



## **“Freemasonry as a Patriotic Society? The 1830 Belgian Revolution”**

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**Fecha de recibido: 12 junio 2010 – Fecha de aceptación: 3 agosto 2010**

**Palabras clave**

Masonería, patriotismo, nacionalismo, revolución, Bélgica

**Keywords**

Freemasonry, patriotism, nationalism, revolution, Belgium

**Resumen**

Al cuestionar la masonería y el patriotismo, tenemos que conceptualizar el análisis de la evolución de la identidad patriótica. El caso de la Revolución belga de 1830 es extremadamente aclarador en este respecto. Las reacciones de los masones demuestran que el patriotismo y el nacionalismo no son sinónimos en 1830, siendo el primero el amor por la patria, mientras que el segundo está conectado a una doctrina específica del Estado. Un proceso de nacionalización de patriotismo está claramente en el camino, pero no inspira a todos los patriotas. La definición de conceptos como nación, estado y nacionalismo difieren fuertemente a lo largo de las logias. ¿En qué estado podría ofrecerse las mejores perspectivas para la nación belga, valores cívicos y amor a la libertad? De acuerdo con una pequeña mayoría de masones, el Estado belga ofrece la mejor solución política. Pero una parte muy importante de los masones, conocidos como los orangistas, prefirieron el régimen holandés, que había gobernado desde 1815 hasta 1830. Sin embargo, esto no significa que no eran patriotas belgas, sino todo lo contrario. Este artículo analiza el cambio de conceptos de patriotismo, nación, estado y nacionalismo en el inicio del siglo XIX, a través del estudio de casos de reacciones masónicas de la Revolución belga de 1830 y en tanto, la posibilidad de que las logias actuaran como sociedades patrióticas.

**Abstract**

When questioning freemasonry and patriotism, we have to conceptualize the analysis of the evolution of patriotic identities. The case of the Belgian Revolution of 1830 is extremely clarifying in this regard. The reactions of freemasons demonstrate that patriotism and nationalism were not synonymous in 1830, the former being the love for one's country, the latter being connected to a specific doctrine of the state. A process of nationalization of patriotism was clearly on the way but did not inspire all patriots. The definition of concepts such as nation, state, and nationalism differed strongly throughout the lodges. What state could offer the best perspectives for the Belgian nation, civic values, and love of freedom? According to a small majority of masons, the budding Belgian state offered the best political solution. But a significant portion of masons, referred to as Orangists, preferred the Dutch regime, which had governed them from 1815 to 1830. However, this did not mean that they were not Belgian patriots. This article analyses the shifting concepts of patriotism, nation, state, and nationalism at the start of the nineteenth century through the case study of Masonic reactions to the Belgian Revolution of 1830 and thus looks at the possibility of lodges acting as patriotic societies.

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Citado en:

Dialnet (Universidad de la Rioja)

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## “Freemasonry as a Patriotic Society? The 1830 Belgian Revolution”\*

Anaïs Maes

### Introduction: freemasonry, patriotism and nationalism

Historical research on freemasonry has been stimulated in recent years by questions concerning the involvement of masons and Masonic organizations in patriotic activities, independence struggles around the world, the creation of nation-states and the evolution of patriotic or national identities in the period between 1750 and 1850. When questioning freemasonry and patriotism, one has to question this last central concept. What is patriotism? Is it a fixed category or subject to change? And how do patriotic sentiments relate to revolutions, independence movements and the establishment of nation-states? In short, we have to conceptualize the analysis of the evolution of patriotic identities.

In the academic sphere patriotism is often equated with nationalism, causing enormous conceptual difficulties. The fact the distinction between the two concepts is often very vague hinders research even more when it comes to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when attachments shifted from patriotism to nationalism. In his book *For Love of Country*, Princeton professor of politics Maurizio Viroli addresses this exact conceptual problem. He defines patriotism as a charitable and generous love of country, nationalism as an unconditional loyalty, an exclusive attachment to the nation. Struggle for liberty, in his eyes, is more often connected to the former as attaining unity is connected to the latter.<sup>1</sup> I would add to Viroli's definition of nationalism the political dimension entailed in British historian Elie Kedourie's description of nationalism as a “sentiment [that] depends on a particular anthropology and [...] asserts a particular doctrine of the state or of the individual's relation to it [...] it's a doctrine which leads to a distinctive style of politics”.<sup>2</sup> Moreover Viroli emphasizes the need for an historical approach to truly understand the contemporary significance of our central concepts as well as their evolution.

Studying Masonic responses to revolutions and independence movements all over the world can do just that. We will attempt to shed a light on the shifting concept of patriotism by analyzing the responses to the Belgian Revolution.

When looking at the activities of freemasons in the months and years preceding this 1830 Belgian Revolution, one will have a hard time finding elements of an organized Masonic

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\* This paper was presented at the “Mesa: Masonería y Sociedades Patrióticas”, X Congreso Centroamericano de Historia (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, Managua, Nicaragua, 12-16 July, 2010).

<sup>1</sup> Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country. An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1-17.

<sup>2</sup> Elie Kedourie, "Nationalism", in: *Nationalism. Critical concepts in political science*, J. Hutchinson & A.D. Smith (eds.) (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), Volume I, 251-270.

partaking or collaboration in the upheaval<sup>3</sup>. This, however, changed once the revolution had taken place and the Belgian nation-state came into being. Masons did take a stance on the newly founded state. They all claimed to be patriots, while not all of them supported Belgium as an independent country. To grasp this apparent contradiction it is thus necessary to look at shifting attachments and understand that the revolution was, as Belgian historian Sébastien Dubois has called it, a “*moment décisif*” (a decisive moment). Ancien Régime patriotism was monarchic: one was part of a certain people and country because they were under the protection of a certain sovereign. The revolutionary era from 1780 to 1830 brought about changes in patriotism. It was gradually nationalized as the Belgian people’s awareness of having clear-cut geographical borders grew and patriotism was linked to liberty, as opposed to a sovereign. This proto-national patriotism did, however, not necessarily entail a claim for independence. The birth of a new nation-state in 1830 and its international acknowledgement meant that patriotic proto-nationalism turned into genuine nationalism.<sup>4</sup> The way in which Belgian Masons adhered to this new nationalism or, on the contrary, continued to cling to proto-nationalistic forms of patriotism is what is at the core of this analysis. An accessory, but not less important question is that of the degree of involvement of freemasonry as an organisation, as opposed to the involvement of individual masons. Both will be analyzed by studying lodges as well as individual members that played a crucial role in the formation of the new state, the opposition to it and the creation of public opinion. The ‘profane’ context is of the highest importance in this regard as different masons were involved in politics and journalism.<sup>5</sup> Key figures will be staged to uncover possible ‘patriotic’ links between the Masonic and profane world. We will encounter two opposite movements within this world: the Belgicist and the Orangist. The former being supportive of the new nation-state, the latter of the Dutch regime overthrown by the revolution.

