



**“From the Sea to Politics: Masonry in New Spain/Mexico,  
1816–23”**

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**Abstract**

The origins of Freemasonry in Mexico have always been surrounded by myths and mysteries, mainly due to the scarcity of Masonic documents to clarify them. In this paper, these origins and the socio-economic groups to which its members belonged are discussed based on primary sources recently found. The paper also addresses when and why the early Mexican Freemasonry was involved in the country's political life.

**Resumen**

Los orígenes de la masonería en México han estado rodeados siempre de mitos y misterios, principalmente a causa de la escasez de documentos masónicos que los aclaren. En este artículo se discuten esos orígenes con base en fuentes primarias recientemente localizadas y se muestran los ámbitos socio-económicos en que sus miembros estuvieron inmersos. También se aborda cuándo y por qué la primera masonería mexicana se introdujo en la vida política.

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## “From the Sea to Politics: Masonry in New Spain/Mexico, 1816–23”<sup>1</sup>

María Eugenia Vázquez Semadeni

### Introduction

The history of the earliest nineteenth-century Freemasonry in New Spain/Mexico is a contentious topic, surrounded by numerous myths that tend to be fueled more by passion than objectivity.

The scarcity of primary sources has made it such that practically all writings on the topic base themselves on three classic works by Mason historians: *Historia de la masonería en México*, by José María Mateos; *Una contribución a la historia masónica de México*, by Richard Chism; and *Apuntes para la historia de la masonería en México*, by Luis J. Zalce y Rodríguez. In addition, they base themselves on three great nineteenth-century Mexican writers: Lucas Alamán, José María Luis Mora and Lorenzo de Zavala.

Despite being required reading for whoever wishes to study Mexican Masonry, the credibility of these works is very questionable, especially since the above authors generally do not vet their sources and tend to exaggerate the participation of Masonry and the Masons in national events. Alternatively, as in the cases of Alamán and Mora, they tend to blame the Masonic fraternity for the political division that the country experienced after independence.

In the course of my research, I have been able to prove that verifiable facts coexist alongside these authors' speculation and fabricated stories, intended to legitimize or delegitimize the Masonic institution and its members. Therefore, I believe historical research should consist of a strict and careful critique of sources in order to profit from the important information that such texts provide, yet without resorting to baseless repetition, which only serves to strengthen myths that obscure understanding of the topic<sup>2</sup>.

The objective of this paper is to prove or cast into doubt, based on primary sources, some of the traditional historiographic claims about Masonry from the first decades of the nineteenth century in New Spain/Mexico. Accordingly, I try to reconstruct at least one part of the first steps Masonry took in what is currently Mexican territory.

The themes I will address are: a) the establishment, between 1816 and 1820, of Masonic lodges of the York Rite on the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico, with the authorization

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank Mikael Wolfe for translating this paper and Laura Normand for revising it. This text is part of a larger research project that I am developing at UCLA. I presented a previous version at the *VII International Seminar: Liberalism, Masonry, and Independence in Hispanic America*, Institute of Historical Research, University Michoacana of San Nicolás de Hidalgo, October 2011.

<sup>2</sup> There are more and more academic studies of Mexican Masonry that make sure to adhere to scientific rigor in their disciplines. Examples include the works of José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli, Marco Antonio Flores Zavala, Melchor Campos García, Carlos Francisco Martínez Moreno, Patricia Masse and Beatriz Urías Horcacitas. Unfortunately there are also still many works, like that of Héctor Díaz Zermeño, *La masonería como sociedad de ideas contrapunteadas en el proceso de la independencia de Hispanoamérica y México, 1782-1833* (México: FES Acatlán, 2009), that do not adequately critique sources, speculate without sufficient evidence or simply compile without a better analysis of information provided by other authors.

of the Grand Lodge of Louisiana<sup>3</sup>; b) what happened to these lodges, and their possible incorporation into the Scottish Rite between 1822 and 1823.

The sources upon which I draw are Masonic documents of the era preserved in the Grand Lodge of Louisiana and the Manuel Orozco y Berra Library in Mexico City. I include some trials by Freemasonry followed in the Inquisition and the Crime Room preserved in the National Archive. I also refer to contemporary newspaper publications of the events. Finally, I rely on the work of Lucas Alamán, José María Luis Mora, and José María Mateos, in the historiography on U.S. Masonry, as well as recent academic historiography on Mexican Masonry.

### Antecedents

Though numerous writers—from academic historians like Nicolás Rangel to Masonic historians like Zalce—have stated the existence of lodges in New Spanish territory in the eighteenth century, thus far no documents have been located to substantiate their claims.

The trials followed by Freemasonry in the Inquisition and the Crime Room show the presence of Masons in New Spain, and even provide clues indicating the plausibility that such Masons knew one another, recognized each other as such, and interacted in their capacity as members of the order<sup>4</sup>. However, there are too many missing elements to be able to affirm that lodges or organized Masonry existed.

One typical example of this topic is the supposed lodge reunited around Juan Esteban Laroche founded by French Masons, who had begun to be persecuted in New Spain after the French Revolution. In addition to considering, as Zalce does, that the meetings of these Frenchmen could have been the first formal or informal Masonic meetings held in New Spain, some historians maintain that they were the ideological precursors of independence, or part of an anti-monarchical conspiracy.<sup>5</sup> Yet as Gabriel Torres Puga has shown, the persecution to which these men were subject was enmeshed in larger processes, a result of the fear—instilled

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<sup>3</sup> Various authors from nineteenth century U.S. mason historians like James B. Scot to contemporary Mexican academics like Melchor Campos García have already studied these lodges but with different foci than my research, which is based on primary Masonic sources that have never been found before. Recently Carlos Francisco Martínez Moreno has also used these sources for his own research, but with different objectives than mine. His results have been published in Carlos Francisco Martínez Moreno, “Las Logias masónicas en la Nueva España”, in: *REHMLAC* 3, no. 2 (diciembre 2011-abril 2012 [cited April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012]): available <http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v3/n2/rehmlac.vol3.n2-cmartinezII.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Instituciones coloniales, *Inquisición*, vol. 1307, exp. 7, fs. 44-74; vol. 1369, exp. 9, fs. 96-116; vol. 1383, exp. 5, fs. 1-192; vol. 1239, exp. 7, fs. 442-524; vol. 1248, s/e, fs. 216-218; vol. 1357, expediente 4, fs. 1-68. *Criminal*, vol. 667, exp. 11, fs. 209-317.

