

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM: THE FRENCH RITE IN SAINT DOMINGUE

By Josef Wäges.

Shrouded in the obscurity of time lies an enigma. Where exactly did the Scottish Rite Craft ritual come from and why was it created? The answers to these questions cannot be found within the pages of the rituals themselves and must be placed in their historical context. To fully answer these questions one is confronted with a massive and immediate obstacle, however. The sources point to a late 18th century origin in Saint Domingue, but due to the extremely violent nature of the Haitian revolution, little to nothing remains there from before 1804. The majority of the colonial records left in Saint Domingue are lost to time, but external sources remain scattered about the globe in various archives. This data can be reassembled to gain a better sense of the macro-Masonic history, through the creation of meta-data for every lodge that has materials available. In reassembling this data not only can we see the arrival of Freemasonry to the island and its rise and fall, but for the first time ever we can precisely see the entire life cycle as well as the Masonic networks of Etienne Morin's *Elus Parfaits* and *Order of the Sublime Princes of the Royal Secret*.

Surprisingly, we observe that not only was he a founding Masonic figure there, but that the systems that he gave birth to, created a national identity so strongly entrenched, that the Grand Lodge of France did not gain a firm foothold. It was only after his death, that the *Grand Orient de France* succeeded in bringing the island under its control. These sovereign aspirations were a taste of things to come.

THE FIRST LODGES (1740-1749)

Freemasonry arrives in Saint Domingue between 1738 and 1740 in Les Cayes with the founding of the lodge *La Concorde*.¹ This story is recorded about thirty years after the fact and is likely a second-hand account. Thankfully, it is remarked that it was established by English Masons from Jamaica. A search of English records reveals that the only Lodge active at that time was St. Johns Lodge, later called '*The Mother Lodge*' in Kingston, founded April 14, 1739 by the Premier Grand Lodge of England.² Some twenty months later a state of war existed between England and France, with the war of Austrian Succession beginning in earnest on December 16, 1740 and ending October 18, 1748. It is within a twenty month window that *La Concorde* is born into existence. The state of war brought direct English and French Masonic collaboration to an end, or so it seemed.

¹ BnF FM2 544. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

² Lane, John, Bernard Williamson, and William James Hughan. *Masonic Records, 1717-1894: Being Lists of All the Lodges at Home and Abroad Warranted by the Four Grand Lodges and the "United Grand Lodge" of England, with Their Dates of Constitution, Places of Meeting, Alterations in Numbers &c., &c. Also Particulars of All Lodges Having Special Privileges, Centenary Warrants, &c., &c.* Shepperton: Lewis Masonic, 2000.

Mercantilism practiced in England and France dictated that their colonial possessions were strictly prohibited to engage in commerce only within the spheres of their respective nations. Clearly this was a policy that existed in principal, yet in reality the lines were blurred and the protocols of necessity dictated a different policy. We see evidence of this first hand in the founding of *La Concorde*. Its location is key to the relationship between it and Kingston. Both cities are major producers and exporters of sugar for their respective colonies. Les Cayes lies at the southwestern tip of Saint Domingue and is far from the heavily trafficked shipping lanes on the northern coast of the island. Strategically it lies due East of Kingston, providing an ideal location for direct unsanctioned commerce. Masonic membership was the means of facilitating such a relationship.

Freemasonry was spread across the globe utilizing the seas, the highways of the 18th century, by bringing together merchants, landowners, ships captains, local government, and the military, under a common association that at times transcended nationalism. Nearly every major port city in both English and French colonial possessions had a Lodge. Saint Domingue was exceptional by comparison, counting at least thirty-nine known Lodges and many more high degree bodies attached to them throughout the life of the colony. One expects nothing less from the *Pearl of the Antilles*, whose output counted for half of French GDP during its existence. Understanding the Masonic social networks of the 18th century therefore is key to understanding the trade networks.

MORIN'S FIRST SYSTEM, THE ELUS PARFAITS (1745-1760)

Masonic membership was key to commercial success in this time period, and additionally offered the prospect of substantially better treatment, if one were taken prisoner. There are several contemporary accounts of Masonic courtesy superseding foreign policy out of fraternal respect. The most germane of these is that of Etienne Morin being taken prisoner twice by the English; the first time in 1745 and then again in 1762.³ Both of these events changed the course of Freemasonry forever on the island making Morin a deputy for the Elus Parfaits and the Grand Lodge of France. Morin used these powers to become the dominant figure until his death.