### **Belgicism: supporting the new Belgian nation-state**

As a consequence of the 1830 upheaval, the subsequent defeat of Dutch troops and the recognition of independence by the international powers at the London Conference, Belgians needed to erect new state-institutions. A constituting assembly, the National Congress, was “le lien historique entre le gouvernement provisoire issu des circonstances politiques, et l’installation définitive [d’une monarchie constitutionnelle]” (the historic connection between a provisional government arisen from the political circumstances, and the final installation of a [constitutional

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<sup>3</sup> Some masons are to be found in the editorial boards of oppositional newspapers, acted as military commanders, were volunteers or organised the vigilantes during the revolutionary days, but their activities were not linked to their Masonic membership.

<sup>4</sup> Sébastien Dubois, *L’invention de la Belgique. Genèse d’un état-nation* (Bruxelles : Editions Racine, 2005), 424-427.

<sup>5</sup> Let’s not forget the importance of print capitalism in the formation of the modern nation-state. See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London/New York: Verso, 1990).

monarchy]). This assembly's debates and decisions were of the highest importance as they produced a, for the time, extremely liberal constitution and selected a new king for the constitutional monarchy.<sup>6</sup> When looking at the composition of this National Congress a great deal of its members (30 to 60) have, in the past, been 'identified' as masons.<sup>7</sup> We, however, have hitherto been able to identify only 16 congressmen having been initiated into the craft by 1830. Two of those were initiated in a temporary, irregular lodge we know close to nothing about, called *L'Union des Peuples*.<sup>8</sup> The others belonged to a series of different lodges.<sup>9</sup> These Belgian officials did not belong to one or a few central leading lodges, much to the contrary their Masonic background was quite diverse. But what they did have in common was their active contribution to the organization and shaping of a new nation-state. Despite their diverging personal inclinations towards a republic or a constitutional monarchy, towards the duke of Nemours or Leopold of Saxe-Coburg as new king or towards a single chamber or a dual chamber-system, most of them were ardent nationalists and liberals. The shift from patriotism to nationalism was quite recent. As Alexandre Gendebien explained,<sup>10</sup> he had been in favour of a reunion with France in the

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<sup>6</sup> P. Raxhon, « Mémoire de la Révolution française de 1789 et Congrès national belge (1830-31) », *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 1-2 (1996): 34-83.

<sup>7</sup> K. Poma, *Actie vrijmetselaren: een politieke benadering van de moderne vrijmetselarij* (Zellik: Roularta, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Félix de Mérode and Charles Rogier, both members of the provisional government and leading figures of the revolution, seem to have been introduced into freemasonry in November 1830 at *L'Union des Peuples*. There is very little known about this irregular lodge. It only appears in a document of another lodge: *Les Amis Philanthropes*. There is no trace of it after 1830. E. Witte & F. Borne, *Documents relatifs à la Franc-maçonnerie belge du XIXe siècle, 1830-1855* (Louvain : Editions Nauwelaerts, 1973), 32; F. Clement, *Histoire de la franc-maçonnerie belge au XIXième siècle* (Bruxelles : Imprimerie du Suprême Conseil, 1948), 83.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Barbanson, Eugène Defacqz, Antoine Barthélémy and Alexandre Gendebien were members of *L'Espérance* (Brussels). Philippe d'Arschot Schoonhoven was a member of *La Constance* (Leuven). Goswin de Stassart and Isidore Fallon appear on membership lists of *La Bonne Amitié* (Namur). *La Parfaite Intelligence et l'Etoile Réunies* (Liège) was the home of Henri Orban, Joseph Forgeur and Pierre Destriveaux. Louis Jacobs was a member of *La Persévérance* (Antwerp). Joseph Lebeau had been initiated with the lodge *Les Amis de la Parfaite Intelligence* (Huy) in 1815. Jean-Baptiste Nothomb had been initiated in the Luxembourg lodge *Les Enfants de la Concorde Fortifiée*. And finally Nicolas Rouppe was a founding member of *Les Amis Philanthropes* (Brussels), without being a very zealous mason however. For their membership of and interventions in the National Congress see: E. Huytens, *Discussions du Congrès National de Belgique, 1830-1831* (Bruxelles : Société Typographique Belge, 1844). For references to their masonic activities see: Witte & Borne; L.J. Peelaert, *La représentation maçonnique dans les noms de rues de Bruxelles* (S.n.: S.n., 1982).

<sup>10</sup> Alexandre Gendebien (° 1789, Mons - † 1869, Brussels) was a lawyer and promoted the union between catholics and liberals that preceded the 1830 revolution. He played a major role in the revolutionary events as he negotiated with the king and his heir (who had been a member of the same Brussels lodge *L'Espérance*) and was a member of the provisional government. Voted member of the National Congress, he repeatedly travelled to France to find a king for Belgium, however his preferred choice, the duke of Nemours, did not make it to the throne. During the regency he became Minister of Justice. After the dissolution of the National Congress, Gendebien became a member of parliament, but left it in 1839 when the Treaty of the XXIV Articles was signed, as he strongly opposed the loss of territory it brought about. Alexandre Gendebien had also been a barrister and a Brussels' city counsellor. He was made a mason in 1820 at the lodge *L'Espérance* (Brussels). He left freemasonry in 1829 for not wanting to be in contradiction with liberal-catholic union. He returned in 1838, as a consequence of a pastoral letter excommunicating all masons, and was then affiliated with *Les Amis Philanthropes* (Brussels). T. Juste, "Alexandre Gendebien", in: *Biographie Nationale* (Bruxelles : Académie Royale), Tome 7, 577-586.; Witte & Borne, 96; *Tableau des F[rères] qui composent la R[espectable] L[odge]...de L'Espérance – 5829* (1829). Moscow Archives, Masonic Documentation