<sup>5</sup> Nicolás Rangel, *La vida colonial. Los precursores ideológicos de la guerra de independencia. La masonería en México, siglo XVIII*, Publicaciones del Archivo General de la Nación XXI, México, Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1932; Luis J. Zalce y Rodríguez, *Apuntes para la historia de la masonería en México* (México: Herbasa, 1950), 8; Víctor M. Uribe Urán, “The Birth of a Public Sphere in Latin America during the Age of Revolution”, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 2 (2000): 431.

in New Spanish authorities in the wake of the French Revolution—that resident Frenchmen could spread the seed of sedition<sup>6</sup>.

Of course, it cannot be unequivocally denied that lodges existed in eighteenth-century New Spain, but surviving primary sources consulted thus far cannot affirm and demonstrate their existence as proven fact either. As Carlos Francisco Martínez Moreno has indicated, it's possible that there was some kind of Masonic activity, since speaking of an organized Masonic presence is not limited to the existence of established regular lodges<sup>7</sup>. However, due to the nature of these Masonic activities, which did not generally leave records behind, it is difficult to extricate ourselves from the habit of guesswork and supposition when speaking of eighteenth-century Masonry in New Spain.

The situation changes when entering the nineteenth century, since although there is still room for myth and speculation, there also begin to appear the first registered documents from Masonic bodies working in New Spain.

Before addressing these records, it seems to me important to comment on a theme which has generated much material for a myth that endures to this day: the *Calle de las Ratas*/"*Arquitectural Moral*" lodge.

José María Mateos affirmed in his *Historia de la masonería en México* that since 1806 Enrique Muñi founded a lodge that met in 4 Ratas Street, house of the *regidor* (councilman) Manuel Luyando. Other regidores such as the Marquee of Uluapa, Francisco Primo de Verdad, and people like Gregorio Martínez, Feliciano Vargas, José María Espinosa, Miguel Betancourt, Ignacio Moreno, Miguel Domínguez, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, and Ignacio Allende belonged to it<sup>8</sup>.

Despite the fact that Mateos himself recognizes that no official document exists that explains the origin of this lodge, it has been made out to be the foundational key of Mexican Masonry.

Mateos' account has been fused with Lucas Alamán's narration, who in the fifth volume of his *Historia de Méjico*, published in 1852, claimed that before the arrival of the expeditionary troops, Masonry in New Spain contained a few individuals who lived in hiding for fear of the Inquisition. According to his account, the first to reunite these Masons and give them an organized body was the judge of the *audiencia* (tribunal) of México, Felipe Martínez de Aragón, son-in-law of Fausto de Elhuyar, who was considered the dean of New Spanish Masonry. After the arrival of the expeditionary troops, Masonry received a new boost. The first lodge, *Arquitectura Moral*, was established in Mexico in 1817 or 1818 in the house of the chaplains of the old Convent of Saint Theresa, on the street by the same name<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Torres Puga, "Centinela mexicano contra francmasones. Un enredo detectivesco del licenciado Borunda en las causas judiciales contra franceses de 1794", in: *Estudios de Historia Novohispana* 33 (2005): 57-94.

<sup>7</sup> Carlos Francisco Martínez Moreno, "El establecimiento de las masonerías en México en el siglo XIX" (Tesis de Maestría, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, UNAM, 2011), 159.

<sup>8</sup> José María Mateos, *Historia de la masonería en México desde 1806 hasta 1884* (México: published in the newspaper *La Tolerancia*, 1884), 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> Lucas Alamán, *Historia de Méjico, desde los primeros movimientos que prepararon su independencia en el año de 1808 hasta la época presente* (Imprenta de J. L. Lara, 1852), Tomo V, 58.

Many years before Alamán made this affirmation, José María Chavero had already spoken of the lodge. In a communiqué he sent on August 26, 1829 to the newspaper *Correo de la Federación Mexicana*, he declared that before independence there existed a Scottish workshop titled “*Arquitectura Moral*,” located at 2 Santa Teresa la Antigua Street, directed by the Judge Felipe Martínez de Aragón and composed entirely of Spaniards, except the American Francisco Ibar<sup>10</sup>. The two authors agreed that this workshop later moved to Coliseo Viejo Street.

It was thus Chavero and Alamán, not Mateos, who coined the name *Arquitectura Moral*. The dates of the establishment, location, and members of both lodges do not agree. Therefore, I dare to maintain that if the lodge on Ratas Street existed, it was not the same lodge as *Arquitectura Moral*. Yet the Masonic and anti-Masonic literature, including academic historiography, have combined these accounts into a single one that has been made into the origin of Mexican Masonry, or at least one of its principal foundational myths<sup>11</sup>.

Confusions such as these have helped complicate the study of the earliest nineteenth-century Masonry in New Spain/Mexico. I therefore consider the search for primary sources indispensable—sources which can clarify who founded the Masonic bodies that functioned in this territory in the first decades of the nineteenth century; when; under the authority of which bodies; and to what ends. What follows is a sample of the results that can be obtained with these kinds of documents and questions.

### **Mason sailors: The Masonry of Louisiana in New Spain**

Despite the fact that Louisiana was not a part of the Spanish empire for the entire duration of this history, an active commerce existed between New Orleans and the Spanish and French colonies of the West Indies. This commerce depended on the circulation of ships in the then-called Seno Mexicano and Caribbean, which transported merchandise from one port to another or to European metropolises. Numerous ships of the Royal Spanish Armada also transited these waters, charged with protecting boats and the ports from pirates that entrapped them. As we shall see, in large measure it was the crewmembers of these vessels that contributed to the diffusion of Masonry in this area.

