' (an official Swedish honour). This Georg (most likely Carl Göran) was apparently immediately initiated in the eighth (out of ten in the Swedish rite) or Knights Templar degree by Duke Charles. Earlier initiation records are missing. Jöran was initiated in February 1787 in the lodge *L'Union* in Stockholm and his next initiation into the Chapter degrees is noted in 1799.²⁹ In 1798, he was in addition appointed the first historiographer of the Swedish Order of Freemasons, 'since he in its historical parts has gained much knowledge' – keeping this office until 1805 despite his diplomatic position outside Sweden.³⁰

Of great interest to our subject is that George Ulrik in 1794 married Harriet Mathew, a daughter of an English cleric from the well-known Mathew-family, patrons of the art (for instance of William Blake) and Swedenborgian sympathisers. Thus, it appears very likely that Silfverhielm moved within these circles in London and could capitalize on their networks. When it comes to his advances in Masonic diplomacy in the crucial year of 1799, letters preserved in the Royal Library of Stockholm and additional material in the Library and Archive of the Swedish Order of Freemasons allow us to reconstruct the course of events in detail.³¹

The Masonic Instructions to Silfverhielm – Secret and Open

At the end of 1797 it emerged that Silfverhielm would again be stationed in London. In connection with his renewed mission, a number of documents were issued by Duke Charles with the aim of gathering extensive intelligence related to English Freemasonry

²⁸ H. Frykstedt, *Jean Jaques och Aurora Taube de Geer af Finspång och deras värld* (Stockholm: Svenska Humanistiska Förbundet, 1987), in particular chapter 8.

²⁹ A. Önnersfors, *Mystiskt brödraskap-mäktigt nätverk* (Lund: Minerva, 2006) 257 as well as "Generalmatrikeln", SFMO, pagina 121 and 170.

³⁰ C. L. H. Thulstrup, *Anteckningar* (Stockholm: n/a, 1898), 118–119. G. W. Francken, *Matrikel öfver Svenska Stora Landtlogens Grundläggare och Embetsmän* (Stockholm: n/a, 1880), 61. The editor of the General Membership Record, Sundius, wrote under both Silfverhielms that they were historiographers of the order and that they died in 1809 (the correct year being 1808 and 1819 respectively), despite the fact that the dates for initiation in the chapter degrees continue for Jöran until 1813. Both brethren are listed as Grand Officers of the Order and it is likely that more certainty about their respective Masonic careers will be established in the future. See Francken, *Matrikel*, 75.

³¹ Kungliga Biblioteket Stockholm, Ep. S. 16 and SFMO, 158.8 'Silfverhielms beskickning till England' and 158.9 'Rapport från Silfverhielm'. See K. Lekeby, *Esoterica i Svenska Frimurareordens arkiv 1776–1803* (Stockholm: Plejaderna, 2011), 164–165.

and to establish formal ties.³² Why the duke had identified such a need is difficult to reconstruct, not the least against the background of some formulations in the secret and open instructions Silfverhielm had received (see below). As mentioned previously, contacts between Swedish and English Freemasonry had only taken place sporadically over the previous five decades. Between 1797 and 1800 Duke Charles worked on a major reform of the Swedish rite. This resulted in the organization and rituals that have in principle been practised ever since. During the period he engaged in a vast correspondence with his intimate circle (partly in cipher) as well as journeys to the continent. It is assumed that Duke Charles thus wanted to gather information for his reform-project and that he used different networks in the state apparatus to this end.

British involvement in European Knights Templar Freemasonry might also help to explain the Swedish interest. With the notable exception of the territory of Hanover (which was ruled in personal union with the British crown until 1837), the Templar Rite of Strict Observance (Strict Observance, 1754–1782) was not practised in the British Isles. However, a number of British subjects were initiated into the Strict Observance and were members of its inner circle, a link that not has been sufficiently studied. A handful of Knights Templar ‘encampments’ had also been practising chivalric degrees in Britain from the 1770s, but lacked a coherent national organization.³³ However, it was only after the collapse of the Strict Observance during the Convent of Wilhelmsbad in 1782 that we see the successful emergence of Knights Templar Freemasonry in Britain. The ‘Grand Encampment of Knights Templar for England and Wales’ was founded in 1791, and the *Freemasons’ Magazine* between 1793 and 1798 included a number of articles related to both the historical order of chivalry and its Masonic equivalent.³⁴ It is possible that this new interest in a decisively Christian and patriotic variety of English Freemasonry established by Thomas Dunckerley (1724–1795) was directed against the secular spirit of revolutionary France. Moreover, Dunckerley, reputedly an illegitimate son of George II, also aimed to recruit volunteers in the wars against revolutionary France.³⁵

³² The procedure of an open and secret instruction seems to have been in common practice during the period. When the newly-appointed Swedish governor to the West Indian island of St Barthélemy, Anckarheim, in 1800 was sent abroad, Duke Charles also provided him with a double set of instructions in order to investigate the state of Freemasonry in the Caribbean: see A. Önnorfors ‘Swedish Freemasonry on St Barthémely around 1800: The Complex History of Transatlantic Fraternalism’ in J. Wade (ed.), *Freemasons in the Transatlantic World*, (London: Lewis, 2019), 63–71; ‘Svenskt frimureri i Västindien: Hur S:t Barthélemy blev en ö inom IX:de Frimurare-Provinzen’, *Acta Masonica Scandinavica* 12, 106–153 and ‘Swedish Freemasonry in the Caribbean: How St. Barthélemy turned into an Island of the IXth Province’, *Revista des Estudios Históricos De La Masoneria* 1(2009), 18–41 (available online).

³³ Volume III of *British Freemasonry 1717–1813*, edited by Jan Snoek (general editor: Róbert Péter), covers the development of English Knights Templar rituals: see for instance 371–388 and 463–477. See also Vol. IV, 221–228 and Vol. V, 144–146 and 195–225.

³⁴ Önnorfors, ‘The Freemason’s Magazine’, 4, 12–13, 15, 17.

³⁵ R. Péter, ‘Religion and Enlightenment in Thomas Dunckerley’s Neglected Writings’ in R. Péter and A. Önnorfors, *Researching British Freemasonry 1717–2017* (Sheffield: CRFF, 2010), 127–157. S. M. Sommers, *Thomas Dunck-*

He was also active in promoting additional degrees in Freemasonry, trying to create a comprehensive set of degrees and to incorporate them in the structure of the Premier Grand Lodge. Since that was also the case in Swedish Freemasonry, which since 1759 had indulged itself in grandiose Knights Templar imagination, it is possible that Duke Charles intended to forge an alliance.

The open instruction to Silfverhielm was signed on 8 January 1798 by the Duke and counter-signed by Grand Secretary, Battram. It contained seven paragraphs. Silfverhielm was here titled as ‘extraordinarily accredited envoy to the [...] English Great National Lodge.’ The aim of his mission was to establish trust and lasting bonds of friendship. After being instructed to display impeccable conduct and to gain admission to the Premier Grand Lodge, Silfverhielm was tasked with gathering intelligence about ‘everything for the best and progress of the Order.’ Depending on the degree and rank of his English counterparts, Silfverhielm was encouraged to give information about the Swedish rite. If he noted any differences in the ritual, the Duke asked him to make and to send detailed annotations. In particular he wanted to be informed about the charitable institutions established by English Freemasonry. The last paragraph made it clear that the main aim was to convince the English brethren of Swedish trust and friendship in order to promote unity and concord between both orders.

On the same day the Duke signed Silfverhielm’s secret instructions. The nine paragraphs are compelling and reveal some of the true reasons why he was interested in a rapprochement between Swedish and English Freemasonry and his attitudes towards it. The first paragraph committed Silfverhielm to a specific procedure in introducing himself as the envoy of the Swedish Order of Freemasons, aiming to underscore its dignity. Silfverhielm was asked to notice how and with what attitude the English brethren would receive him. The second paragraph touched upon a far more contentious issue – that of supremacy in inter-Masonic relations. It deserves to be quoted in full:

erley and English Freemasonry (Cambridge: Pickering & Chatto), 109–114, ‘Dunckerley Goes on Crusade’.