months leading up to the revolution: “j’ai désiré cette réunion jusqu’au moment de notre victoire du 26 septembre qui nous permit d’espérer nationalité, indépendance et liberté” (I desired this reunion up until the moment when our victory of the 26<sup>th</sup> September allowed us to hope for nationality, independence and liberty).<sup>11</sup> Moreover Gendebien was a republican, but one prepared to give up his republicanism in favour of the stability of Belgium, as the international community would not allow such a form of government.<sup>12</sup> Philippe d’Arschot de Schoonhoven,<sup>13</sup> another mason, liberal aristocrat and member of the National Congress, stated that the instauration of a constitutional monarchy would ensure the Belgian nationality: “si la monarchie est un moyen d’empêcher la réunion à la France c’est une raison de plus d’adopter ce mode de gouvernement. Je suis Belge, trop Belge pour consentir jamais à abdiquer ce titre !” (if the monarchy is a way of halting the reunion with France, it is an extra reason for adopting this type of government. I am Belgian, too Belgian to ever accept to abandon this title).<sup>14</sup> The decisions taken at the London Peace Conference, aimed at creating a peace treaty to be signed by Belgium and the Netherlands, brought about the most patent displays of nationalism. Eugène Defacqz,<sup>15</sup> who would later become the Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Belgium, protested heavily against the preliminary proposals of the London Conference that narrowed the Belgian territory: “le congrès n’abdiquera dans aucun cas, en faveur des cabinets étrangers, l’exercice de la souveraineté que la nation belge lui a confiée; il ne se soumettra jamais à une décision qui détruirait l’intégrité du

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Centre of the Grand Orient of Belgium (CEDOM), file 5.0043, folio 276.; J. Garsou, *Alexandre Gendebien. Sa vie, ses mémoires* (Bruxelles : Van Sulper, 1930).

<sup>11</sup> Juste, 577-586.

<sup>12</sup> Huyttens, 254.

<sup>13</sup> Philippe d’Arschot Schoonhoven (° 1771, Voordt - † 1846, Brussels) held the position of mayor of his birth town and was a counsellor for his department during the French regime. Under Dutch reign he was to become governor of the province of Meridional Brabant and member of the States General. After the 1830 revolution – he had been part of the delegation that negotiated with king William – he became a member of the National Congress. In 1831 he travelled to London to hand the crown to Leopold and would later become the first Grand Marshal of the Belgian court. From 1831 to 1839 he was elected to the Senate. D’Arschot Schoonhoven had been initiated at *La Constance* (Leuven) during the Dutch regime. Witte & Borne, 257; J. Bolsee, “Philippe d’Arschot Schoonhoven”, in: *Biographie Nationale*, Tome 29, 156-160.

<sup>14</sup> Huyttens, 254.

<sup>15</sup> Eugène Defacqz (° 1797, Ath - † 1871, Brussels) was a jurist, magistrate and member of the National Congress. In 1820 he was initiated at *L’Espérance*. This lodge was heavily divided over the revolution and there is no indication that Defacqz participated in the establishment of the Grand Orient of Belgium in 1832-33. He reappeared on the Masonic scene as the co-founder and Worshipful Master of *Les Amis du Progrès* created in 1838. From 1842 to 1852 he was the Grand Master National of the Grand Orient of Belgium, leading it in an anticlerical yet not politicized way. When the interdiction to talk politics and religion inside temple walls was undone Defacqz and his lodge left the obedience. This, however, did not halt Defacqz’s liberal aspirations. He presided the *Société de l’Alliance*, a liberal electoral organization, created through the combined forces of three Brussels’ lodges. When the radical-conservative discord broke down the association, Defacqz retired from politics. He would spend the following years teaching legal history at the Free University of Brussels, a university he helped create in 1834. But his main activity was and would remain that of a magistrate. P. Godding, « Eugène Defacqz », in: *Nouvelle biographie nationale de Belgique* (Bruxelles : Palais des Académies, 2001), Tome 6, 106-111; Witte, « Eugène Defacqz », in: *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek* (Brussel : Paleis der Academiën, 1974), Vol. 6, 215-220; *Tableau des F[rères] qui composent la R[espectable] L[oge]...de L’Espérance – 5829* (1829). Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 5.0043.

territoire et mutilerait la représentation nationale” (the congress will in no event discard, in favour of the foreign cabinets, the exercise of the sovereignty delegated by the Belgian nation; it will never accept a decision that would destroy the territorial integrity and mutilate the national representation). Even if, in his eyes, absolutist monarchies wanted to give the impression the Belgian nation was created by them, Defacqz refused “*en vrai patriote*” (as a true patriot) to let the “*indépendance de la patrie et la constitution nationale*” (independence of the fatherland and the national constitution) be negated.<sup>16</sup> Even if Defacqz defined himself as a patriot, the Belgian revolution had brought about a major shift, it had nationalized patriotism as it was now clearly linked not only to freedom and a constitution but also to independence and territorial sovereignty. The Belgian nation could no longer, as it had been the case in former times, be a part of another kingdom or empire.

This process was mirrored in the Masonic world. Belgian freemasonry had been integrated in the Grand Orient of France and the Grand Orient of the Netherlands during the respective regimes. However, due to a Belgian desire to obtain a certain level of independence, this last obedience never operated as such. It was divided into two grand lodges of administration: one for the northern, Dutch part of the kingdom, the other for the southern, Belgian part.<sup>17</sup> This Grande Loge d’Administration des Provinces Méridionales des Pays-Bas would eventually become the starting point for the formation of a Belgian Grand Orient. *Les Vrais Amis de l’Union*, a Brussels lodge, took the initiative to invite the three other lodges of the city in 1831. Their representatives discussed the possible establishment of a Belgian obedience and decided that the best and most ‘regular’ way to go about this was the resurrection of the administrative Grand Lodge. To this end Joseph Defrenne,<sup>18</sup> having been the principal Belgian dignitary -the Senior Warden- of the old body, took the initiative to invite first his fellow dignitaries and later all Belgian lodges in an effort to turn the Grand Lodge into a Belgian Grand Orient. And so it went, but the founding assembly was composed of the representatives of a mere five lodges. The inaugural session, adversely, gathered thirteen lodges.<sup>19</sup>

Defrenne’s address at this occasion provides the main legitimizing elements for the establishment of a new, national obedience. A Belgian body was needed, “surtout depuis que constituée en royaume, son indépendance a été reconnue, proclamée et garantie par les grandes

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<sup>16</sup> Huyttens, Vol. 3, 397-400.