The precise date of Masonry’s installation in Louisiana is unknown, but we do know that the population that abandoned the island of Santo Domingo after the slave revolution and established itself in New Orleans propelled it. In this period, the Louisiana territory formed part of the Spanish empire, in which both the monarchical and ecclesiastical authorities

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<sup>10</sup> José María Chavero, “Comunicado”, in: *Correo de la Federación Mexicana* (August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1829), tomo VIII, no. 449.

<sup>11</sup> An example of the putative academic historiography which incorrectly fuses both accounts is the article by Erik E. Gutiérrez Muñoz and Karla Bautista Frutes, “Masonería e Independencia: los mitos en contraste”, en: *Escenarios XXI*, no. 3 (2010), which states precisely: “La primera logia de la que se tiene registro que se haya asentado en la Nueva España, inició sus trabajos en 1806 con el nombre de ‘Arquitectura Moral’, reuniéndose en la Calle de las Ratas –hoy 7ma. de Bolívar- número cuatro, en la residencia del regidor del Ayuntamiento, don Manuel Luyando”. It also establishes as reference for such affirmation the *Historia de la Masonería en México* of José María Mateos in which the name “Arquitectura Moral” is not mentioned even once.

prohibited Masonry. Despite this, various lodges were founded from 1793 in the Louisiana territory and were recognized by diverse American and French Masonic bodies<sup>12</sup>.

In 1800, through the treaty of San Ildefonso, Spain returned Louisiana to France, from which the U.S. government acquired it in 1803. With this political change the prohibitions against Masonry were lifted, since in the U.S. this institution was not only permitted but also enjoyed great social prestige<sup>13</sup>. As a result, lodges multiplied and could work openly and freely.

In 1812 Louisiana was made into a sovereign state of the American union and, according to James B. Scot, this change in political status prompted a few members of the fraternity to in turn change their Masonic status, seeking the creation of a Grand Lodge in the state. After various meetings, the Grand Lodge of Louisiana was finally installed, with five regional lodges. All of them worked in French (the two working in English preferred to keep their previous jurisdictions) and in the York Rite<sup>14</sup>.

Once formally established, the Grand Lodge of Louisiana began to grant dispensations for the foundation of new lodges in the state's own territory, but also outside of it and outside of the U.S. dominions.

On April 30, 1816 it granted a charter to found a lodge in Veracruz, New Spain<sup>15</sup>. The charter, reproduced entirely in the book of the grand secretary<sup>16</sup>, says verbatim:

J. Soulie G. M.  
Moreau Lislet D. G. W.  
M. Lefebvre Senior G. W.  
Y. Lemonier J. G. W.

To all whom it may concern

The Grand Lodge of Louisiana ancient York masons, established at New Orleans, in the state of Louisiana, the 20th day of June in the year of our lord 1812 and of masonry 5812, according to the old Constitution revived by the Prince Edwin at York, in the kingdom of England, in year of our Lord 926, and of masonry 4926, by the style and title of the Grand Lodge of Louisiana ancient York Masonry and its Masonic jurisdiction, invested with full and sole power and authority over all the ancient craft,

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<sup>12</sup> James B. Scot, *Outline of the Rise and Progress of Freemasonry in Louisiana. From its introduction to the reorganization of the Grand Lodge in 1850* (New Orleans: Clarck & Hofeline Book Printers, 1873), 4-19.

<sup>13</sup> On U.S. Freemasonry, see Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood. Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Scot, *Outline*, 4-19.

<sup>15</sup> For the text of the charter that is reproduced as follows, it appears that it had to do with an authorization to found a new lodge, though it is also possible that the lodge already existed and it was only being regularized for ascription to the Grand Lodge of Louisiana. A denunciation of 1816 before the Inquisition, which mentions the existence of a lodge in Veracruz which functioned from 1814 and to which Gonzalo de Ulloa, Teniente de Fragata and Comandante del Cuerpo de Patriotas de la plaza de Veracruz belonged, makes me contemplate such a possibility. AGN, Instituciones Coloniales, *Inquisición* 61, Vol. 1463, exp. 9, fs. 97-99.

<sup>16</sup> Gran Logia de Louisiana, Libro del Gran Secretario 1812-1840, 33-34, Archivo Histórico de la Gran Logia de Louisiana. I owe the discovery of these documents to the extraordinary work of Sally Sinor, librarian of this Grand Lodge.

and the supreme court of appeal in all Masonic cases arising under its jurisdiction agreeably to ancient form and usage –Being assembled in Grand communication in the city of New Orleans and state aforesaid

#### Send Greeting

Know ye that we the Grand Lodge of Louisiana by virtue of the powers and authorities duly vested in us as aforesaid, do hereby authorize and empower our trusty and well beloved brethren Miguel Jose Monzon Master; Antonio Valera Senior Warden, Felix Galan Junior Warden; to open and hold a lodge designated by N. 8 and by the name of “Los Amigos Reunidos” under our register and jurisdiction, in Vera Cruz or within three miles of the same: and we do likewise authorize and empower our said brethren M. J. Monzon, An[tonio] Valera and Felix Galan to admit, make, pass and raise Freemasons according to the most ancient custom and usage of the craft, in all ages and nations, throughout the known World and not otherwise: and we do further authorize and empower the said M. J. Monzon, An[tonio] Valera, and Felix Galan and their successors, to hear and determine all and singular matters and things relative to the craft, within the jurisdiction of the said lodge N. 8, and lastly we do hereby authorize and empower and direct our said trusty and well beloved brethren M. J. Monzon, Ant[onio] Valera and Felix Galan to install their successors after being duly elected and chosen; to invest them with all the powers and dignities to their offices respectively belonging, and deliver to them this warrant. And such successors shall in like manner, from time to time, install their successors, and proceed in the premises as above directed: Such installation to be upon or near the festival of S. John the evangelist, during the continuance of the said lodge forever; provided always that the said above named brethren and their successors do pay due respect and obedience to the Right Worshipful Grand Lodge aforesaid and to the ordinances thereof, otherwise this warrant to be of no force or virtue.