Swedish secret instruction to Silfverhielm '2° §	English translation §2
<p><i>Honom [Silfverhielm] åligger at vid alla tilfällen undvika den förmente suprematie eller öfvervelde, som engelska Frimureriet i gemen vill taga sig öfver andre Länders Loger; och som Svenska Landt Logen aldrig erkänt något företräde af den Engelska, så undvikes sorgfälligt alla sådane tvister; men skulle emot förmodan något sådant förefalla, gifver Svenska Landt Logens Sändbud klarligen tillkänna, at emedan den äger sin magt och myndighet ifrån et helt annat ställe än Engeland, kan den ej [b]jeller erkänna dess landt Loges öfvervalde: den utgjör en Särskildt Provints, independent af den engelska och hafver ej annan delaktighet med den samma än den hvilken en nära vänskap befremjar och som likheten uti gjöromälens ändamål stadgar.'</i></p>	<p>'He [Silfverhielm] is obliged on all occasions to avoid the alleged supremacy or superiority which English Freemasonry generally wants to exercise over the lodges of other countries; and since the Swedish Grand Lodge has never accepted a precedence from the English, such disputes are to be avoided diligently; but if such unexpectedly occur, the envoy of the Swedish Grand Lodge should clearly declare that, since it owns its power and authority from a completely different place from England, it can also not accept the precedence of its Grand Lodge: it [Sweden] constitutes a particular province, independent from the English, and shares no other interest than that which promotes a close friendship and which is stated by the uniformity of the aims of its practices.'</p>

In other words the Duke openly addressed the attempts of the Premier Grand Lodge to exercise regulating powers in relation to foreign Grand Lodges, and stated moreover that the Swedish Grand Lodge had never accepted such superiority. Against the backdrop of the Tullman case described above and the correspondence with de Vignoles, this position can be disputed on good grounds.

The question is whether the Duke had ignored how the conflict had been solved or whether he rejected its implications, namely that the Swedish Grand Lodge had effectively taken over the dignity (and function) of Tullman's Provincial Grand Lodge of Sweden in 1771, and as late as 1784 (when the Duke had been Grand Master for ten years) was identified in this capacity by London.³⁶ What is far more perplexing though is that Duke

³⁶ In 1784, the Premier Grand Lodge wrote to Stockholm and asked politely why they hadn't heard back for a decade. An official reply was ordered by Duke Charles in May of the same year and drafted by Grand Secretary Fredenheim in which he referred to the Tullman-case, royal protection king by Gustav III, and leadership exercised by Duke Charles over Freemasonry in general and 'the highest degrees in the Inner of the Temple' in particular. Both letters are preserved in 'Inkomna skrivelser till Storsekreteraren 1746–1847', SFMO. See also Kupferschmidt. 'Notes', 206–207. Furthermore, and adding to the complexity that awaits more comprehensive research, Eckleff in Stockholm had granted Zinnendorf in Berlin a patent to establish lodges working in the Swedish Rite in 1765, which five years later led to the foundation of the *Grosse Landesloge der Freimaurer von Deutschland* (GLL). However, owing to the rivalry of this Grand lodge (also working in Knights Templar degrees) with the SO, Duke Charles, who was during his negotiations to assume leadership over the SO, was prompted to withdraw the foundational patent of the GLL. But the question is whether Sweden had the authority to do so at all (arguably both the granting of a patent to form a new Grand lodge in 1765 and to order its cessation in 1777). Zinnendorf at his end had in 1773 received recognition of his GLL by the Moderns Grand lodge in London and was able to claim that the cessation of the Swedish patent was of no effect. From the Swedish perspective, however it was perceived so, which is yet another indication that Sweden considered its Masonic authority unaffected by the Moderns' attempt at European dominance on issues of recognition and regularity. The relationship between the Swedish Grand Lodge and the GLL only improved after the death of Duke Charles.

Charles claimed that the power and authority of the Swedish Grand Lodge originated somewhere completely different from England, which of course begs the question: from where? The French patents from 1738 and 1751 respectively, as well as the foundation of the Swedish Grand Lodge in 1760, were in 1771 considered regular by de Vignoles, so there can have been little doubt that the French origin of the Swedish Grand Lodge was recognized retrospectively. So why did Duke Charles not simply state 'since our origin is French'? The answer lies in the next sentence, where he explains that Sweden constitutes a 'particular province', independent of England, which refers to the division of Europe in different provinces of the Order [of Knights Templars], introduced by the Strict Observance or arguably already by earlier forms of Knights Templar systems in Europe. The origin of the rituals with which Carl Friedrich Eckleff (1723–1786) in 1759 had founded the first Masonic Knights Templar chapter *L'Illuminé* in Stockholm is still shrouded in considerable mystery. What we know is that they were directly imported from Geneva and were possibly of Italian origin or from Avignon. They have resemblances to but are different from the rite of Clermont-Rosa (which spread during the Seven Years War) and are significantly different from the Strict Observance. As a consequence of Swedish involvement in the Strict Observance, Duke Charles in March 1780 (under royal protection) founded the 'IXth Province of the Order' (the 'Archipelago') comprising Sweden, the Baltics, and the Russian Empire, and held on to the claim of territorial authority and autonomy even after the collapse of the Strict Observance in 1782. In fact the Swedish Order of Freemasons continued to call itself the 'IXth province' until 1937.³⁷ But the question still remains as to who Duke Charles considered had given this province 'power and authority' back in time. Did he refer to an ominous patent that King Gustav III had received from the Pretender in 1783 during a visit to Florence, and which transferred the authority over the Knights Templar to the Swedish crown?³⁸

³⁷ Kuperschmidt, 'Notes', 205–206. *Det svenska frimureriet – när hände vad?* (Uppsala: Eckleff, 2010), 66, which also mentions a royal proclamation from 1939 in which the complete independence of the Swedish Grand Lodge as a national organization is underscored (and thus to a certain degree echoes Duke Charles's instruction to Silfverhielm). In the context of its origin, the most likely explanation is that dropping the name 'IXth Province' as well as changing the title of the Grand Master *Visaste Salomo Vicarie* ('Most Wise Representative of Solomon') to *Ordens Visaste Stormästare* ('Most Wise Grand Master of the Order') was an attempt to appease contemporary anti-Masonry and its allegations of Jewish links and of international collaboration. There are also other examples related to the removal of references to Jewish religion during the period. Future research hopefully will shed more light on this intriguing episode to which also is related the fact that M. Kinnander in the middle of the war, in 1943, published *Svenska Frimureriets Historia* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1943) which not only glossed over the international dimensions of Swedish Freemasonry, but reprinted the royal decree of 1939 on page 55. In the light of a potential German occupation (and the fate of their brethren in Denmark and Norway), Swedish Freemasonry nervously monitored Nazi attitudes. Helge Bjørn Horrisland will develop the episode of the Nordic Grand Lodges dropping their provincial numbers in a forthcoming publication provisionally titled *Norsk frimureri i nazismens skygge* ('Norwegian Freemasonry in the shadow of Nazism'). The Norwegian Order of Freemasons dropped its number (X) in 1945 and Denmark retained number VIII until 1972.

³⁸ A. Önnerfors, 'Fraternal Kingdom? Freemasonry at the Court of Gustav III of Sweden (1772-1792)' and sources quoted therein in T. Biskup, *Courts and Enlightenment* (forthcoming). See also G. Anderberg, *Frimuraren Gustaf III* (Partille: Warne, 2009), 156–167.

The third paragraph of Silfverhielm's secret instructions was related to the first, and in the fourth paragraph the open instruction was summarized, and Silfverhielm encouraged to share its content with the leadership of English Freemasonry. The fifth paragraph arrived at one of the main goals of his mission: 'to gather more intelligence about the history of the inner order', and the Swedish envoy was entitled to use both secret and open channels to achieve this goal. But in doing so he was not allowed to claim that 'Swedish Masonic knowledge was less complete; to the contrary, it may be that in this respect treasures are preserved here [in Sweden] that are unknown in England.' The Duke also noted that a number of degrees were conferred in England that 'here [in Sweden] are regarded as false.' Unfortunately he did not mention which degrees, but still demanded to receive detailed information about them. Paragraph six was devoted to Freemasonry in Scotland, the so-called Scottish degrees (intermediary degrees in the Swedish rite between Craft and Knights Templar) and their potential relationship to Swedish Freemasonry.