<sup>17</sup> Clement, 41-61.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Defrenne (° 1767, Brussels - † 1848, Ixelles) was a lawyer and author of brochures, mostly verses. Defrenne was an extremely active freemason, initiated at *L’Espérance*, later affiliated to, and repeatedly Worshipful Master of the influential Brussels lodge *Les Amis Philanthropes*. During the Dutch regime he was appointed First Grand Inspector of the Grande Loge d’Administration des Provinces Méridionales des Pays-Bas by prince Frederic. After the revolution he contributed to the establishment of the Grand Orient of Belgium. He was the co-founder of the lodges *Les Amis du Progrès* (in 1838) and *Le Travail* (1840). Witte & Borne, 33; de le Court, « Joseph De Frenne », in: *Biographie Nationale*, Tome 7, 301-302; *Tableau des F[rères] qui composent la R[espectable] L[oge]...des Amis Philanthropes*, 5829 (1829). Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 4.0051, folio 502.

<sup>19</sup> Clement, 84-92; *Circular letter to the dignitaries of the Grande Loge d’Administration des Provinces Méridionales des Pays-Bas by Joseph Defrenne*, 26.08.5832 (26th October 1832). Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 1.0655, folio 40.

puissances de l'Europe" (especially since its constitution as a kingdom and the recognition, proclamation and guarantee of its independence by the great powers of Europe). Allegations of irregularity could only originate from political adversaries of the new nation-state- the Orangists. According to Defrenne, the Grand Orient of Belgium was the legitimate successor to the Grand Orient of the Netherlands, or its southern body at least. The Grande Loge d'Administration was the sovereign body for the Belgian lodges and the support of its Grand Officers for the new Grand Orient made the legitimacy claim even more founded. He went on to say the contemporary situation was quite similar to that after the fall of Napoleon. If it had been necessary at the time to move all Belgian lodges from the authority of the Grand Orient of France to that of the Grand Orient of the Netherlands, it was now necessary to create a Belgian obedience to ensure a decent and independent structure for Belgian lodges.<sup>20</sup>

At the banquet following Defrenne's inaugural speech a toast was brought out to the new Belgian king, Leopold I.<sup>21</sup> The relation between the monarch and freemasonry is of the highest symbolic importance, as it clarifies the link between masonry and what that sovereign embodies - be it the state, the nation, freedom or oppression. Only five months after Leopold's rise to the throne in July 1831 he set out to seek Masonic support for his newly founded kingdom, and thus followed in the footsteps of Napoleon and William I. He informed the Brussels lodge *Les Vrais Amis de l'Union* that he, himself a mason initiated in 1813 by a Rosicrucian belonging to a Swiss lodge, had "*les meilleurs sentiments*" (the best feelings) for freemasonry and would grant the Belgian order his 'special protection'. A delegation belonging to this same lodge was charged with offering the king a commemorative medal of their jubilee. During this meeting he is told to have said that the Masonic order "pouvait rendre de très grands services au pays, sous le rapport [...] de la nationalité" (could render the nation enormous services, within the scope [...] of nationality). In addition the king encouraged the masons to "*développer dans les ateliers l'amour de la patrie et de l'esprit public*" (develop the love of the fatherland and public spirit in the workshops).<sup>22</sup>

Leopold clearly counted on Belgium's freemasons to support him and the new nation-state. It however seems that even the pro-nationalist members of the craft were not undividedly pleased with the royal protection. The main concern was with the danger for Masonic independence and propositions to make him Grand Master National consequently failed. The royal protection would eventually be maintained but not at any cost, as a representative of the Grand Orient stated in 1833: "si [...] un jour venait où cette protection [...] n'était plus qu'une domination, une dictature, les Officiers du G[rand] O[rient] sauraient secouer, répudier une protection dégénérée" (if [...] the day comes when this protection [...] was nothing more than a

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<sup>20</sup> *Discours prononcé par le F[rère] J. Defrenne, président ad interim les travaux, à l'occasion de l'inauguration du temple du Gr[and] O[rient] de la Belgique, à l'O[rient] de Bruxelles, 23.12.5832 (23rd February 1833). Cultureel Maçonniek Centrum 'Prins Frederik', The Hague, file CMC N23F67.*

<sup>21</sup> *Programme pour la fête d'inauguration du Grand Orient de la Belgique, 23.12.5832 (23rd February 1833). Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 4.0085, folios 74-76.*

<sup>22</sup> J. van Win, *Léopold Ier, le roi franc-maçon* (Charleroi : Editions Labor, 2006), 72-76.



domination, a dictatorship, the officers of the G[rand] O[rient] shall cast off, repudiate a degenerate protection).<sup>23</sup> The reasons for this restraint were twofold. Firstly, granting a constitutional monarch prerogative was not in line with the pride of having an extremely liberal constitution. More importantly, the masons were on their guard against a too intrusive royal presence. Past events had inspired this caution.