Given in open Grand Lodge under the hands of our Right Worshipful Grand Officers and the seal of our Grand Lodge at New Orl[eans], this 30 of April in the year of our lord 1816 and of Masonry 5816

Attest:

Guiberty G. S.

Signed J. B. Pinta G. T.

In the following year on April 12, 1817, the Grand Lodge gave authorization for establishing the lodge *Reunión de la Virtud* No. 9 in Campeche. The charter’s text is exactly the same as that which is transcribed above, changing only the name and number of the lodge, its dignitaries and the site where it was to be established. The three principal officers of this new workshop were Juan Miguel López Duque de Estrada, master; José María Machín; senior warden; and Carlos Francisco Escoffie, junior warden<sup>17</sup>.

In March 1820 it gave one more authorization: for a lodge named *Aurora de Yucatán* No. 18, established in Mérida. The registration of this document in the book of the grand secretary is different from the previous two; it does not completely transcribe the text of the

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<sup>17</sup> Gran Logia de Louisiana, Libro del Gran Secretario 1812-1840, 39-40, Archivo de la Gran Logia de Louisiana.

charter but rather only acknowledges, in French, that the authorization was granted. The three officers of the said lodge were: Luis Cañas, venerable; John Quevedo, premier surveillant; and Pedro Tarrazo, second surveillant<sup>18</sup>.

The first question that emerges from reading these records: Who were these men, named officers of these lodges?

Miguel José Monzón was Spanish, originally from Villa de Jorcas, Aragón. Titled as surgeon from Madrid in 1791, he arrived in Veracruz in 1798, worked as a surgeon aboard various ships in the Royal Spanish Armada and on occasion lent his services to military hospitals in the area, where he distinguished himself by distributing smallpox vaccines. He remained in Mexico after independence, working as a doctor in Veracruz. The laws of expulsion against Spaniards affected him, as he had to leave the port in 1827. But for health reasons he received an exception and didn't leave the country, where he appears to have resided until his death. He didn't engage in any important political activity but his son, Pedro Miguel Monzón, was a remarkable military officer who helped Agustín de Iturbide in the consummation of independence and died in 1827 as an infantry battalion colonel. Both father and son were known as Scottish Masons<sup>19</sup>.

Antonio Valera y Viaña was also Spanish, native of the villa of Mencia, Córdoba born in 1791. He was a distinguished sailor in the Royal Spanish Armada, who commanded the mail boats between Cadiz, Cuba and New Spain. Son of Juan José Valera y Roldán and María Josefa Viaña, he had ten brothers, one of whom was the father of the famous Spanish writer Juan Valera. He was also related to the Alcalá Galiano family, to which the well-known liberal of the Cadiz Courts Antonio Alcalá Galiano belonged. According to the account of the latter, Antonio Valera formed part of the conspiratorial network to reestablish the Cadiz constitution during the absolutist restoration. He was a member of the crew in the convoy that carried Juan O'Donojú to New Spain. Manuel Codorniú, known to be one of the founders of Scottish Masonry in Mexico, claimed that Valera was the only Mason that traveled in O'Donojú's group. In 1824 Valera was one of those in charge of sending auxiliaries from Havana to the Spanish resistance in San Juan de Ulúa. At the end of his life he was deputy for Córdoba in the Spanish General Cortes<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Gran Logia de Louisiana, Libro del Gran Secretario 1812-1840, 67, Archivo de la Gran Logia de Louisiana. Diverse authors such as James B. Scot, Robert F. Gould and Richard Chism, have mentioned the existence of these lodges from the second half of the nineteenth century. However, it was not until 2011 that these registries in the Grand Lodge of Louisiana were made available to historians.

<sup>19</sup> María Luisa Rodríguez-Sala, *Los cirujanos del mar en la Nueva España (1572-1820) ¿Miembros de un estamento profesional o de una comunidad científica?* (México D.F.: IIS-UNAM/Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit/Instituto Veracruzano de la Cultura/Academia Mexicana de Cirugía, 2007), 141-146. I profoundly thank the author for the generosity with which she facilitated her research. R.D., communiqué inserted in *El Sol*, 29 de octubre de 1827. Basilio José Arrillaga, *Recopilación de leyes, decretos, bandos, reglamentos, circulares y providencias de los supremos poderes y otras autoridades de la República Mexicana* (México: Imprenta de J. M. Fernández de Lara, 1836), tomo de enero de 1832 a marzo de 1833, 301. *El Sol*, [Editorial], 8 de febrero de 1827. Rafael Dávila, *Taller de Cohetería. Plaza de Toros. Vaya un torito travieso al congreso de Veracruz por su lindo manifiesto* (Diálogo veinte y tres, México: Imprenta de A. Valdés, 1827).

<sup>20</sup> *Estado General de la Real Armada*, Madrid, Imprenta Real, 1818. *Estado General de la Real Armada*, Madrid, Imprenta Real, 1830. Antonio Alcalá Galiano, *Recuerdos de un anciano* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2009), 322. Manuel Codorniú, "Apuntes para la historia de la revolución mexicana", in: *Revista Española de Ambos Mundos* (Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de Mellado, 1855), 710. Jesús C. Contreras, *Valera D. Juan. Su perfil*

Félix Galán was a merchant in Veracruz, principally of food and metals. He conducted his business in the area of Veracruz and Campeche, though as the merchant of the frigate *El Águila*, he also had commercial ties with Cadiz. As a member of the Chamber of Commerce of Veracruz, he maintained a protectionist posture that defended the relation with Cadiz merchants when the possibility of requesting free trade to improve provincial economic conditions was discussed<sup>21</sup>.