At the close of 1760, at least seven lodges had been founded in Saint Domingue. Three Lodges, *Saint Esprit* in Léogane, *l'Union* in Petit-Goave and the *Parfaite Loge d'Ecosse* of Port-de-Paix had demised. The remaining four Lodges, *La Concorde* in Les Cayes with its high degree bodies, the Perfect Scottish Lodge *Saint Jean de Jérusalem Ecossoise* and its symbolic Lodge *La Parfaite Harmonie* in Cap-Français, along with *La Concorde* in Saint-Marc, were all united as members of the system of the Elus Parfaits and all under the influence of Morin directly. This is why he was the obvious choice of deputies for Saint Domingue.

³ Josef Wäges, "Étienne Morin and the Santo-Domingo Manuscript," in Heredom: *The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society*, vol. 26 (Washington, D.C.: Scottish Rite Research Society, 2018).

MORIN, GRAND INSPECTOR OF THE GRAND LODGE OF FRANCE (1761-1765)

By 1761 Morin was in Paris and became the Deputy of the Grand Lodge on August 27, 1761. A close examination of the powers ascribed to him are instructive in determining precisely what were the limitations on these powers and privileges, in comparison to what occurred.

We have by general Consent, Constituted and Instituted and by these present Constitutions, we institute and give Full and Entire Power to Brother Stephen Morin, whose signature is in the margins hereof, **to Form and Establish a Lodge, to receive and multiply the Royal Order of Free Masons in all Perfect and Sublime Degrees, to take care that the statutes and regulations of the Grand and Sovereign Lodge, General or Particular, be kept and observed and never to admit therein except true and Legitimate brethren of Sublime Masonry.**

To regulate and govern all the members who will compose the said Lodge that he can establish in the 4 parts of the world, where he will arrive or will be able to remain, under the title of Lodge of St. John and called *La Parfaite Harmonie*, giving him power to Choose such officers to help him to govern his lodge as he sees fit, whom we command and enjoin to obey and respect him. Ordain and Command all masters of regular Lodges of whatever dignity they May be, cast upon the surface of the earth and the seas, Pray, and enjoin them in the name of the Royal order and in the Presence of our most Illustrious Grand Master to recognize as such and as we acknowledge our Dearest Brother Stephen Morin as Respectable Master of the Lodge of *La Parfaite Harmonie* and Deputize Him as our Grand Inspector in all parts of the New World to enforce the observance of our Laws in General &c. **And by these present Constitutions our Very Dear Brother Stephen Morin our Grand Master Inspector, authorizes and empowers him to establish in all parts of the world, perfect and Sublime Masonry &c. &c. &c.**⁴

At the end of 1765 Morin was in Jamaica, and he had mostly completed his original mission and yet more Lodges were created. The net result is that his influence had been watered down with the expansion in the number of Lodges. There were now eleven Lodges on the island; four of them, *Les Frères Réunis*, in Les Cayes, *La Concorde* in Saint-Marc, *La Parfaitie Harmonie* in Port-au-Prince and *Parfait Union* in Port-au-Prince were aligned with Morin. He had temporarily failed in the North of the island and the lodges there were aligned with the oldest *St. Jean de Jérusalem Ecosaise*, who was still operating under its Elus Parfaits constitution. Subordinate to it were its daughters, *Parfaitie Harmonie* in Cap-Français along with its own daughter *L'Etroite Union* in Gros-Morne and *La Double Alliance* in Fort Dauphin. *L'Amitié Indissoluble* of Léogane had directly contacted the Grand Lodge to alleviate itself from destruction. Unaffiliated with either side were *Le Choix des Hommes* in Jacmel and *Édouard Stuard* of Cap-Français, but the later was considered clandestine and about to vanish. The following year brought even more change and conflict with it.

⁴ BnF FM1 285. Suprême Conseil du 33è degré de Grasse-Tilly. Livre d'Or. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

CONFLICT WITH BROTHER MARTIN (1766)

From the Grand Lodge's perspective Morin had succeeded in gaining it Lodges, but had yet to achieve its conquest of the island. More troublesome however is that it had direct evidence from his own hand that he is now also claiming Deputy Powers from the Grand Lodge of England. He also claims to have sole authority over the degrees 'Grand Elect Perfect Master and Sublime Mason, Knight of the East, and Prince Mason' from him. In addition, he had made at least two deputies; Bertrand Berthomieux for Saint-Marc, Martin Bérindoague for Les Cayes, and had given a constitution to François Ignace de Villiers Deschamps in Port-au-Prince to establish a Lodge of Perfection in Brest, France; well outside of his theatre of operation. Most alarming of these was that he was creating entirely new bodies of Lodges, as evidenced by the member lists in Les Cayes from 1765. All of these facts considered together, led to his removal as deputy on July 17, 1766.