The eldest Dutch prince, William, had been an active member of Brussels lodge *L'Espérance*. The youngest, Frederic, had been Grand Master National of the Grand Orient of the Netherlands. At the initiative of *Les Vrais Amis de l'Union* several lodges declared the deposition of Frederic as Grand Master National in the month following the revolutionary events. One particular lodge, *La Concorde*, reacted in a revealing way. It was decided that both William and Frederic's names, which were mentioned on the membership list, would be crossed. While William's name was indeed plainly removed, Frederic's by contrast was burnt between the pillars, the appropriate Masonic punishment for a brother lacking honor and integrity.<sup>24</sup> Not only had the nationalist revolution made it structurally impossible to accept Frederic as Grand Master, but his personal involvement in the revolutionary events, as commander-in-chief of the army that attacked the city of Brussels, was unacceptable for a brother mason. The nationalization of Belgian freemasonry had very personal repercussions, independence and freedom now controlled the brotherly ties. Yet again we find these actions mirrored in the profane sphere as the National Congress, and all its mason members, voted the perpetual exclusion of the Nassau family from any power in Belgium in the exact same month (November 1830).<sup>25</sup>

Nationalist masons were not only quite active on the political scene, some were also in print. In the years up to the revolution the oppositional press had played a capital part in expressing the grievances and preparing for the event. Masons, like Joseph Lebeau,<sup>26</sup> had been journalists for leading newspapers as the *Mathieu Laensberg* and *Le Courrier des Pays-Bas*. After the September days of 1830 these nationalist papers quickly made way for new opinion makers attacking the Belgian state.<sup>27</sup> This, however, did not mean nationalists restrained from

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<sup>23</sup> Clement, 99-103.

<sup>24</sup> Witte & Borne, 26, 29 and 48.

<sup>25</sup> Huyttens, Vol.1, 261-319.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Lebeau (° 1794, Huy - † 1865, Huy) the "most considerable statesman of the Belgian revolution and First half of Leopold's reign" according to Armand Freson in the *Biographie Nationale*. He had first been a lawyer but quickly turned his attention to the press. He co-founded the newspaper *Mathieu Laensberg* that would become one of the main oppositional voices at the eve of the Belgian revolution. He then became an active and eloquent member of the National Congress. Lebeau was voted into parliament and repeatedly took on a ministerial office (Foreign Affairs under the Regence, Justice in 1832-1834 and Foreign Affairs as well as head of the cabinet in 1840), he was also appointed governor of the province of Namur. Little is known about his masonic activities. He was initiated at *Les Amis de la Parfaite Intelligence* in Huy in 1815. A speech he delivered in 1819 at this same lodge has been published in several biographies. A. Freson, « Joseph Lebeau », in: *Biographie Nationale* (Bruxelles : Académie Royale), Tome 11, 503-518; Daniel Ligou, *Dictionnaire de la franc-maçonnerie* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2006), 693; P. Carre, *Joseph Lebeau. Un homme d'état* (Huy : Etablissement Degrâce, 1923).

<sup>27</sup> P. van Den Dungen, « Le rôle des milieux de presse dans la fondation de l'Etat belge et la création d'une "opinion publique" nationale (1830-1860) », *Annus. Revue de Civilisation Contemporaine de l'Université de Bretagne Occidentale* (2004) : 1-11.

putting their thoughts to print. Joseph Defrenne, the provisional leader of Belgian freemasonry in 1832-1833, published several brochures discussing the contemporary political situation. Through these writings one can discern the nationalist outlook of this prominent and influential mason. In his anonymous writings, signed by “*un belge ami de sa patrie*” (a Belgian, friend of his fatherland), Defrenne sounded the praise of his fatherland, its industry, arts and history of freedom fighting, with a special reference to the 16<sup>th</sup> century “*gueux*” who rebelled against the despotic Philips II. He further praised the French July Revolution, its revolutionaries fighting for freedom and Philippe d’Orléans, “*le monarque observateur des lois*” (the monarch observer of the laws)<sup>28</sup>. When describing the Belgian uprising the same elements return: freedom, the sacredness of constitutions and loathing of despotism. While the list of grievances against the Dutch regime and its king is long, one accusation stands above the others, “*notre ancre de salut, la charte est violée; le monarque lui-même à ses pieds l’a foulée!*” (our anchor of prosperity, the charter has been violated; the monarch himself has downtrodden it). But Belgium and its flag were, according to Defrenne, the “*gage à jamais certain de notre liberté*” (the everlasting pledge of our freedom). He further honored the National Congress, the acknowledgement of “*nos droits et notre indépendance*” (our rights and our independence) and the instauration of a constitutional monarchy.<sup>29</sup> Freedom and constitutionality were clearly essential to Belgian nationalism and its champions.

A comparable discourse is to be found in the speech held at the inauguration of a novel lodge, *La Fidélité*, in the city of Ghent in 1837. This address, pronounced by Franz Faider,<sup>30</sup> one of the founders of the workshop, was filled with patriotic and nationalistic references and started with a clear statement: “l’affection pour le lieu natal est une vertu morale et nous doutons qu’il soit possible d’avoir une seule vraie vertu sans l’amour de la patrie” (the affection for the birth place is a moral virtue and we doubt there could be a single virtue without the love of the fatherland). Not only is a citizen and a mason to be a patriot, he is also to be a nationalist, because “le véritable citoyen...n’est heureux et libre que sous une autorité nationale et librement consentie, de même les Maçons de chaque contrée se sont appliqués à constituer des Orients nationaux et à n’obéir qu’à des chefs concitoyens” (the true citizen can only be happy and free under a freely chosen national authority and that is why masons have constituted their own national Orients and only obey fellow citizen superiors). Faider reappraised the obediencial history of the Belgian freemasons in a nationalist manner. He stated that Belgian freemasonry had always been independent structurally, with the French period being the more than acceptable exception. Before the French Revolution there had been the Provincial Grand Lodge of the

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<sup>28</sup> J. Defrenne, *Bruxelles, Paris et les Pays-Bas depuis le mois de juillet 1830. Par un belge ami de sa patrie* (Bruxelles : S.n., 1830).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Franz Faider, a man we know little about, was the substitute of the public prosecutor in Ghent and a co-founder of the lodge *La Fidélité* in that same city in 1837. He was also a signatory and founder of the *Association Belge*, created in 1831 and aiming at obtaining Belgian independence, the eternal ban of the Nassau family and the inviolability of the Belgian territory. Witte & Borne.