Juan Miguel López Duque de Estrada was originally from Campeche. From 1806 he served as navigational attaché on the warship *Antenor*, which traveled principally from Campeche to Havana and Santo Domingo, typically carrying riches, documents and arms. In 1822, he looked for available diplomatic work or in the war in Campeche, with the backing of Lorenzo de Zavala and Pedro Baranda<sup>22</sup>.

José María Machín was born in Campeche. He was a merchant marine though he also occupied posts in the Royal Spanish Armada and after independence in the Mexican Armada. In 1827 he was involved in the maritime movements to affect Spanish commerce in Cuba and to defend Mexican commerce from the attacks of Spanish boats. He was an official of Commodore Porter's squadron. He also intervened in various local political movements in Campeche, where he distinguished himself for being a partisan of federalism<sup>23</sup>.

Carlos Francisco Escoffie was son of Carlos Escoffie and María Cecilia Gueit. His parents lived in New Orleans, Havana, and Campeche. I have not found his birth certificate, but it's possible that he was born in one of the latter two cities. His father was a doctor though he was also dedicated to commercial activities. Carlos Francisco dedicated himself to the merchant marine and became a prosperous owner of various warships, several of which he personally commanded. He traveled principally between Veracruz and Campeche<sup>24</sup>.

Luis Cañas, probably of Spanish origin, was also a merchant marine covering the routes between Veracruz, Campeche and Tampico. He was the pioneer of nautical education in Mexico. In 1822, he presented a project to the municipality of Campeche to establish a school of mathematics in which students studied arithmetic, speculative and practical geometry, plane and spherical trigonometry, astronomy, and navigation. The project was

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*ignorado y algunas cartas inéditas* (Madrid: Visión Net, 2005). Congreso de los Diputados, "Índice Histórico de diputados" (España: Dalmiro de la Valgoma y el Barón de Finestrat), *Real Compañía de Guardias Marinas y Colegio Naval. Catálogo de pruebas de caballeros aspirantes* (Madrid: Instituto Histórico de Marina, 1945), tomo III, 471. Francisco Xavier de Santa Cruz y Malles, *Historia de familias cubanas* (La Habana: Ed. Hércules, 1942), tomo tercero, 49.

<sup>21</sup> Matilde Souto Mantecón, *Mar abierto. La política y el comercio del Consulado de Veracruz en el ocaso del sistema imperial* (México: El Colegio de México/Instituto Mora, 2001), 292. AGN, Instituciones coloniales, *Indiferente virreinal*, caja 3530, exp. 8.

<sup>22</sup> AGN, Instituciones gubernamentales: época moderna y contemporánea, Administración Pública Federal s. XIX, *Gobernación*, vol. 40/9, exp. 17, fs. 1-7.

<sup>23</sup> Juan de Dios Bonilla, *Historia marítima de México* (México: Ed. Litorales, 1926). Mario Lavalle Argudín, *La Armada en el México independiente* (México: Secretaría de Marina/INEHRM, 1985). Manuel A. Lanz, *Compendio de Historia de Campeche* (Campeche: Tip. El Fénix, 1905).

<sup>24</sup> María Luisa Rodríguez-Sala, "Carlos Escoffiet", manuscript provided by the author to whom I am once again grateful for her support for this research. AGN, Instituciones gubernamentales: época moderna y contemporánea, Administración Pública Federal, *Relaciones exteriores*, caja 29, exp. 22. *El Sol*, "Noticias nacionales", 21 de abril de 1825. *Diario de Gobierno de la República Mexicana*, "Capitanía del puerto de Sisal", 10 de agosto de 1838.

approved and Cañas opened the school on the grounds of the Colegio of San José. He had to leave the school in 1824 when the rector decreed that lay professors could not teach on the grounds. He stayed in a locale that facilitated the town hall, but a few months later he returned to the school by invitation of Rector Ximénez. Luis Cañas died in 1825; a short time later, the school was closed<sup>25</sup>.

Pedro Tarrazo was originally from Campeche. He was a deputy for Yucatán in the first Constituent Congress. He did not support the coronation of Iturbide as emperor. He was deputy again in the second Constituent Congress and as such signed the 1824 Constitution. As a member of the federalist group, he was close to Lorenzo de Zavala. His brother Francisco Antonio Tarrazo was governor of Yucatán. It appears that both brothers were involved in contraband in the region<sup>26</sup>.

Unfortunately, I have not found any information on John Quevedo.

Given that only the names of the three principal officers of these lodges appear in the registries of the charters, the sample is too small to do a precise analysis of its social composition. Yet given that six of the nine officers were sailors; that the Grand Lodge of Louisiana granted charters not only to establish these lodges in the principal ports of the Gulf of Mexico but also in the wider Caribbean (two in Havana and one in Matanzas)<sup>27</sup>; and that in general the entry into these lodges was by invitation—which tended to occur between people who knew each other by doing the same job—it seems plausible that Masonry spread throughout this area through the ties established between sailors/traders. As a result, Masonry followed maritime routes, commercial as well as military, forming a clear maritime-Masonic triangle<sup>28</sup>.

We have thus found a typical pattern of Masonic diffusion. Numerous authors have shown that the order's diffusion in coastal areas consists of a considerable number of Masons who were professional sailors<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, there are registries of the existence of naval lodges in the British, French, and American navies. And as early as the nineteenth century,

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<sup>25</sup> Bonilla, *Historia*, 308.

<sup>26</sup> Melchor Campos García, *Que todos los yucatecos proclamen su independencia: historia del secesionismo en Yucatán, 821-1849* (Yucatán: Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán 2002), 53.

<sup>27</sup> Gran Logia de Louisiana, "Historical Table of Lodges". Reproduced every year in the Grand Lodge proceedings.