It is not entirely clear in which degrees the Duke actually was interested, but it is most likely those of the Masonic Knights Templar established by Dunckerley. But he might also have been curious about the Red Cross of Constantine, which traced its history back to the first Christian emperor and which had been practised in England since the end of the eighteenth century. In Sweden a secret fraternal chivalric order of St Helena (Constantine's mother), *S:t Helena Orden*, with elaborate symbolism and rituals was founded by the Duke. The seventh paragraph again instructed Silfverhielm to note carefully any differences between the Swedish rite and English Freemasonry and highlighted his freedom to fulfill the Swedish mission. Among the papers issued to the Swedish diplomat is a peculiar certificate in French:

*A la Gloire
Du Très haut Le Trois Fois Grand Architecte
De L' Univers.
[Jerusalem Cross]*

*Nous Frère Charles humble Serviteur du Seigneur Gr. Pr. Des Ch: Re: & Se: de l'O: du S: T: de J: et du S^{te} S^{pre} de N: S: J: C: de la IX^{me} Pr.
Certifions par la presente que le Frère George Baron de Silfverhjelm a ete initié dans nos Misteres et qu'il a été revetu du Pourpre comme Ch: Se: du S: T: de J: et du S^{te} S^{pre} de N: S: J: C: Nous le Recommandons a nos chers Frères qui connoissent les liasons étroites su Sang qui nous unisent en le confiant a la haute Protection de l'Être Supreme qui veille à nos Traveaux.*

Donne de l'Adytum du Nord 19. Juliet 1798.

*[Signature Charles 'Patriarchal Cross']
Duc d Sud
In Ord: Dic: Eqv. & Frat. Profess.[?]*

À Sole Vivificante.

[Seal with Star of David]

Several things are remarkable with regard to this certificate issued to Silfverhielm. It is not Masonic in the sense of referring to the Craft degrees, but it is clearly placed within the Knights Templar and chivalric context of European Freemasonry. The invocation of the three times Grand Architect at the start as well as protection from the ‘Supreme Being’ at the end of the certificate refer of course to typical motifs in Freemasonry. However, Duke Charles introduces himself as a servant of the Great Protector (according to the Swedish interpretation this office was transferred by the Pretender to the Swedish crown in 1783) of the chivalric ‘Order of the Holy Temple of Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulcher of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the IXth Province.’ Sixteen years after the collapse of the Strict Observance he thus still claimed to represent a Province of the Order of Knights Templar (but also of the Holy Sepulchre, which actually uses the Jerusalem Cross as its symbol). Silfverhielm is recommended as a member of this order (apparently a mixture of both) by those who ‘recognize the close ties of blood which unite us.’ It is not entirely clear to what this phrase refers, since the Swedish and British royal houses at the time were not directly connected. Possibly the phrase refers to a part in the ritual of these chivalric degrees in which blood occupied a symbolic function. Charles also signed in his capacity of being both a knight and a priest together with his chivalric name in the order, *À Sole Vivificante*, the ‘lifegiving sun.’ The question is to whom Silfverhielm would show this certificate, being insignificant at least for the Premier Grand Lodge as that body only exercised authority over the Craft degrees. But its existence underlines the point that one of the main aims of the mission seems to have been to find out more about, and potentially forge alliances with, higher degree and chivalric Freemasonry in Britain.

The Correspondence between Duke Charles and Silfverhielm

During the early autumn of 1798 the Duke and Silfverhielm travelled in different directions. Duke Charles went to take the waters in Carlsbad (Karlovy Vary), intending to travel to Italy. He had arrived in Vienna via Prague by the end of October. But by then it had emerged that it was impossible to travel further south owing to the French invasion of Italian lands – characterized by the Duke as a *Pays dans une Confusion totale* (‘a country in total confusion’).³⁹ Thus, Duke Charles and his small entourage decided to stay in the Habsburg capital. On 17 November 1798 he started his exchange of letters with Silfverhielm in London through the Swedish post director Starck in Hamburg.⁴⁰ The Swedish post office served as a hub of communication with the northern kingdom’s European contacts. The Duke assumed that Silfverhielm had by now established himself

³⁹ Duke Charles to Silfverhielm, Vienna 19 February 1799, Kungliga Biblioteket Stockholm, Ep. S. 16.

⁴⁰ Duke Charles to Silfverhielm, Vienna 17 November 1798, Kungliga Biblioteket Stockholm, Ep. S. 16.

‘on an island which is closely observed by Europe.’ He wrote about his stay in Carlsbad, the plans to remain in Vienna during the winter, and other topics and concluded: ‘having nothing else to report concerning the task you so kindly agreed to take on, I finish these lines by ensuring your fulfilment of the close liaison mutually uniting Masonic brethren.’ Silfverhielm’s replies arrived in February 1799.

His letters are preserved in the Royal Library in Stockholm. These are mostly written in cipher, as is the majority of the Duke’s correspondence with leading Swedish Freemasons during this period, using a similar procedure.⁴¹ A simple transposition cipher was applied by using a quadratic metallic grid (or grille) in which certain spaces are cut out allowing the insertion of numbers, letters, and symbols. By turning the grid (a technique developed during the Renaissance by Cardano and called Cardan or Fleissner Grille), it was possible to code the text written on the letter page. Silfverhielm’s and other grilles are preserved to this day in the Archive and Library of the Swedish Order of Freemasons and represent a relatively advanced form of cipher. As it would have taken a long time to decode the letters in the Royal Library, I was lucky enough to identify Duke Charles’s notebook in which he had deciphered the dispatches himself, and could thus compare his solution with the originals, and also be guided by the preserved grille. Silfverhielm’s first dispatches to the Duke, which they both called *apostillor* relations are dated 4 and 22 January 1799 and were sent from London to Vienna. Here we receive a first-hand description of public opinion towards Freemasonry as compared with that during an earlier stay in England, most likely in the beginning of the 1790s.

Freemasonry, which since my last stay in England [probably during the early 1790s] in a rather unimportant way was acknowledged by the public has since that time in a high degree turned into a topic of diligent and curious public interest and even more of closer investigation by the government. Two learned men, the one a Scotsman with the name of Robison, professor in Edinburgh, the other a Frenchman called Barruel, an Ex-Jesuit, have both within a year and each in his own language published writings accusing Freemasonry of being the breeding ground and nursery for the present teachings of revolution, destroying all social order and legitimate government. With some but insufficient acquaintance of the true secret of Freemasonry, both have united a more true and extensive knowledge of ‘Illuminatism’ [*sic*] both of its atheistic type from Bavaria, the head of which was Weishaupt, as well as of the mystical, which as its tools has used a Cagliostro, or a Pater Gassner, as well as other publicly known charlatans. How finally these two types of Illuminati – as a vehicle to transport their systems – have gained access to the secret of Freemasonry and in particular for this purpose have exploited its three Craft degrees has been known by these above-mentioned authors. But such a knowledge has then been applied by them without differentiation to throw a shadow on the entire Order of Freemasons and in particular its higher secrets. French Freemasonry and in particular its operations under the rule of the Duke of Orleans has

⁴¹ Önnorfors, ‘Schwedische chiffrierte diplomatische Korrespondenz.’

been cited by Barruel as evidence for the activity of the entire Order to [bring about] the present revolution in society. Although correct knowledge of the matter takes off all suspicion from the hazard posed to societies and religion by the Masonic order, if perceived as such in the right way, it is at the same time less surprising that the fear of the profane world has been awakened by these crippled but partly evidenced facts on the misuse that was caused [by certain forms of Freemasonry].

This entire relation, outlined already in December 1798, is highly remarkable. From it we can conclude that Barruel's and Robison's writings had an immediate effect on domestic opinion in Britain. It also appears that the contemporary discourse had difficulties in distinguishing between the Bavarian Illuminati as a movement promoting hyper-enlightenment values and those who claimed to have been 'illuminated' by more esoteric practices. Even more remarkable is the content of dispatch 88, in which a link to domestic British politics is claimed:

The Order can expect a persecution here which is caused by the unsuitable zeal of the writers [Robison and Barruel] mentioned earlier. It has not been triggered yet, but if one knows the Minister's [Prime Minister Pitt] tactics, it is possible to judge from certain previous conditions with rather precise certainty what [the PM] has in mind.

In other words already in January 1799 informed circles in the capital had reasons to believe that Freemasonry would be targeted by the British government in a clampdown caused by the conspiracy theories disseminated by Barruel and Robison and the negative public opinion they had triggered. As we shall see later, there were also other reasons explaining government actions. The precarious nature of Silfverhielm's mission forced him to operate with extreme caution by disclosing himself as an 'ombudsman' of Swedish Freemasonry. The best way to approach the English Grand Lodge as a Swedish diplomat would be to get into contact with 'a man with reputation, known by both the PM and the public as a loyal friend of the government.' And so he had targeted a certain 'Hesseltine', employed in the navy and 'who is highly esteemed among the public and who in the Grand lodge over a period of twenty years has behaved as a zealous and worthy brother and worked there as [Grand] Secretary and Treasurer.' Silfverhielm expressed a hope of meeting with this illustrious brother very soon. In reality, his encounter with Hesseltine was, according to a later dispatch, very frustrating. Yet another Freemason who could be approached 'easily, whenever', was Lord Moira (Francis Rawdon Hastings, 1st Marquess of Hastings, 2nd Earl of Moira (1754–1826), called 'Deputy Grand Master'.⁴² However, as Silfverhielm explained, to approach Moira, which otherwise would have been the best option

⁴² Vol 1, August 1793 of the *Freemasons' Magazine*, has an engraved portrait and provides us with a biography of Rawdon, titled 'Acting Grand Master', 232–234 and 301–303. The biography noted that Rawdon belonged to the opposition, 'an active adversary to the Minister in the House of Lords.'

has now the disadvantage that this man, who was generally in high esteem some time ago, has had a conflict with the Minister [Pitt] since he is an Irishman and has different opinions than Mr. Pitt concerning how to counter the rebels in his home country. The political principles of the Earl of Moira are by the way rather sound and his inclination towards the successor [the Prince of Wales] and this sir's friendship with the Earl is one of the factors the public appreciates the most among the private views of the prince.