Austrian Netherlands and from 1817 to 1830 the Grande Loge d'Administration des Provinces Méridionales, mentioned earlier on. The loss of obediential independence under the French was amply compensated by the mutual defense of constitutional freedom, so Faider claimed. 'Liberté, égalité, fraternité' were patriotic concepts masons were glad to identify with. And the French Revolution achieved everything these masons hoped and worked for: "détruisant d'antiques institutions basées sur le despotisme et les privilèges, elle appelle au bienfait de l'égalité devant la loi des peuples amis de la liberté" (destructing ancient institutions based on despotism and privileges, she calls for the benevolence of equality before the law of peoples, friends of liberty). Moreover, the fact the Dutch rule did not succeed to create a unified obedience was "*la preuve la plus sûre de notre inaltérable nationalité*" (the most certain proof of our inalterable nationality). Faider was slightly bending the truth, but his emphasis on nationalism and constitutional freedom translate the general tone of the pro-revolutionary, nationalist tendency in Belgian freemasonry.<sup>31</sup> The founding of the Grand Orient of Belgium was the apogee of the nationalization of Belgian freemasonry. The implantation of a lodge under its aegis in the city of Ghent was no coincidence, but rather a well-planned attempt at reclaiming a city that was predominantly Orangist.

### **Orangism: a different form of patriotism**

In his speech Faider attacked the other Ghent masons by charging them of leaguings with the enemy, being the Dutch. An Orangist mason, in his eyes, "se rabaisse au point de mendier un joug étranger et trouve quelque plaisir à vivre sous d'autres lois que celles de ses frères"<sup>32</sup> (lowers himself to the point of begging for a foreign yoke and is pleased by living under other laws than his brothers'). Orangists did indeed wish for a return of the Nassau dynasty, be it as a return to the situation ante 1830, a reunion of both countries but within a federal structure or the ascension of the king's oldest son on the Belgian throne. The main reason for this was economical. Belgium had prospered under Dutch reign, thanks to the Dutch and colonial market, but according to the Orangists Belgium's economy was not viable on its own, especially for the Ghent cotton industry.<sup>33</sup>

In this focal city of the Orangist movement, the Dutch tendency was prominently present within its Masonic lodges. *Le Septentrion* can undoubtedly be called the champion of the movement. The invitation, sent out by Joseph Defrenne, for the establishment of the Grand Orient of Belgium gave rise to heavy protest inside temple walls. The lodge claimed to see no reason why the Masonic order should be reorganised.<sup>34</sup> The revolution could not adjourn the obligations Belgian masons had towards the old statutes, "puisque les principes de haut libéralisme sur

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<sup>31</sup> Witte & Borne, 74-79.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> J. Stengers, « Sentiment national, sentiment orangiste et sentiment français à l'aube de notre indépendance », *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* XXXVIII (1950) : 993-1029.

<sup>34</sup> Witte & Borne, 33-34.

lesquels repose notre institution, ne sauraient subir l'influence des événemens politiques qui viennent agiter le monde profane"<sup>35</sup> (because the principles of high liberalism on which our institution rests cannot be influenced by political events that shake the profane world). One can easily understand the Orangist inclination lead to a desire to remain a part of the Grand Orient of the Netherlands. Consequently *Le Septentrion* did not recognize the new Belgian obedience, which in turn declared the Ghent lodge irregular.<sup>36</sup> The Grand Orient of the Netherlands officially admitted the lodge in 1836.<sup>37</sup>

The adherence to Dutch masonry was made explicit by *Le Septentrion* on different levels. First of all toasts at banquets were still proposed to king William and the Dutch national anthem, the *Wilhelmus* was sung at many occasions.<sup>38</sup> More importantly, the ties with the Dutch king's youngest son, Grand Master Frederic, were repeatedly stressed. He was and would stay their legitimate Grand Master and was "l'héritier du plus beau nom qui soit dans l'univers, d'un nom cher à l'humanité et qui se rattache à toutes les pensées, à toutes les actions généreuses de ces tems modernes" (the heir of the most beautiful name in the universe, a name dear to humanity linked to all the thoughts and generous actions of these modern times).<sup>39</sup> The lodge also proved its adherence ritualistically. During the period of Dutch rule prince Frederic had tried to replace the different and at times very 'French' rites by a system of two higher master degrees, Maître Élu and Maître Suprême Élu. This attempt to unify, and thus nationalize the higher degrees failed completely.<sup>40</sup> The reuse of the "rite Frédéric" by *Le Septentrion* after 1830 is thus extremely revealing.

But did all this mean Orangist masons were unpatriotic? Were their fatherland and their nation Dutch? Much to the contrary. Orangists in general and the members of *Le Septentrion* in particular, thought of themselves as the real patriots. Indeed, according to the lodge, the revolutionaries and the founders of the Grand Orient of Belgium were nothing less than "les

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<sup>35</sup> *Extrait de la planche tracée des travaux de la R[espectable] Loge du Septentrion à l'O[rient] de Gand, 09.04.5835* (9th June 1835). Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 1.0655, folio 115.

<sup>36</sup> *Written note by Le Septentrion*. Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 1.0655, folio 107.; *Extrait du Livre d'Architecture du G[rand] O[rient] de Belgique pour ce qui concerne la résolution prise en tenue du 04.11.5835* (4th February 1836). Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 1.0655, folio 217. *Le Septentrion* was not the only lodge that wanted to remain under the aegis of Dutch freemasonry. *Les Vrais Amis* (Ghent), *La Félicité Bienfaisante* (Ghent), *L'Aménité* (Sint-Niklaas) and *Les Trois Niveaux* (Ostend) all sent letters of approval as a reaction to *Le Septentrion's* circular letter of 9th June 1835. See: Moscow Archives, CEDOM, folios 119-128. See also: D. Destanberg, *Histoire de la R[espectable] L[oge] de St-Jean sous le titre distinctif du Septentrion à l'Or[ient] de Gand, 5811-5911* (Gand, Ad. Hoste, 1911), 57-58.

<sup>37</sup> See: *Letter from the Grootloge van Bestuur (The Hague) to Le Septentrion* (May 1836). Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 1.0651, folio 7.

<sup>38</sup> Destanberg.

<sup>39</sup> *Rapport adressé au Sér.: G.: M.: National de l'Ordre des Franc-Maçons dans le Royaume des Pays-Bas par la R[espectable] L[oge] du Septentrion à l'O[rient] de Gand*. Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 1.0655, folios 56-60.