Brother:: Martin member of the Grand:: Lodge:: of France, obliged to pass to America gives his demission – To reward his Zeal and Labour the Grand:: Lodge:: gives him the patent of Inspector of Lodges:: in America, and revokes the powers allegedly given in the same capacity to Brother Maurin [sic], given that the latter responds badly to the confirmation of the Grand:: Lodge::⁵

Martin arrives unannounced in Saint Domingue on business, visiting all of three lodges in Cap Français, and finding them all to be irregular, as they were not constituted by the Grand Lodge. The lodge *Édouard Stuard* is reconstituted as *Le Vérite* in 1767 to the horror of the lodges on the island, as its original constitution was under Charles Edward Stuart. In comparison to Morin, he can be scarcely considered to be Grand Deputy. Morin lives partially in Port-au-Prince and has influence everywhere on the island, through his network of deputies. Martin in contrast, resides very briefly in Cap-Français and returns quickly to France initiating a row. He fractures the foundation laid by Morin, isolating *Le Vérite* in the North and *L'Amitié Indissoluble* in the South, who are now surrounded by hostile Lodges. This isolation steeled their resolve in correcting this sorely perceived error.

THE ORDER OF THE SUBLIME PRINCES OF THE ROYAL SECRET (1767-1775)

Morin likely did not intend to build a high degree system outside of the sphere of the Grand Lodge of France, but rather within it and went to great lengths to inform them precisely what he was doing, in order to bring the Lodges of Saint Domingue under their control. His decision to pursue a path towards local sovereignty was one borne of necessity; first because it was the Grand Lodge who abandoned him and not the other way around, and second because as the Grand Lodge's labours were at slumber, their administrative powers had devolved down to the local bodies, to maintain order. From his perspective he had constantly been at labour propagating the high degrees since 1745, and his vision of a Masonically unified Saint Domingue had mostly come to fruition. The historical record shows no clear separation between his work for the Elus Parfaits and his work for the Grand Lodge and appears instead to be a continuous string of actions. By extension, his actions were a continuity of his original task; spreading the high degrees in general

⁵ BnF FM1 541. f. 13. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

and Scottish Masonry in particular, albeit in slightly augmented forms from the originals. Moreover, he appears to be creating a unifying system that unites both French and English Masons; both Ancients and Moderns.

In March 1765, Morin is with Francken in Kingston and by that December, Francken will be in New York attending the christening of his Johanna Low with his future wife.⁶ In between these months, they will work out a plan of action to utilize Morin's English powers and establish an arm of the same system in the English colonial possessions. When Francken departed for New York, he likely had a deputy patent copied after Morin's, had commissioned a new seal and counter seal for his use in the Order of the Royal Secret, and was travelling with a freshly translated copy of at least the Grand Elect, Perfect and Sublime Master degree. His mission was to establish a Lodge of Perfection in New York, which he achieved on December 20, 1767 and returned hurriedly to Jamaica by April of 1769. To avoid debtors prison, Francken had fled New York with his wife and his personal effects were auctioned, appearing in the local newspaper as a "Gentleman absconding" from his debts.

Morin dies in 1771 and in the absence of their founder, the order continues to expand. *Saint Jean de Jérusalem Ecosaise* established the Fond des Nègres Lodge *Les Frères Choisis* on May 10th, 1773. This lodge will hold out until November 11, 1783, before affiliating with the *Grand Loge Provinciale*. The high degrees worked by this lodge are retained in the archives of the Grand Lodge of Sweden, and the bound cahier contains two sets of rituals used in the Lodge with identical degrees.⁷