Silfverhielm thus explains that approaching Moira in the context of contemporary politics would be disadvantageous owing to Moira's views upon the government (and brutal) handling of the Irish rebellion and moreover his close connection with the Prince of Wales. And as a consequence,

those who believe that Mr Pitt extends his calculations very much (and for which there seems to be reason, not the least in trying to secure his own position [as PM]) want to understand the persecution of the Masonic order here in England as indirectly targeting the Prince of Wales and the Earl of Moira as his most likely candidate for PM in case of the death of the current Royal English Highness.

This assessment from a high-ranking European diplomat suddenly provides a completely different picture from what hitherto has been known in relation to the background of the 'Unlawful Societies Act.' What Silfverhielm (and his informants) here suggest is that one of the true motives behind the expected persecution of Freemasonry must be understood in the context of Pitt's self-preservation of political power as PM. Pitt's calculation, according to the letter, seems to be: anything that harms the Prince of Wales (and in extension Lord Moira who apparently was considered his choice as PM) will strengthen and secure Pitt's government.

Silfverhielm's first dispatches provided insights into the negative British public perception of, as well as potential motives behind, the politics of persecuting Freemasonry. In his reply written in cipher, dispatch 21, the Duke informed his envoy that he 'with infinite pleasure had received intelligence my baron has provided me concerning the state of Freemasonry in England.' And he commented on the attacks against Freemasonry in the following way:

It is not the first time our society has been subjected to the machinations of jealousy and evil. However, since it cannot in the slightest way accuse itself of having a part in plots and evil intentions that are so distanced and different from the high goals of our Order, I hope that its innocence and noble purposes now as before will defeat the evil plots of darkness and in time overcome all such difficulties and sorrows that only a few have [created] together by intrigues and envy. From my own experiences I am familiar with such infamous accusations in that I have recently read a book in which the author aimed to prove that I, as the head of Swedish Freemasonry, was instrumental in the murder of my brother [Gustav III in 1792] in my capacity as the head of the Swedish Jacobins, such as the Duke of Orléans was in France. But when such rude and incon-

sistent accusations are brought forward, they eventually dissolve by their own weight, because there is only one truth and sooner or later it will be entirely revealed, when a just public cannot act in any other way than to take the party of the one who innocently is blamed and suppressed. This is what surely also happens in England, but one or a couple of lampoons can never denigrate a society known since time immemorial for order and honesty and the practice of good deeds.⁴³

The Tomb of Jaques Molay

What is of interest here is that the Duke openly commented on being exposed to insinuations in his quality of Swedish Grand Master in general and in connection with the murder of his brother Gustav III in particular. The book he referred to is *Le Tombeau de Jacques Molai* (1797), by Charles-Louis Cadet de Gassicourt (1769–1821), which I have treated comprehensively elsewhere.⁴⁴ Still, some parts are important in order to understand the accusations of revolution and regicide directed against European Freemasonry in general and against Knights Templar Freemasonry in particular at the time. The book is principally divided into two large parts. Under the heading *Le Tombeau de Jacques Molai* the large narrative of conspiracy is outlined on about 130 pages. The second part, *La Clef des Loges*, exposes the rituals and symbols of Freemasonry. In the introduction Gassicourt declares that he is going to talk about the ‘adepts, the initiated, the Freemasons, the Illuminated, develop their terrible mysteries, their political assassinations, and make known the influence they have exercised upon our revolution.’⁴⁵ These secret adepts had been united by homicide for six centuries, dating back to the historical Knights Templar who aimed at a project to usurp the sovereignty of all empires.⁴⁶ Incarcerated by the French king at the Bastille, their Grand Master Jacques de Molay formed four mother lodges or chapters: in the East, Naples; in the West, Edinburgh; in the North, Stockholm; and in the South, Paris.⁴⁷ These four lodges, Gassicourt claimed, took an oath to exterminate all kings and the race of the Capetian [French] dynasty, to destroy the power of the Pope, to preach liberty to the people, and to establish a world republic.⁴⁸

Universal aspirations are also vilified in other parts of the text. For that purpose, the Knights Templar established Freemasonry and used it as a tool to bring about *la grande conspiration*: Masonic ceremonies were simply turned into allegories of the history of the Templars, first revealed in the ultimate degrees of revenge. This spirit of theft, heredi-

⁴³ Duke Charles to Silfverhielm, 16 February 1799, Kungliga Biblioteket Stockholm, Ep. S. 16. See also Anderberg, *Frimuraren Gustaf III*, 30.

⁴⁴ A. Önnersfors, ‘Criminal Cosmopolitans: Conspiracy theories surrounding the assassination of Gustav III of Sweden in 1792’ in T. Haug & A. J. Krischer, *Höllische Ingenieure* (forthcoming).

⁴⁵ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 18.

⁴⁶ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 21.

⁴⁷ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 25 and 30 not reflecting upon that Stockholm barely was existing at that point in time.

⁴⁸ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 28.

tary vengeance, and regicidal fanaticism, had its religious precursors in the Syrian Islamic sect of Assassins.⁴⁹ Gassicourt claims that the Knights Templar united with this religious sect and incorporated their doctrines into their own. But the Jesuits also belonged to the initiated, famous for their assassinations of kings and statesmen, accused of thirty-nine conspiracies and twenty-one regicides.⁵⁰ Gassicourt now developed the subject with a huge number of historical examples and asked rhetorically ‘who else than the eternal enemies of the kings dare to consecrate their revolutionary system in such a monument?’⁵¹ Speaking about the organization of the conspiracy, he claimed that each chapter consisted of twenty-seven members, one of them a travelling member with the task of establishing communication between them. And one of these travelling agents, he went on comprehensively, was the infamous mystic Cagliostro, who was said to have predicted the French Revolution and the destruction of the Bastille.⁵² The trial of Cagliostro in 1790 in Rome revealed, according to Gassicourt, a vast plot to overturn France, Italy, and Rome. Despite the closure of Masonic lodges in revolutionary France, the conspiring chapters of the Knights Templar still survived, ‘the current Grand Master is the Duke [Charles] of Sudermania, regent of Sweden.’⁵³ It was now Gassicourt developed the argument that Gustav III was murdered by order of his own brother because of the king’s support for the French monarchy: ‘The King of Sweden was allied with Louis XVI: during the escape to Varennes, Gustav came right to the borders to meet him and to protect him; but the Duke of Sudermania had his brother assassinated by Anckarström, a free-mason.’⁵⁴

And Gassicourt commented as well upon the contemporary Swedish government: As ‘every Templar can govern, but not reign, the Duke of Sudermania has immediately made an alliance with the Jacobins in Paris, depriving the Swedish nobles of much of their privileges, restricting the rights of the king of whom he is the guardian, and who has been exposed to assassination attempts already twice.’⁵⁵ In contrast to the murder of Gustav III, these assassination plots are entirely fictional, the brainchild of Gassicourt, perhaps echoing the post-revolutionary European press which was replete with tense rumours of Jacobin misdoings and which ascribed to them almost super-human power.

As head of the Jacobins in France it was the French Grand Master Phillippe d’Orléans (he adopted a new name, *Egalité* – ‘Equality’ – after the revolution), who conspired to bring about revolution, not only in France but across Europe, and, among other evils, they

⁴⁹ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 31–32.

⁵⁰ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 40–41.

⁵¹ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 44.

⁵² The concept of Cagliostro and his fate as travelling agent of the most diverse esoteric practices during the immediate pre-revolutionary era was well-known to the European reading public.

⁵³ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 59 and 120.

⁵⁴ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 58.