<sup>40</sup> About this ritualistic reform and reactions to it, see: E. P. Kwaadgras, "Prins Frederik en de ontmythologiseren van de vrijmetselarij", *Toth. Tijdschrift voor vrijmetselaren* 48, n. 5 (1997): 187-199.; J. S. Wijne, "Over de verhouding van de Belgische vrijmetselaren ten opzichte van de vrijmetselarij in de Nederlanden", *Toth. Tijdschrift voor vrijmetselaren* 18, n. 2 (1967): 44-50.

ennemis de la Belgique et les fauteurs de l'ignorance, [qui] allumèrent, au sein de notre chère patrie le feu de tant de passion" (the enemies of Belgium and the instigator of ignorance, [that] lit the fires of passion in our dear fatherland).<sup>41</sup> In *Le Septentrion's* register a nationalist newspaper, *De Vaderlander* (The Patriot) is called a "journal anti-vrai patriote" (a anti-real patriot newspaper).<sup>42</sup>

To understand this apparent contradiction we can turn to the writings of prominent *Le Septentrion* member Charles Froment.<sup>43</sup> This French-born man (°1797) fled to Belgium, "*caché sous des habits de séminariste*" (hidden under seminarian clothing), in 1819 or 1820, owing to his desertion. He became a renowned writer and publicist as the editor or contributor for different government sponsored newspapers such as *Le Journal de Gand*, *La Sentinelle*, *Le Messenger de Gand* and *Le Lynx*.<sup>44</sup> He continued his journalistic activities in favor of the Dutch rule after the revolution. Froment was undoubtedly the most active and eloquent spokesman of the Orangist movement in the immediate aftermath of the insurrectional events. Through articles in the Brussels' newspaper *Le Lynx* and his 1834 book, named *Études sur la révolution belge*, we can easily reconstruct the anti-revolutionary, yet patriotic argumentation of the Orangists in general and the Ghent masons in particular.

The 1830 upheaval was, in their opinion, a crime, a mistake. Moreover, the Belgian kingdom had been "*fabriqué le 25 août 1830*" (fabricated on the 25<sup>th</sup> August 1830).<sup>45</sup> The Belgian people had not wished for this revolution, there had been no "*volonté nationale*" (national will) supporting it.<sup>46</sup> But who had "*barbouillé à son plus bel endroit la carte de l'Europe moderne*" (smeared the most beautiful area on the map of modern Europe)?<sup>47</sup> Frenchman Froment paradoxically accused the French exiles of the July Revolution of being the agitators and having used public money and bayonets to persuade the indifferent or obstinate Belgians. His description of these men doesn't leave much to the imagination: "*nous fûmes redevables de notre emancipation politique à des hommes indigestes que la société vomissait avec dégoût*" (we owed our political emancipation to indigestible men that society vomited with

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<sup>41</sup> *Rapport adressé au Sér. . G. . M. . Nationale de l'Ordre des Franc-Maçons dans le Royaume des Pays-Bas par la R[espectable] L[oge] du Septentrion à l'O[rient] de Gand*. Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 1.0655, folios 56-60.

<sup>42</sup> *Livre d'Architecture - Le Septentrion, 1829-1834. Tenue du 15.12.5833* (15<sup>th</sup> February 1834). Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 1.0628.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Froment had been initiated on the 8th October 1831, he was one of those deliberately attracted to the lodge to support and further the Orangist cause. *Livre d'Architecture - Le Septentrion, 1829-1834. Tenue du 08.08.5831* (8<sup>th</sup> October 1831). Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 1.0628.; J. Tyssens, *Van wijsheid met vreugd gepaard. Twee eeuwen vrijmetselarij in Gent en Antwerpen* (Brussel/Gent : Marot/Tijdsbeeld, 2003), 18.

<sup>44</sup> G. Charlier, *Le mouvement romantique en Belgique (1815-1850): la bataille romantique* (Bruxelles : La Renaissance du Livre, 1948), 392-395; « Froment Charles-Camille », in: C. Louandre & F. Bourquelot, *La littérature française contemporaine, 1817-1844* (Paris : Félix Daguin, 1848), 579; P. Lebrocqy, *Souvenirs d'un ex-journaliste* (Bruxelles: Jules Gérard, 1842), 3-8; Concerning government sponsored press during the Dutch regime see: A. J. Vermeersch, "Willem I en de pers in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden 1814-1830", in: *Staats- en natievorming in Willem I's koninkrijk (1815-1830)*, eds. C. A. Tamse & E. Witte (Brussel: VUBPress, 1992), 310-321.

<sup>45</sup> C. Froment, *Études sur la révolution belge* (Gand : Duvivier, 1834), 5.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

disgust).<sup>48</sup> These French conspirators were the cause of unrest and war and had destroyed a peaceful and prosperous united kingdom. Indeed, the Dutch reign had brought nothing but wealth, stability and “*vraie liberté*” (true liberty) to the Belgian people according to Froment. This is why the Orangist Belgians were the “*véritables amis de leur patrie*” (the true friends of their fatherland). “L’indépendance est bien certainement ce qu’un peuple a de plus précieux [...mais] la Belgique est moins libre, moins indépendante que ces peuplades du Caucase, soumises en apparence à la domination des Turcs” (independence is no doubt what a people holds most dear [...but] Belgium is less free, less independent than those peoples of the Caucasus, apparently subject to Turkish domination).<sup>49</sup>

The Orangist masons clearly did not make the connection between patriotism and nationalism. Patriotism, in their eyes was wanting good for the fatherland, for the people, and did not necessarily imply strict nationalism and independence. Consequently Masonic and profane action against this unpatriotic and illegitimate nationalism was to be taken. The Ghent masons were deeply involved and even lead the broader political Orangist movement. The worshipful master of *Le Septentrion*, Hippolyte Metdepenningen,<sup>50</sup> can easily be called the leader of the entire movement. Under his administration the number of -Orangist- members rose dramatically.<sup>51</sup> Moreover many of the lodge’s members were prosecuted because of their involvement in Orangist coups. To elude the accusations and when pro-revolutionaries started looting Orangist’s homes, Metdepenningen and his brothers repeatedly fled to France.<sup>52</sup> The most important Orangist paper, *Le Messager de Gand* was written by members of *Le Septentrion*. It openly attacked the new Belgian state and even the nationalist lodges in Brussels.<sup>53</sup> The paper and the lodge were instrumentalized by Metdepenningen for the political goals of Orangism. The other Ghent lodges, *Les Vrais Amis* and *La Félicité Bienfaisante*, willingly collaborated to this

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>49</sup> ‘De l’indépendance de la Belgique’, in: *Le Lynx*, 04-05-06.04.1832.