1783

4. Expert ou Maître préfet des Ouvrages.

5. Elus.

6. Grand Elus ou sublime Ecosais.

7. Chevalier d'Orient.

8. Princes de Jérusalem.

1773

4. Expert.

5. Elu.

6. Ecosisme ou Loge de Perfection.

7. Chevalier d'Orient.

8. Princes de Jérusalem.

The second set of degrees appear to be the rituals of the Order of the Royal Secret in use, at the time of the Lodges founding in 1773. The first set appears to be reworked versions of the second made sometime after the Lodge affiliated with the *Grande Loge Provinciale*. Noticeably these altered forms have the Scottish degree substituted altogether, with heavy revisions to the Knights of the East and also the Princes of Jerusalem texts. Nowhere to be found are references to a Sovereign Council and most significantly, the privileges of the Princes of Jerusalem are nowhere to be found in the later versions. At odds was the provision that Princes of Jerusalem 'are the chiefs of Masonry, and they judge sovereignly, all the affairs which relate to it, and have right to annul, revoke or cancel all that is done in lodge, abusive or contrary to the regulations.'⁸

⁶ Dutch Reformed Church Records from Selected States, 1660-1926; New York City, Vol II, Book 34; page 89; 1765, Dec. 8; Johanna, parents Nicholaas Low and Sara Low; wit. Henry A. Franken and wife Johanna Low.

⁷ Grand Lodge of Sweden Archive, Ms. 104 D. LII. '*Haut Grades de l'Orient de Paris.*'

⁸ Ibid. 'Ils sont les chefs de la Maçonnerie, ils jugent souverainement, toute les affaires qui la concernant, et ont droit de casser et révoquer ou annuler tout ce qui se fait en loge d'abrasif ou contraire au réglemens.

These privileges in context to the history were likely necessary to assert the Orders dominance in light of competition from Lodges aligned only with the Grand Lodge. These same powers were codified by Francken in the English arm of the Order appearing in the 1771 Francken manuscript as Article 29 of the Constitutions of 1762, though he limited their jurisdiction from symbolic lodges to Lodges of Perfection and Councils of the Knights of the East.⁹ By 1775, the Grand Lodge had begun to turn the tide.

THE PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE, A FORCE OF STABILITY (1776 -1789)

The death of Morin ultimately had an effect on the Order, as the foundations of their entire structure were built on his powers, but they by no means suffered from a lack of administration, and continued growing and expanding in his absence. His passing as well as that of the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of France, Louis, Comte de Clermont in 1771, made reconciliation in Saint Domingue possible. Louis Philippe II, Duc de Chartres succeeded as Grand Master, and at once the Grand Lodge arose from its slumber. The birth of the *Grand Orient de France* in 1773 from the ashes of the former, signified a change in direction. This coupled with the loss of Morin lead to a softening of hearts and a desire to be affiliated with the reformed Grand Lodge. The principle means of achieving this was the closure of the Council of the Sublime Princes seated at Port-au-Prince which occurred in 1774. It was not until 1785 before all Lodges of the Order of the Royal Secret were constituted by the *Grand Orient*.

The Grand Orient had successfully brought the entire island of Saint Domingue under its control. For only one year in 1787, but its success was short-lived, and the map of her dominion, was ever changing on the island.

The French Revolution began on July 14, 1789, with the storming of the Bastille, destabilizing the mother country and her colonies. This same year Antients Masonry arrived on the island with the constitution of *Réunion des Coeurs Franco Americain* in the capital city of Port-au-Prince on December 18 by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania at the instance of Pierre le Barbier Duplessis, their Grand Secretary.¹⁰

REVOLUTIONARY CHAOS (1789 -1799)

The revolution whose motto was liberty, equality, and the rights of man, rang hollow in the ears of the enslaved, whose sweat, blood, and tears fertilized the soil of the island. The first article of the Declaration of the Rights of Man stated that 'Men are born free and remain free, equal in rights,' yet they remained everywhere in bondage, not as men but as chattel property.¹¹ Gathered together in the rain and darkness at Bois Caïman on August 14, 1791, slaves lead by Dutty Boukman performed a voodoo ritual and made a pact with each other to break their chains and

⁹ 1771 Francken Ms. 2^d T[he] Princes of Jerusalem have a Right and Privilege, to annul and repeal, all that might have been done inconsistent to the orders & Laws, in a council of knights of the East, and also in a Royal Lodge of Perfection and in any other Lodges whatsoever, Provided nevertheless, that there is not Present any of the Sublime Princes of a Superior degree –

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Declaration of the Rights of Man. National Assembly August 24, 1789.

burn their plantations to the ground. Within a week the entire Northern Department of the colony was in flames. Some 4,000 whites had been slaughtered and over 1,000 plantations had been razed. The survivors organized into militias and proceeded to massacre over 15,000 blacks in reprisal, but they were simply outnumbered ten to one and driven back to Cap Français.