⁵⁵ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 61.

prepared for the assassination of Gustav.⁵⁶ The Irish uprisings and attempts to assassinate George III were blamed upon the existence of a Templar's chapter in Ireland, directed from London, and Masonic lodges were equated with the revolutionary Irish defenders. King William of Prussia was said to be surrounded by the initiated evil and it was very likely that he would follow the fate of the Swedish king.⁵⁷

These instances and a thousand others,' says Gassicourt, 'are a proof that if the strangers, the anti-religious, the anarchists without interruption are troubling public tranquillity, they are nothing else than the instruments of a constantly conspiring faction – of the initiates, which, always talking about the great interests of the people, only is occupied with its own.'⁵⁸

It is in this faction you find all kind of parties and terrorists. Great political troubles are organised close to the reunion of the Templar chapters:

'It is in Sweden, in England, in Italy, in France, where the thrones are attacked, where they stagger or fall, where the ecclesiastical power is destroyed, and where the true Freemasons, the Jacobins, reunited around the tomb of Jacobus Molay establish independence, seize wealth and government.'⁵⁹ Everything is in their hands: 'We shall not be surprised if the king of England, of Sweden, the Pope and the Emperor will fall under their sword.'⁶⁰

But it is not only exoteric political violence which constitutes the power of the initiated; it is also their esoteric skills. Studies in the secrets of nature create an inconceivable power.⁶¹ Gassicourt describes at length the hermetic skills of the initiates, which for instance contribute to an instant communication among them, only to be compared to the telegraph (that at the time was developed); their coordinated action makes them appear as supranatural men.⁶² As an example, Gassicourt recounts an anecdote from the Swedish mystic Swedenborg who (without knowing it of course) revealed the content of a letter from Frederik the Great of Prussia to his sister Louise Ulrika, Queen of Sweden, about a royalist *coup d'état* in 1756.⁶³ These people constitute

a society of new beings, who know each other without having seen each other, who understand each other without explanation, and who serve without friendship. This

⁵⁶ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 64. In a note Gassicourt assured that 'all the journals of the time agreed to say that these events were prepared in the Masonic lodges; in time they were stopped by the authorities.'

⁵⁷ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 120.

⁵⁸ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 71.

⁵⁹ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 72.

⁶⁰ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 73.

⁶¹ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 78–79.

⁶² Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 92.

⁶³ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 92–95 and 101. Gassicourt was obviously familiar with German journals and literature in general. His quotes suggest furthermore a line of continuity between the immediate pre-revolutionary discourse and post-revolutionary conspiracy theories, worth exploring further in future studies.

society has the project of governing the world, of appropriating the authority of sovereigns, of usurping their place [. . .] Its aim is universal domination.⁶⁴

The neophytes of the society take a horrible oath which prepares them for violence, poisoning and assassination. How is it, asks Gassicourt, that the doctrines of the initiates and that of the Jacobins overlap? Both ‘preach agrarian law, both foment anarchy, both strike kings, both seize power, and both demoralize the people, both of them are enriched at the expense of the states, and both are fanatical.’⁶⁵ Gassicourt also quoted extensively from an English title on *The use and abuse of Freemasonry* (1783) which painted the gloomy picture of a close link between the Knights Templar and Freemasonry, its symbolism and rituals.⁶⁶ Again, Gassicourt dwelled extensively on the similarity between Jesuits, Freemasons, and Knights Templar in their doctrines and crimes, ‘supported by the dagger and by poison.’⁶⁷

With such conspiracy theories around, it is not surprising that Freemasonry in Sweden, England, and indeed across Europe was faced with scepticism and persecution. But back to Silfverhielm’s mission.

Establishing Contacts with the Moderns Grand Lodge

Not only did the Duke reveal how he had been targeted by contemporary conspiracy theories, but he also recalled the name ‘Hesseltine’:

He must be the same who about twenty years ago was in contact with colonel Pfeiff (bless his soul), ombudsman of the Swedish Grand Lodge when the grudge concerning the English and Swedish [Grand] lodges arose concerning the patent of a secretary of the English embassy by the name of Tullman as Swedish Grand Master, which by this man [Hesseltine] was solved to the satisfaction of both [the English and Swedish Grand] lodges. I remember having seen this name among the papers of our archive and if this man is both wise and knowledgeable you will certainly be able to use him to your advantage both when it comes to negotiations and knowledge that might shed a light upon all parts and intelligence concerning the history of our Order. When Pfeiff lived, he spoke a lot about this man and told us that he knew all events, changes and coincidences that have unfolded in English Freemasonry since its first establishment and that he possessed complete knowledge about genuine as well as false higher [degree] Freemasonry. Once you have made his acquaintance, it is up to your own judgement to decide whether this has any basis. However, I thought it was right to inform you about everything I knew about this issue.

⁶⁴ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 103 and 106.

⁶⁵ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 111.

⁶⁶ G. Smith, *The use and abuse of Free-Masonry : a work of the greatest utility to the brethren of the society, to mankind in general, and to the ladies in particular* (London, Kearsly, 1783).

⁶⁷ Gassicourt, *Le Tombeau*, 174. A look into the source text reveals that Gassicourt did not quote correctly from the book at all.

It is remarkable that the duke, writing from Vienna without access to the Swedish Masonic archives, was able to recount these memories in detail. Not only did Heseltine sign the confirmed constitution for the Swedish Grand lodge in 1770, but Duke Charles was perfectly aware of the episode concerning Tullman and thus, that the ‘power and authority’ of Swedish Freemasonry at least was related to the English perception of it.⁶⁸ How far the former Grand Secretary Pfeiff’s perception of Heseltine was true or not cannot be ascertained. Silfverhielm’s encounter with him developed anyhow into a complete disappointment. Heseltine declined the baron’s advances on the grounds of age and illness, but the Swedish diplomat suspected that ‘this excuse was more pretended than real.’⁶⁹ Silfverhielm had received information that Heseltine

who in his professional occupation is dependent upon the PM, and, since he had already received knowledge about the planned abolition of Freemasonry, had decided to leave it behind in these dire times of hardship, and thus he ignored the situation of a true warrior: either be victorious or to die.

If Silfverhielm’s judgment is correct, there is no doubt that the prohibition of Freemasonry discussed in Britain in the spring of 1799 was a tangible reality. Even a loyal Freemason like Heseltine, who for decades had served the Grand Lodge, was apparently inclined to turn his back on the fraternity.

The contact with Lord Moira was established on the occasion of a dinner at a club over which Moira presided (unfortunately we do not know its name) in late February or early March 1799. Silfverhielm was introduced by the Swedish envoy von Asp. During the conversation Silfverhielm revealed himself as a Freemason, and mentioned that he had a mission on behalf of the Swedish Grand Lodge: ‘Lord Moira answered politely but coldly, and added that he would happily receive me as his guest.’ In order not to push the matter, Silfverhielm waited for two weeks for his visit and presented his Swedish documents:

He acknowledged the accuracy of the certificates, seemed to be flattered by the content of the letter [from Duke Charles to the Prince of Wales], expressed his appreciation of YRH and the attention of the Swedish Grand Lodge. But during our conversation, he touched upon the supremacy of the English Grand Lodge which I pretended not to notice or replied to so indirectly that he finally dropped the issue.

The conversation was ended with the assurances by Lord Moira that he would inform the Prince of Wales as soon as possible about the meeting. But Moira was very clear that the Prince of Wales only acted as the protector of the order whereas he as ‘Acting Grand Master’ exercised true power. According to Silfverhielm’s dispatches, over the next weeks the prohibition of Freemasonry by an act of parliament ‘and that it was included in the

⁶⁸ Hesseltine to Scheffer 29 February 1772 in ‘Inkomna Skrivelser till Storsekreteraren’, SFMO.

⁶⁹ Silfverhielm to Duke Charles, 21 May 1799, SFMO.

abolition of secret societies as planned by the PM' was publicly discussed. Since 'adversity generally hastens the English to change from pride to humility', Silfverhielm assumed that 'as soon as the persecution of Freemasonry by the government was mentioned, I was almost certain that Lord Moira in the one way or the other would take advantage of the letter and the mission to the English Grand Lodge from the side of YRH.' In case he was invited to Grand Lodge, Silfverhielm speculated as to whether it was better to accept than to decline. Given the tense political atmosphere, he claimed, however, to think more about the benefit for Freemasonry than for his own person and situation 'in case a prohibition of Freemasonry actually will come about.' Finally, Lord Moira sent several notes and on 9 April 1799 the Swedish diplomat was formally invited to attend Grand Lodge on the subsequent day:

Lord Moira regrets exceedingly that he was so unfortunate as not to be at home when the Baron de Silverhjelm did him the honour to call. There is to be a Quarterly Communication at Freemasons Hall tomorrow. If the Baron de Silfverhjelm would like to visit the Grand Lodge upon that occasion, L:d Moira would be happy to carry him previously to dinner with the Grand Officers a little before five, & will in that case, wait upon Baron de Silverhjelm to take him to the place where they are to meet.