<sup>28</sup> It's important to make clear from this point that this was not the only pattern of diffusion or that Louisiana was the only origin of Masonic establishments in the region. In the Gulf of Mexico region, in addition to the lodges with records from Louisiana, superior bodies of the Scottish rite with authorizations from Havana and Paris were established between 1816 and 1822, about which I will discuss more below. Furthermore, Chavero's commentaries on the lodge "Arquitectura moral" in Mexico City and a denunciation before the Inquisition in 1819, in which it's affirmed that various members of the Dragons regiment were Freemasons like Melchor Alvarez -brigadier and general commander of Querétaro, whose membership years later in Masonry we indeed have records for-, permit us to suppose that in the central zone of New Spain there existed organized Masonry in this same period. However, it still has not been possible for me to establish if this was related to Scottish Masonry in the Mexican Gulf at this time. AGN, Instituciones Coloniales, *Inquisición* 61, vol. 1416, exp. 14.

<sup>29</sup> For one example see Alberto J. V. Valín Fernández, "La Galicia francmasónica, entre el mar y el agro", en: *Brocar. Cuadernos de Investigación histórica* 17 (1991): 85-90.

anti-Masonic authors like Vicente de la Fuente claimed that the Spanish navy was dominated by Masonry, though he acknowledges that he does not have the evidence to demonstrate it<sup>30</sup>.

José Antonio Ayala Pérez sustains that the long time in solitude and continuous displacement prompted the sailors to make contact with diverse ideological currents, and become a diffuser of them in the places they traveled. At the same time, they searched for human support and company to attenuate their condition of foreignness. Ayala therefore considers it understandable that Masonry found fertile ground for growth in the navy and that, due to its geographical mobility, its crew members searched to found Masonic establishments in the distinct localities where they docked<sup>31</sup>. For his part, Éric Saunier notes that, as a sociological fact, the initiation of seafarers into Masonry may be linked to a desire to break their isolation, to a need for solidarity or to the desire for recognition of acts of bravery, all this having as a backdrop the fact that initiation “exorcises” the fear of death that every seamen faces<sup>32</sup>.

The maritime-commercial character of the Veracruz, Campeche, and Mérida lodges permit us to add another element to these considerations. Steven Bullock has shown that since the end of the eighteenth century, in the face of commercial growth and geographic mobility, U.S. Masonry provided union, friendship, brotherly love, and mutual sympathy, which contributed to the creation of social and economic ties. With the loyalties it generated, Masonry facilitated long-distance commerce, offering an ideal of familiar care and affection much larger than local traditional bonds, which helped to form and maintain solid relationships with men from outside the localities<sup>33</sup>.

These interpretations provide me with the grounds to question the account of the traditional historiography on Mexican Masonry, which tends to associate its origins with political matters. Mateos relates it to the supposed posture of Mexico City in favor of independence and with Cadiz liberalism. Alamán and Mora link the first lodges to expeditionary troops, the defense of constitutional monarchy, and clerical reform. Even Chism accuses all Mexican Masonry of being inherently political.

Such affirmations could be true for the Masonry of the territory’s central zone, but not necessarily for the coastal region. The dignitaries of the *Los Amigos Reunidos*, *Reunión de la Virtud*, and *Aurora de Yucatán* lodges were immersed in the same professional and commercial networks that Bullock describes<sup>34</sup>. As such, it is possible to suppose that its establishment responded more to the search for spaces of conviviality and socialization; to the

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<sup>30</sup> Vicente de la Fuente, *Historia de las sociedades secretas antiguas y modernas en España y especialmente de la Francmasonería* (Madrid: Imprenta a cargo de D. R. P. Infante, 1874), tomo primero.

<sup>31</sup> José Antonio Ayala Pérez, “Marina y masonería: el ejemplo de Cartagena”, in: *La masonería en la historia de España*, coord. José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli (Zaragoza: Diputación General de Aragón, 1985), 287-304.

<sup>32</sup> Éric Saunier, “Les «gens de mer» et la vie maçonnique: une influence mal connue”, in: *La Franc-maçonnerie dans les ports*, ed. Cécile Révauger and Saunier (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2012), 186. It is necessary to clarify that in this paper Saunier does not focus on the sociological reasons the seafarers might have had to initiate into Masonry, but on the impact this group had on the lodges’ life.

<sup>33</sup> Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 185.

<sup>34</sup> In a later stage of this research I will try to reconstruct the maritime-commercial networks of Louisiana, Cuba and New Spain, in order to prove if there existed direct economic and professional relations between members of the lodges dependent on the Grand Lodge of Louisiana.

creation of relations of trust required for commercial activities; to the need for support of castaways and losses; even to receive preferential treatment that Masons provided one another; than to political objectives<sup>35</sup>.

These ideas are not new. The very Vicente de la Fuente sustained that members of the merchant marine made friends where they didn't know anybody thanks to Masonry<sup>36</sup>. But the politicized image of Mexican Masonry has obscured these aspects, which the documents analyzed here have brought to light. As we shall see in the next section, some of these lodges acquired their political character years later.

Another assertion of the traditional historiography, which the analysis of the records permits us to question, is the supposed predominance of the Spanish in the zone's Masonry. Of the nine officers that appear in them, we know that Monzón, Valera, and Cañas were Spanish; López, Machín, and Tarrazo were originally from Campeche; Escoffie was the son of Frenchmen born in America (Havana or Campeche); and Galán appears to have been born in Veracruz. It's possible that the total number of *peninsulares* in the three lodges was greater than that of the Americans, but at least among the first officers of each one of them there were as many Americans as Spanish. Another possibility is that the Spanish predominated in Veracruz and the Americans in Campeche and Mérida, or the Spanish in Veracruz and Mérida and the Americans in Campeche. As we can see, there is much work to be done on this theme, but the question has now been raised.

### **The appearance of Scottish Masonry**

As I mentioned above, the *Los Amigos Reunidos*, *Reunión de la Virtud*, and *Aurora de Yucatán* lodges worked in the York Rite. From 1813–14 a committee of the Grand Lodge of Louisiana prepared a uniform system of work in this rite for the three symbolic degrees, which had to be used for all of the lodges under its jurisdiction<sup>37</sup>.