<sup>50</sup> Hippolyte Metdepenningen (° 1799, Ghent - † 1881, Ghent) was a lawyer, barrister and the undisputed leader of the Orangist movement. From 1830 until 1848 he acted as a Ghent city counsellor. His political influence was great, in Orangism and in the Ghent liberal party, but he rarely stepped in the forefront. He was initiated at *Les Vrais Amis* in Ghent in 1829 and affiliated with *Le Septentrion* in 1831. This was a deliberate move of the Orangistic Worshipful Master of *Les Vrais Amis*, Karel Vervier, to instrumentalize a near to dying lodge, *Le Septentrion*, for the purpose of the Orangist movement. Five months later Metdepenningen was made Worshipful Master of this lodge, a position he would hold for 50 years. Witte & Borne, 33; Witte, *Politieke machtsstrijd in en om de voornaamste Belgische steden 1830-1848* (Brussel : Pro Civitate, 1973), 92-96; Destanberg, 53-54; L. Tierenteyn, « Hippolyte Metdepenningen », in: *Biographie Nationale* (Bruxelles : Académie Royale), Tome 14, 613-615; Tyssens, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Tyssens, 18 ; *Livre d’Architecture - Le Septentrion, 1829-1834*. Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 1.0628. From the moment Metdepenningen was affiliated, in September 1830, until 1834 the lodge was joined by over a hundred newcomers (initiates and affiliates).

<sup>52</sup> Destanberg, 53-54.; *Livre d’Architecture - Le Septentrion, 1829-1834. Tenue du 13.01.5832* (13th March 1832). Moscow Archives, CEDOM, file 1.0628: the lodge decided a banquet would be held for the return of Bernard Trossaert, a member of the lodge who fled “*political and arbitrary prosecutions*”.

<sup>53</sup> A. Vermeersch, & H. Wouters, *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de Belgische pers, 1830-1848* (Leuven: Nauwelaerts, 1958), 97-103; Lebrocqy, 26-27; Destanberg, 59; H. Balthazar, “De Gentse brandhaard”, in: *Van vrijheid met vreugd gepaard. Twee eeuwen vrijmetselarij in Gent en Antwerpen*, ed. J. Tyssens (Brussel/Gent: Marot/Tijdsbeeld, 2003), 71-90.

same movement. An electoral association, the *Société des Amis de l'Ordre et du Repos Public* (the Society of the Friends of Order and Public Rest), was erected by the same group of people as early as October 1830. Through it Orangists disposed of an effective party structure that enabled them to win several elections in Ghent.<sup>54</sup>

After 1839, year in which The Netherlands signed the Treaty of London and thus acknowledged Belgian independence, Orangism quickly faded away as a political movement.<sup>55</sup> Strikingly it would take *Le Septentrion* almost 50 years to adhere to the Grand Orient of Belgium. It was only when leading man en perpetual worshipful master Metdepenningen and prince Frederic died that a new generation of masons could let go of the Orangist undertone.<sup>56</sup> But politically, Orangism was rapidly included in the broader, liberal and anticlerical movement.

### **Freemasonry as a patriotic society?**

Indeed, the years had gradually shown that Belgium was a viable nation-state and that the opposition to it was to no avail. This, however, did not make obsolete the references to a Masonic patriotism or nationalism. They would now be used in the discourse concerning a common adversary: the clerical movement. The identification of freemasonry with anticlericalism was reinforced as a consequence of a pastoral letter issued in 1837 excommunicating all masons.<sup>57</sup> Joseph Defrenne pointed to the clerical danger as early as 1832. In his invitation for the founding assembly of the Grand Orient he called for organisation and action because “*nous dormons et nos ennemis veillent autour de nous*” (we sleep while our enemies are on the watch).<sup>58</sup> The clericals were charged with being the “*détracteurs de la Nation*” (detractors of the Nation), while the masons would always be the “*premiers soutiens du Roi et de l'Etat*” (the first support of the King and the State).<sup>59</sup>

But were they? Had freemasonry acted as a patriotic society in the first constituting years of the new kingdom of Belgium? And if so, how to interpret the Orangist, but paradoxically ‘Belgian’ patriotism? To clarify these issues one has again to bear in mind the distinction between nationalism and patriotism. Those masons and lodges that supported the new nation-state can undoubtedly be called nationalists as they demanded separate, independent and free institutions not only for their country but also on an obediencial level. To use Sébastien Dubois’ words, their patriotism had clearly been nationalized. The Grand Orient of Belgium and the new

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<sup>54</sup> Witte, 92-96.; Balthazar, 71-90.

<sup>55</sup> Stengers, 80.

<sup>56</sup> Balthazar, 76.

<sup>57</sup> For a general overview of masonic politization and anticlericalism see: J. Tyssens, « Politisation et dépolitisation au sein de la franc-maçonnerie belge, 1830-1940 ». *Cahiers Marxistes* 193 (1993) : 11-27.; J. Koppen, « Otons le masque à nos persécuteurs! De Belgische vrijmetselarij op zoek naar haar eigen identiteit en de confrontatie met het katholicisme, 1830-1840 », *Acta Macionica* 18 (2008): 91-122.

<sup>58</sup> Witte & Borne, 31.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

nation-state mutually supported and legitimized each other. It was this obediencial level, and no other, that acted as a Masonic nationalist society. There was no other Masonic coordinated or associative effort to actively support the new state in the profane sphere. Nevertheless individual nationalist masons were very active in the early nation-building process in the areas of politics or print.

The Orangist freemasons of Ghent did not support the national institutions, profane or Masonic. However this did not inhibit them from defining themselves as Belgians and patriots. Their patriotism was of a proto-national type, it had not yet been nationalized. This meant they wanted good for the fatherland, its liberty and its prosperity even if it meant being integrated into another kingdom, in casu the Dutch one. The Orangist freemasonry, as opposed to the nationalist, did act in a coordinated manner. It was the meeting point for Orangist leaders and journalists and structured the entire movement that wanted to better their fatherland's fate. Freemasonry could thus be willingly used as a patriotic society.

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