And Silfverhielm replied:

B.S:ms. respectful comp:ts wait on Lord Moira & will certainly not neglect this very best opportunity His Lordship's condescension offers B. Silv: to pay his respects to the Grand Lodge to-day. From 4 o'clock B. Silv: will be ready at his home to wait for the honours of going with L:d Moira.

10 April 1799: The Big Day at Grand Lodge

Two days after his visit the baron penned a long letter in cipher to Duke Charles in Vienna in which the Quarterly Communications of April were described extensively. How international diplomacy and Freemasonry were intermingled is visible from the open letter in French that accompanied his report from Grand Lodge. Silfverhielm expressed his gratitude for the appointment as *Chargé d'Affairs* in London and described his efforts with respect to two Swedish convoys that had been seized by the Royal Navy. But the longest part of the letter concentrates on the ceremonies of a fraternity under the threat of government prohibition. It almost seems that Silfverhielm wanted to capture the detail of the ceremonial in case this was the last time Grand Lodge assembled. Almost 400 Freemasons were present when Silfverhielm was introduced as the envoy of the Swedish Grand Lodge.

At 5 o'clock in the afternoon Lord Moira arrived in his coach in the company of Sir Ralph Millbanke, the Provincial Grand Master of Durham, in order to take me to Freemasons' Hall where I was first invited to dine with all Grand Officers and was placed

at the table next to Lord Moira. As soon as dinner was finished, the doors were closed and Lord Moira briefly explained to those present that I with the permission of my king, who was the protector of Swedish Freemasonry and initiated into its secrets, had received an accreditation to the English Grand Lodge from YRH as Grand Master of Swedish Freemasonry and of its Grand Lodge with the aim of establishing and retaining peaceful relations and trust between all regular provinces. My certificates were produced, inspected, and accepted; their presentation was counter-signed by the Grand Secretary and sealed with the seal of the English Grand Lodge. Thereupon Lord Moira read out the copy of YRH letter [to the Prince of Wales] which was met with general and avid appreciation. The news that HMK is a Masonic brother and has declared his protection of Swedish Freemasonry was met with the same happiness as before, and Lord Moira immediately proposed a toast to YRH and the Swedish Grand Lodge and it was taken with the most general satisfaction.

Around 8 o'clock the Grand Director of Ceremonies called upon Lord Moira and the Grand Officers to say that the members of Grand Lodge were assembled and after we had gone to another room to dress in regalia, the procession to the Grand Hall commenced. When we were called, Lord Moira informed me that he had assigned me the place just in front of his, and added that he also wanted to leave that place as a token of appreciation, if possible. When Lord Moira had taken his seat, I was placed immediately to his right and the lodge was opened. After it was effected, Lord Moira rose to inform the English Grand Lodge of the honour it had received from the Swedish Grand Lodge, since an envoy had been sent with an official letter which he assumed now should be handed over in order to be opened in the presence of Grand Lodge. Its content was already known to him sufficiently in order to assure that it would be instructive and pleasant to listen to it. I then handed over the letter and found it appropriate – although in front of such a great assembly unknown to me and in another language – to make known the intentions which had motivated YRH and the Swedish Grand Lodge, and to assure the English Grand Lodge of its esteem and trust in a short address. One of the delegates present proposed that the members of Grand Lodge should rise during my address – a request that was seconded and immediately effected. Lord Moira broke the seal of the letter and read it in English, having rehearsed this earlier. The enthusiasm was general, and immediately a decision was taken to ask HRH the Prince of Wales for a reply on behalf of the English Grand Lodge in terms answering to the delight it had occasioned and the noble attitude it had displayed. Thereupon, greetings and signs of honour were presented to our royal Brother, the King of Sweden & protector of Masonry [English in the original], to YRH as the Grand Master as well as to the Swedish Grand Lodge, and expressed in the most flattering manner. It was also decided that YRH letter and the reply would be carefully recorded in the annals of the English Grand Lodge. Upon myself the honour was bestowed to be elected in open lodge by general acclamation a member of the English Grand Lodge. I rose again in order to express my emotions to the best of my ability concerning the mark of respect that had been presented to Swedish Freemasonry on this day, and to witness my gratitude concerning the honour that had been presented to me as its envoy, and I promised not to delay my report to YRH which I already

knew would be pleasant to your heart, enlivened by the purest zeal for the Order of Freemasons, its honour and prosperity.

After this ordinary business was conducted, and at the end of the meeting I was invited to supper by the Grand Director of Ceremonies to which also more than a hundred of the most illustrious in the Grand Lodge were invited and where I was placed to the right of the Grand Master, between him and the Grand Chaplain. Again, toasts were raised to the King of Sweden, YRH, and the Grand Lodge of Sweden, and the celebration was not terminated before 1 o'clock at night.

The Minutes of the Quarterly Communications of Grand Lodge in April 1799 are preserved.⁷⁰ Silfverhielm is listed right after the Grand Officers. Seven Provincial Grand Masters attended as well as Masters and Wardens of the Stewards Lodge and thirty-five individual lodges. After regular business had been conducted, 'the Baron de Silverhjelm Minister from HMK of Sweden to the Court of Great Britain presented to the Grand Master in the Chair the following letter from the National Grand Lodge of Sweden, which was read.'⁷¹ The letter (the French original of which has disappeared) is also printed in Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry* and below I reproduce the text together with slight amendments when compared with the Minutes which are placed in square brackets:

[To the Glory
of the Grand Architect of the Universe]

We Charles, by the Grace of God Hereditary Prince of the Swedes, Goths, and Vandals, Duke of Sudermania, Heir of Norway, Duke of Sleswick, Holstein, Stormarrie, and Dittmarche, Count of Oldenbourg and Delmenhorst, Grand Admiral of Sweden, Vicar of Solomon of the 7th and 9th Province, and National Grand Master of all the Lodges reunited under the Grand Lodge of Sweden working in the Royal Art within the States and Dominions dependent on our august Sovereign, Master, and Protector, His Majesty the King of Sweden.

Strength, Health, and Prosperity.

To the Most Illustrious, Most Enlightened, Most Sublime, Most Venerable and Venerable the National Grand Lodge of England, the National Grand Master, Deputy Grand Master, Grand Wardens, Grand Dignitaries, Grand Officers superior and inferior, and Worshipful Members,

Union, Content and Wisdom.

Most Illustrious and Most Enlightened Brethren, To contract an intimate, sincere permanent tie between the National Grand Lodge of Sweden and that of England, has long been ardently our object; but if temporary circumstances have delayed the effect

⁷⁰ Thanks to Martin Cherry at the Museum of Freemasonry, London for providing me with scans of the transcripts. See also Kupferschmidt, 'Notes', 207 and Prescott 'The Grand Lodges', 207–208.

⁷¹ London, Museum of Freemasonry, Minutes of the Premier Grand Lodge, 10 April 1799.

of our wishes, the present Moment leaves us at liberty. Our Order, which enjoys in the two States the same privileges and the same protection of Government, is not obliged to seek for security in darkness; and our labours approved as known to promote the public good are protected by the power of our Sovereigns, enjoying the sacred ri[ghts] of true liberty (their essence,) in being able without danger to exercise those charitable Deeds towards the unfortunate, which are the principal objects of our Duty.

This uniformity of situation, as well as the Fundamental Principles of the Craft, which we equally profess, authorizes us to consolidate and to draw closer a confidence, a friendship, and a reciprocal union between two bodies, whose common object is the good of Humanity, who mutually consider Friendship as the Nerve, and the Love of our neighbour as the pivot of all our Labours.

Deeply penetrated by these principles, we send the Most Illustrious Brother George Baron de Silverhjelm, decorated with the highest degrees of Masonry, as our Plenipotentiary, to present to the Most Enlightened, Most Sublime, and Most Venerable the National Grand Lodge of England, our affectionate Greeting.

He is charged on our part to express to you the sincere esteem we bear you, and how desirous we are to contract with you a fixed and permanent Union. We pray, therefore, that you will receive him amongst you as the Bearer of our Fraternal Sentiments, and that you will be pleased to give faith and credence to all that he may say on our part, conformable to these our Cordial Professions.

The Union, which is the basis of our labours, being once established between two Nations who reciprocally esteem each other, and who are both known to possess the requisite qualities of all Free and Accepted Masons, it will consolidate for ever the Foundation of the Masonic Temple, whose majestic edifice will endure to future ages. May the Most High, the Grand Architect of the Universe, deign to be favourable to the wishes we offer for the success of your endeavours; and we remain always, Most Illustrious and Most Enlightened Brothers, by the Sacred Number,

Your devoted Brother,
CHARLES
Duke of Sudermania
G. A. Reuterholm,
Grand Chancellor
Grand Lodge of Sweden
24th Jan., 1798.