Yet the sources indicate that at about the same time, and in the same area, bodies of the Scottish Rite were being formed. A letter dated February 17, 1822 shows that it already existed in this year in the Arcadia de Veracruz, a Grand Consistory of the Scottish Rite of Ancient and Accepted Franco Masons 32<sup>nd</sup> degree<sup>38</sup>. The document does not mention when the Grand Consistory was established, but it does claim that it was with authorization of the Supreme Council of the Grand Inspector Generals 33<sup>rd</sup> Degree of Paris.

The letter was addressed to Melchor Álvarez, distinguished Spanish military officer who had served in the royal army against the insurgents. In 1821, however, he joined the "Army of the Three Guarantees" and supported Iturbide in the consummation of independence. From 1819 Álvarez was accused of being a Freemason and by 1822 he held the thirty-second degree in the Scottish Rite, Prince of the Royal Secret. In that year he was

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<sup>35</sup> All of these, of course, were in addition to the properly Masonic ends which its founders had had.

<sup>36</sup> De la Fuente, *Historia*...

<sup>37</sup> Scot, *Outline*, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Gran Consistorio de Veracruz, [Carta a Melchor Álvarez], 17 de febrero de 1822, Biblioteca Manuel Orozco y Berra.

named commander general of the province of Yucatán, and found himself en route to his new destination when he received the letter. Through it, the Grand Consistory granted him power to visit as inspector of the lodges under its jurisdiction, which were located on the way to Mérida. Thanks to this affirmation we know that by 1822 there were Scottish lodges working between Veracruz and Mérida, though unfortunately we do not know how many, which ones, or from when.

In the letter we can also read:

In the Capital of said Peninsula [de Yucatán] and in the city of Campeche, there are two established lodges of the ancient York rite dependent on the Grand M.: [Masonic?] Lodge of Louisiana so that you may carry this particular charge of requesting them to join this S.: G.: Consistory and so that they recognize the ancient and accepted Scottish masonry as the only supreme authority constituted on this Continent<sup>39</sup>.

This paragraph raises questions with respect to the fate of the lodges that we are analyzing. It indicates that by 1822 only two were left, which is consistent with the *Historical Table of Lodges* of the Grand Lodge of Louisiana, according to which the *Los Amigos Reunidos* lodge of Veracruz was extinguished in 1818.

Per the letter, the *Reunión de la Virtud* and *Aurora de Yucatán* lodges would keep functioning. But in the *Historical Table of Lodges* it is settled that the Grand Lodge of Louisiana withdrew the charter of the *Reunión de la Virtud* on August 11, 1821<sup>40</sup>. What, then, was the lodge in Campeche to which the letter referred? If it pertained to a new lodge established with authorization granted in 1817, it would have had to be inscribed in the Grand Lodge, but there is no reference to it in the records<sup>41</sup>. One hypothesis is that upon compiling the information in the lodge catalogue, someone mistook the date, and the registry was withdrawn in 1822 after the *Reunión de la Virtud* would have accepted joining the Grand Consistory of Veracruz. Such a hypothesis could be supported with information supplied by Aznar Barbachano y Carbó, according to whom in 1822 there existed a lodge in Campeche named *La Unión de la Virtud*, which might indicate that it modified its name upon changing rites<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Gran Consistorio, [Carta...]

<sup>40</sup> Gran Logia de Louisiana, "Historical..."

<sup>41</sup> The constitution of the Grand Lodge of Louisiana, formulated in 1819, prohibited masons from creating new lodges without first obtaining authorization from the Grand Lodge. Nevertheless, there remains the possibility that some of these new lodges could have been founded in Campeche before getting news of this prohibition, and that they never would have obtained their regularization from the Louisiana G.L. Such information could concord with the statement of Aznar y Carbó that in 1822 there were three lodges in Campeche, though it's also possible that two of these lodges would have been formed under the auspices of the Scottish Grand Consistory and only one would have been under the jurisdiction of Louisiana, like the letter indicates. Tomás Aznar Barbachano y Juan Carbó, *Memoria sobre la conveniencia, utilidad y necesidad de erigir constitucionalmente en estado de la Confederación Mexicana el antiguo distrito de Campeche, constituido de hecho en estado libre y soberano desde mayo de 1848, por virtud de los convenios de división territorial que celebró con el estado de Yucatán, de que era parte* (México: Imprenta de Ignacio Cumplido, 1861), 24-25.

<sup>42</sup> Aznar, *Memoria*, 24-25.

This possibility is reinforced a little more when we analyze what happened to *Aurora de Yucatán* lodge. Per a letter written in 1823, we know that in that year an Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite lodge, *Aurora Yucateca* No. 5, regularly constituted under the auspices of S.: G.: Consistory of Veracruz, was working in Merida<sup>43</sup>. Melchor Campos García has indicated, and I concur, that it is very probable it pertains to the same previously York Rite lodge, which accepted the invitation of Melchor Álvarez to join the Grand Consistory of Veracruz and adopt the Scottish Rite<sup>44</sup>. The slight change in name resembles that of the Reunión/Unión de la Virtud.

As we can see, these first York Rite lodges lasted little time, since they soon disintegrated or diluted into Scottish Masonry. And though there is no direct relationship between these first lodges and the Yorkino organization established in 1825, it does appear possible that some of its founders “saw the Masonic light” in the lodges dependent on Louisiana after having been incorporated into the Scottish Rite and later having decided to reinstall the York Rite in Mexico, for political more than Masonic ends. One of them could have been Lorenzo de Zavala, who practically all historiography indicates as one of the members of these primitive coastal lodges.