By January of 1792 over a third of the colony had been sacked. France sent 6,000 troops and a new governor, Léger-Félicité Sonthonax to restore order. A genocidal civil war had begun and showed no signs of stopping. We have no way of knowing for certain if Lodges met during this period, but if the late history of the revolution is any indication, they persisted where possible in large cities, but that said there are no Masonic records for Saint Domingue from 1789-1797. Thousands of displaced citizens boarded ships, fleeing to America as refugees for their safety, having lost everything. Creoles in the Southern Department invited the British to come and occupy the island, believing that they would preserve the institution of slavery, after it was abolished in Saint Domingue by Sonthonax on August 29, 1793. The landowners felt betrayed by their own government.

Arriving in May of 1794, the British occupation was largely ineffective as they were too few in number and utterly decimated by yellow fever. Spain briefly entered the conflict from their half of the island and met with a similar fate. Forces led by Toussaint Louverture and André Rigaud checked the British advance and kept them largely isolated to Port-au-Prince, leading to their evacuation in May 1798, and a formal agreement to withdraw all British forces from Saint Domingue signed by Colonel Thomas Maitland and Louverture on August 31, the same year. By the end of the year all British forces had withdrawn to Jamaica counting nearly 100,000 casualties. The Revolution began to cool, as the rebel leaders now turned inward and fought amongst themselves for control, with Louverture emerging as the victor. Slowly Lodges began to emerge in this relative peace, returning to normal operation.

GRAND LODGE OF PENNSYLVANIA LODGES (1801-1804)

As *Réunion des Cœurs Franco Americain* had survived the revolution, it was in a unique position to spread Antients Masonry across the island in the West and South Jurisdictions, being aligned with *Les Frères Réunis* and *La Concorde*. These Lodges were reconstituted *No. 88 Les Frères Réunis* and *No. 89 La Concorde* by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania on May 4, 1801. The island began to stabilize through 1801 under the leadership of Louverture and the Grand Lodge founded *No. 95 La Humilité* in Anse-a-Veau on December 6, 1802 before constituting their *Provincial Grand Lodge of Saint Domingue* three days later in Port-au-Prince on December 9.

Louverture expanded his power over the whole island, conquering the Spanish portion and abolishing slavery. Returning he issued a constitution declaring the island sovereign from France, provoking the wrath of Napoleon, who sent General Leclerc to put down the revolution in 1802. Louverture is tricked into a signing a truce, but is instead imprisoned and sent back to France where he dies in his cell. Initially Jean-Jacques Dessalines succeeds Louverture and fights for the French, but turns on them after learning of the plan to re-institute slavery in Martinique. The French face a final onslaught from the rebel forces and are utterly decimated by disease and fierce fighting, claiming Le Clerc himself.

PROGRESSION OF THE RITUALS (1740 -1804)

Regrettably, there are no surviving examples of Saint Domingue symbolic degrees from 1740-1774. The earliest lodges were aligned with Elus Parfaits of Bordeaux, itself attached to the symbolic Lodge *L'Anglaise*, chartered by English and Irish Masons in 1732. It used the same ritual as England, given that all minuets for this Lodge are in English until the Comte de Clermont becomes the Grand Substitute for the Grand Master in 1744. In Saint Domingue however, the Perfect Scottish Lodges were attached to Saint John's Lodges that already existed, making it impossible to say with any certainty what ritual was used in their lodges, absent definitive proof.

As Saint Domingue Lodges had received constitutions issued from several Masonic authorities, a variety of symbolic degrees were conferred over the lifetime of the colony. There were four Grand Lodges chartering symbolic Lodges from 1774-1804, each with its own unique ritual. All of these ritual influences are evolutionarily linked and when combined with the Antients degrees, contain all the necessary ingredients to compose the 1804 *Guide des Maçons Écossais*.

The arrival of the French Rite through the Grand Orient ushered in a period of stability, peace, and prosperity, that truly was the calm before the storm. The Haitian revolution upended the colony and severed old associations. Revolutionary struggles gave way to the Lodges seeking new recognition from the Antients in the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania as well as the Philosophical Scottish Rite in Paris. These Masonic Lodges continued to labour in earnest right up until the final moments, despite the chaos outside their doors. It is in this meta-data that we can observe the Masonic history of Saint Domingue, by placing the evolution of Masonic ritual in context within these different periods, leading up to the creation of the Scottish Rite craft ritual and answering why, with a great degree of satisfaction.