After this letter was read out, the Minutes continue,

it was resolved unanimously that the Most Worshipful, the Grand Master be requested to return an answer on the part of the Society to the Duke de Sudermania, expressive of every sentiment correspondent to the warm and brotherly address received.

Concerning Silfverhielm it was stated that it likewise was unanimously stated that he 'be received as the representative of the Grand Lodge of Sweden, and have a seat with the Grand Officers at all meetings of the Grand Lodge.'⁷²

Duke Charles replied from Vienna on 3 May 1799 and expressed *beaucoup de satisfaction et je suis infiniment obligé des détails intéressants que vous m'avez donnés des premiers pas faits pour la cimentation de la bonne harmonie que nous désirons ardemment de consolider* ('great satisfaction and I am infinitely obliged for the interesting details that you have given me of some first steps made for the cementing of the good harmony that we ardently desire to consolidate.') These 'first steps towards cementing a good harmony' were developed further in a letter sent from Carlsbad ten days later in which the duke proposed to appoint and to send a Masonic envoy from England to Sweden, but not before his own return, since his brothers in the Grand Chapter 'with all their zeal for the order are novices when it comes to the ceremonies.'⁷³ Not even his own brother Fredrik Adolf could be trusted in this regard, as in ritual matters he did not know 'what is fish or what is fowl.' Since there were apparently frequent visitors from British lodges in Sweden, the duke asked Silfverhielm for a list of lodges in England, Ireland, and Scotland and intelligence concerning their organization. This was also occasioned by the fact that a Swedish merchant, Lars Clewer, had produced English certificates at a meeting of lodge *L'Union* in Stockholm, also in degrees that were unknown in Sweden. Silfverhielm noted: 'it was necessary and useful to stop his admission further than the Craft degrees. I know this man pretty well: he is in any case an adventurer, however not of the worst sort and most likely rather deceived than a deceiver, but I have little confidence concerning his Masonic relations here.'⁷⁴ This might be further evidence of the 'sense of concern on part of the Swedish Grand Lodge' about Swedes being admitted into British Masonic lodges.⁷⁵

As it emerged, the Swedish diplomatic initiative had an immediate effect in the context of rising external pressure against Freemasonry in British society. And already at the occasion of the next meeting of Grand Lodge, the Grand Feast on 8 May 1799, the response from the Prince of Wales to the Duke of Sudermania was presented. The transcribed letter (which was sent to Sweden in July) is attached further down and can be summarized as follows: the aim of Freemasonry is to promote general good and its 'simplicity' is described as a key asset. The fraternity enjoys governmental protection and it would

⁷² London, Museum of Freemasonry, Minutes of the Premier Grand Lodge, 10 April 1799. It is worth noting that Duke Charles in his letter to the Prince of Wales still claimed authority over the VIIth province of the order (inherited from the Strict Observance), whereas in reality he had resigned from that position nineteen years earlier.

⁷³ Duke Charles to Silfverhielm, Vienna 3 May 1799 and Carlsbad 13 May 1799, Kungliga Biblioteket Stockholm, Ep. S. 16 and D:1054:11.

⁷⁴ Lars Clewer or Clever has No. 4266 in the General Membership Record of Swedish Freemasonry. He is listed as being adopted from an 'unknown' lodge, but was in 1800 initiated into the higher degrees of lodge Nordiska Cirkeln in Stockholm, see Önnorfors, 'Mystiskt brödraskap', 181.

⁷⁵ Prescott, 'The Grand Lodges', 207.

be detrimental if turned into a front for conspiracies or ‘dangerous enthusiasm’, its core values being adoration of God, patriotism, and philanthropy. The question is whether the Prince’s stress on ‘simplicity’ was directed against the kind of higher degree of Freemasonry which was vilified by Gassicourt, Barruel, and Robison as a hotbed of revolutionary imagination and terrorism (and with which Duke Charles had been associated). However, the reply provided an opportunity to highlight the fact that Freemasonry in Britain was under royal protection (as it was in Sweden) and thus indirectly that any criticism or prohibition of it also implied opposition to royal policy.

The Consequences of the Swedish Rapprochement

But the Swedish rapprochement apparently also impacted on the course of development in the politically tense spring of 1799. As mentioned above, a delegation of leading British Freemasons had met with PM Pitt on 2 May. It appears as if this meeting convinced the PM to change his course in relation to the issue of prohibition. Not only this, Pitt himself subsequently spoke positively about the fraternity in Parliament. On 21 May 1799 Silfverhielm wrote again to the duke about the political developments in Britain. Its ‘floating fortresses’ had fought off French attacks, but now this ‘happy island’ had also been liberated from ‘its more secret and therefore more dangerous plans for disorganization aimed at domestic chaos.’ Since the secret organizations of the United Irishmen, Englishmen, and Scotsmen had been disclosed, the government had now taken steps to prevent and eradicate such looming chaos: ‘Soon all secret societies will be prohibited by an act of Parliament.’ In the light of this measure that all friends of constitutional government must welcome, the ‘secret and public enemies of Freemasonry have experienced that scorn and slander not always prove to be effective tools in the hands of insidious and revengeful people, to subdue innocence and to turn power into tyranny as a tool of suppression.’ Silfverhielm related that PM Pitt had spoken well of Freemasonry and proposed an exemption from legislation, which was acclaimed and acknowledged publicly. Even if ‘the enemies have been silenced’ it was still ‘probable that they secretly forge new arrows for future occasions.’ More remarkably, in a letter posted on 21 May 1799 to the duke, Silfverhielm claims that Lord Moira had produced the Swedish letter to the English Grand Lodge at the meeting with PM Pitt:

Not long after this assembly [the Quarterly Communications of 10 April], Lord Moira had a meeting with Mr Pitt at which Moira, among other proofs of the innocence of the order of Freemasons in all plots against social order, showed YRH’s letter to the English Grand Lodge and also mentioned the excellent protection it enjoys from the side of HM the Swedish king. The persecution was abandoned and I have heard a lot of brethren here express their conviction that YRH’s letter and mission not to a little degree contributed to this end.

Silfverhielm also announced that a decision had been taken to frame the letter written by Duke Charles and place it on the wall of the Grand Lodge room. If this account is true, the Swedish initiative indirectly impacted on the negotiation about exemption of Freemasonry from English legislation or at least was perceived as having this effect.

Duke Charles replied from the German spa Pyrmont in July and expressed his great pleasure 'to have contributed in a way that I could not have anticipated' to reach a common goal.⁷⁶ Most certainly it was not the intention to intervene in a matter of British domestic affairs, but the timing of the Swedish rapprochement could not have been better. In September 1799 Silfverhielm asked Duke Charles to write to Lord Moira expressing satisfaction concerning 'friendship and trust which this lodge on the occasion of the renewal of communications between English and Swedish Freemasonry had demonstrated as well as to offer congratulations on the victory against the impending persecution'. Whether such a letter was ever sent to Moira has not been possible to ascertain. Silfverhielm also promised to compile information related to British Freemasonry, a task he now could carry out diligently due to his position in the English Grand Lodge. A few more letters were exchanged and Silfverhielm was reappointed envoy of the Swedish Grand Lodge in 1801. The Swedish initiative had apparently occasioned a profound normalization of Masonic relations, or as Preston put it in his *Illustrations* (1802):

From the above correspondence and the happy opening of a regular communication between the Grand lodges of England, Scotland and Sweden, there is the greatest reason to believe that the best effects will result and that, agreeably to the wish of every zealous brother, a friendly and lasting intercourse will be preserved with the Freemasons of all the Kingdoms.

Whether the visit of Prince William Frederick to Sweden in 1802 and 1803 can be interpreted as a continuation of this new spirit of collaboration merits further investigation.⁷⁷ However, only a decade later the Swedish diplomat Count De la Gardie was present at the union between the Antients and the Moderns and the issue of closer contacts was raised again.

Overlapping Diplomacies

As I have argued elsewhere, owing to its close association with the monarchy and the state apparatus, Freemasonry in Sweden was identified as a tool of foreign policy.⁷⁸ During the reign of Gustav III (1771–1792) Knights Templar Freemasonry was part of Swed-

⁷⁶ Duke Charles to Silfverhielm, Pyrmont 24 July 1799, Kungliga Biblioteket Stockholm, Ep. S. 16.

⁷⁷ His time in Sweden ended with a scandal when he aimed to join a mixed-gender fraternity headed by Duke Charles and which the Swedish king identified as a revolutionary organization. As a result, Sweden in March 1803 adopted a similar legislation as Britain in 1799. Whether the Prince acted as an official envoy of the Moderns Grand Lodge has not been possible to establish.

⁷⁸ Önnorfors, 'From Jacobite Support' and 'Fraternal Kingdom'.

ish approaches to gain symbolical status in Europe through soft politics. Whereas these efforts during the 1780s were mainly concentrated on lost influence in the Baltic Sea Region, the Swedish rapprochement with Britain around 1800 seems to have been an integrated part of strategic realignment in the aftermath of the French Revolution, the Coalition, and the looming Napoleonic wars. Most certainly, Swedish intervention in British domestic affairs in the tense year of 1799 was not intended, but still it cannot be entirely dismissed, and it seems to have been welcomed on the part of the Moderns Grand Lodge. At least, since Prussian legislation in 1798, it must have occurred to leading Freemasons across Europe that the radicalization of politics sooner or later would target forms of secret sociability that had been established during the century, Freemasonry included. Persecution or regulation from the side of various governments and churches was not uncommon before 1789, but in connection with the boom of popularized and widely-disseminated conspiracy theories in the new political landscape the situation had developed for the worse. Freemasonry had to fend off accusations of being involved in or having orchestrated radical political change, undermining the rule of crown and church. At the same time Masonic leaders (even when belonging to or being close to their own governments) aimed at maintaining their privileges and preserving their Grand Lodges as independent actors in a nascent civil society. Thus, an agenda of incremental reform as opposed to radical change could be maintained, extending to thousands of members in lodges across the continent. This must have represented a delicate balancing act in a time of increasingly suspicious governance of reaction and restoration.

Even in the country of its origin Freemasonry was dangerously close to prohibition owing to a combination of popularized conspiracy beliefs and politics of paranoid fear of French invasion. According to Silfverhielm's spectacular claims, this was also because of conflicts in domestic politics in which Pitt anxiously defended his position in relation to a monarch with weak (mental) health and the opposition around the Prince of Wales and Lord Moira struggling over such contentious issues such as the Irish rebellion, restrictions of civil liberties, and relations with revolutionary France. Here, the Swedish diplomatic mission seems to have served as a token of good faith in negotiations with the government. If Silfverhielm's account is true, the analogy between Sweden and England expressed by Swedish rhetoric was used as an argument of the innocence of Freemasonry. So, while on the one hand it is true that increased Swedish and English collaboration was aimed against 'radical and republican tendencies within Freemasonry', as Prescott has suggested, on the other hand the situation seems to have been more complex. From the Swedish side, the overlap of official and Masonic diplomacy was interpreted as a positive step towards new relations with Great Britain in times of geopolitical reconfigurations in Europe. In Britain the Swedish advance was utilized in negotiating an expansion in Freemasonry's room for manoeuvre in a challenging domestic setting. What the episode

of 1799 reminds us of is that Freemasonry can serve as an important channel of trust-building contacts in times of both domestic and international crises.

APPENDIX

Transcript and Translation of Prince of Wales to Duke Charles 8 May 1799

(Original in the Archive and Library of the Swedish Order of Freemasons, 'Inkomna Skrivelser till Storsekreteraren 1746–1847.' Translation from French by Bro. Michael Taylor. See also Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry* from 1801, which most likely reproduced the original concept in English.)

*A La Gloire
Du Grand Architecte
De l'Univers
George, Prince de Galles
etc. etc. etc.*

F ∴ S ∴ P ∴

[Force Santé Prosperité]

*A Notre très cher, très illustre et très
Éclairé Frère Charles Duc de Sudermanie
etc. etc. etc.*

V ∴ C ∴ S ∴

[Union Contentement Sagesse]

C'est avec la Satisfaction la mieux Sentie très cher, très illustre et très éclairé frère, que j'ay recue la Planche par laquelle vous exprimez votre désir [1]

de voir exister un Rapport intime entre les dignes et Véritables Maçons de la Suède et ceux de l'Angleterre. La haute Idée que j'ay de votre Caractère, et L'Estime fraternelle qui en est la Conséquence ajoutent encore au Plaisir que j'éprouve en Vous voyant L'Organe de Vôtre Ordre. Un Sentiment réciproque porte depuis bien Longtems ces deux braves Nations a S'admirer l'une et l'autre; mais cette Admiration, quoique généreuse, es Stérile. Il est donc à souhaiter qu'elle Soit alimentée par une Liason étroite entre les Membres d'un Ordre dont l'Existence dans les deux Paÿs es fondée sur le Bien de l'Humanité.

Je Suis instamment prié par mes Frères de la grande Loge d' Angleterre, de M'adresser à Vous très illustre, très venerable et très éclairé Frère pour faire part à la grande Loge de Suède, de leur Adhésion la plus unanime et la plus cordiale à ses Dispositions.

Nous sentons vivement combien une Communication suivie peut opérer à conserver cette Simplicité qui a distingué L'Ordre pendant tant de Siècles; Simplicité que est tout à la fois majestueuse et rassurante pour tous les Gouvernements qui nous accordant leur Protection. Reunissons nous pour la maintenir: proserivons des nouveautés qui fournissent à des Entousiastes dangereux, ou à des Conspirateurs atroces des Materiaux pour travailler dans l'obscurité

To the glory
of the Great Architect
of the Universe
George, Prince of Wales
etc. etc. etc.

F ∴ H ∴ P ∴

[Force Health Prosperity]

To our very dear, very illustrious and very
enlightened brother Charles,
Duke of Sudermania
etc. etc. etc.

U ∴ C ∴ W ∴

[Union Contentment Wisdom]

It is with most deeply felt pleasure very dear, very illustrious and very enlightened brother that I received your letter in which you express your desire [1]

to see the closest of ties between the true and regular Masons of Sweden and those of England. The high opinion I hold of your character and the fraternal esteem which this in turn engenders serve only to add to the great pleasure I have in seeing you at the head of your Order. A mutual feeling has, over a long period of time led these two proud nations to hold for each other the greatest admiration; but this admiration no matter how noble is sterile and so it is to be desired that it might be enlivened by a closer link between the members of an order whose existence in both countries is founded on the good of humanity.

I am earnestly begged by my brethren of the Grand Lodge of England to communicate with you most illustrious, most worshipful and most enlightened brother to inform the Grand Lodge of Sweden of their unanimous and most cordial support of its position.

We are acutely aware of how regular correspondence can work to preserve that simplicity which has distinguished the Order for so many centuries; a simplicity which is at one and the same time majestic and reassuring for the governments which afford us their protection. Let us unite to maintain it; let us proscribe those novelties which furnish material for those dangerous enthusiasts or wicked conspirators working under the cover of darkness and under the

en Se couvrant du Voile Sacré de Notre Ordre, et que nos travaux, comme ceux de Nos Prédecesseurs Soient embellis par Notre Adoration du tout Puissant, par [2]

Notre soumission au Gouvernement de Notre Patrie, et par L'Amour de notre Prochain. Ces Principes, justifieront la Protection que vous recevez de Votre auguste Souverain, et dont nous Jouissons pareillement Sous les Auspices de notre inestimable Père et Roi.

Puisse Le grand Architecte de L'univers exaucer Les Vœux que nous ne cesserons d'offrir au Ciel pour la Prosperité de ces deux Protecteurs Magnanimes de notre Ordre, et puisse r'il répandre Sur Vos, très illustre et très éclairé frère, aussi bien que sur vos vénérables collaborateurs les fruits inépuisables de Sa bienveillance.

Je vous Saliüe par les nombres Sacrés.

A L'Orient de Londres 8me de Mai 5799

GEORGE

["Seal of the Grand Lodge of Masons / London"]

Par Ordre du Grand Maître

W[illia]m: White G[rande] S[écretaire]

sacred veil of our Order and let our labours, like those of our predecessors be enriched by our adoration of the Almighty, by [2]

our submission to the government of our native country, and by our love for our neighbour. These principles will justify the protection you receive from your august sovereign and which we also enjoy under the auspices of our inestimable father and King.

May the Great Architect of the Universe answer the prayers we offer ceaselessly to Heaven for the prosperity of those two magnanimous protectors of our Order and may He grant you, most illustrious and most wise brother and also your worshipful colleagues the inexhaustible fruits of his benevolence.

I salute you with all the sacred numbers.

In the East, London 8th May 5799 [1799]

GEORGE

["Seal of the Grand Lodge of Masons / London"]

By order of the Grand Master

William White Grand Secretary