The institutional Masonic reasons that the Grand Consistory of Veracruz might have had to draw it to the York Rite lodges are not in the scope of this work and have been addressed by other authors, hence I will not get into them<sup>45</sup>. What I must state is that the lodges dependent on Louisiana were not the only ones that joined the Scottish body in Veracruz. In Yucatán there existed another grand consistory, established under the auspices of the Grand Consistory of Havana<sup>46</sup>. I do not know when this Scottish Yucatecan body was formed, but given its dependence on the Grand Consistory of Havana, it should not have been before 1818, the year in which it was established. Neither have I located documents to establish how this Cuban obedience influenced the formation of the Grand Consistory of Yucatán, but it’s very possible that this Scottish Masonry followed the same maritime-commercial routes as the York Rite of Louisiana.

What is important to point out here is that in 1822 the Grand Consistory of Yucatán decided to separate from that of Havana to join that of Veracruz. As such, the two superior Scottish Rite bodies active in the Gulf of Mexico zone in 1822 remained united in only one body, which went on to absorb the incipient York Rite Masonry. The Grand Consistory of Veracruz saw its efforts to become the supreme Masonic authority of the area, and perhaps of the country, crowned. With this, an important Scottish Masonic force was constituted, which, as we shall see in the next section, soon began to interfere in matters of political order<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Logia Aurora Yucateca, [Carta a Melchor Álvarez], 1er día del 1er mes m.: a.: d.: l.: v.: l.: 5823 (1 de marzo de 1823). Biblioteca Manuel Orozco y Berra.

<sup>44</sup> Melchor Campos García, *Sociabilidades políticas en Yucatán. Un estudio sobre los espacios públicos, 1780-1834* (Mérida: Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán/Conacyt, 2003), 90.

<sup>45</sup> Ver Martínez Moreno, “El establecimiento de las masonerías en México en el siglo XIX”.

<sup>46</sup> “Discurso masónico pronunciado al abatimiento de columnas del gran consistorio de Yucatán al separarse del de la Havana [sic] y reunirse al gran consejo [sic] de Veracruz”, en *La inquisición se pone o la religión se acaba*, núm. 2, México, Oficina de Don José María Ramos Palomera, 1822.

<sup>47</sup> Beginning in 1826 the yorkino publicists accused Veracruz of being a bulwark of Scottish Masonry, and from what has been said thus far, they did not appear to be mistaken.

## Masonry and politics

A traditional account of the historiography is that, with the consummation of independence, organized Masonry in Mexico was opposed to the coronation of Iturbide as emperor because it preferred a constitutional monarchy with a Bourbon on the throne. According to this history, Scottish Masonry, which by this time was dominant in the country, supported and even formulated the Plan of Casa Mata to dethrone Iturbide, with the intention of reviving the Treaty of Córdoba. These plans slipped from their hands, and because of the movement that Antonio López de Santa Anna started and the autonomist desires of the provinces, a federal republic was established instead of a Bourbon monarchy<sup>48</sup>.

Though I do not have material to corroborate the totality of this account, there does exist evidence that some Masonic groups were politically active in this period, and one of these is precisely the ancient York lodge, now Scottish, *Aurora Yucateca*.

When the imperial government designated Melchor Álvarez as Commander General of Yucatán, his arrival awakened suspicion and mistrust between local politicians, who perceived him as a functionary imposed from the center, unfamiliar with local problems and who would be following the central government orders of submitting the regional interests. Given the relation of Álvarez with Iturbide, after the coronation and his conflicts with the congress, which devolved in its dissolution, the situation worsened. Agustín I was beginning to be seen as a tyrant, and the despotism that he appeared to be showing signs of was undermining his government's initial relative consensus.

The distrust that some sectors of the political classes of Campeche and Yucatán felt toward Álvarez increased, since they believed he would support the emperor's decisions and force the peninsula to obey them. The *Aurora Yucateca* members clearly expressed this mistrust:

Since you came to this city, it was the beginning in which, anguished doubts and founded suspicions being spread about, each and every one of the inhabitants of this distinguished province feared becoming victims sacrificed to the fierce despotism, believing you were able to support the whims of the liberator of the north, with complete quashing of civil liberty, of the State's fundamental laws, and what is more, of our corporations [illegible] and our national congress<sup>49</sup>.

Yet Álvarez did not support Iturbide's methods. To the contrary, he ordered the meeting of a military junta in Becal, which adhered itself to the Plan of Casa Mata. And it is here that we find the first record of political activity supported by a Masonic body. The *Aurora Yucateca* lodge sent a letter to Álvarez in which it claimed that the mistrust toward him had ended, thanks to the conduct he had shown in the Becal junta in favor of civil peace,

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<sup>48</sup> One of the authors sustaining this version was Lucas Alamán.

<sup>49</sup> Logia Aurora Yucateca, [Carta...]

liberty, and national independence. And it offered “the mallet, the pen and the sword in defense of his liberties and his person<sup>50</sup>.”

This was, as I mentioned, an evident political action undertaken by members of the lodge. Interestingly, it is worth noting that they did it not as citizens, but rather as Masons, and they also offered Álvarez the lodge’s support as a body. That is, they used the Masonic structure to act politically in order to oppose what they considered the tyranny of Iturbide and erect themselves as defenders of public peace and national independence. In this sense, although it is not possible to affirm that all Scottish Masonry was involved in the movements against the empire and in favor of the Plan of Casa Mata, I can indeed say that at least part of Scottish Masonry, as such, intervened in his downfall in Yucatán.

From then on events quickly unfolded. After Iturbide’s fall, a republican regime was established in Mexico. According to the narration of Rafael Dávila, in this moment Scottish Masonry deployed all its organizational apparatus to try to revive the Treaty of Córdoba and impede the consolidation of the recently founded republic. He claims that the superior rite bodies merged into a single one at the end of 1824 and organized “an arrangement and emancipation of Masonry in order to prevent [the nation’s] ruin.” They convoked the Masonic authorities, determined how they would elect their representatives, the character these should have, the extraordinary Masonic meetings that would precede its nomination and the power that should be granted to electors. Dávila is given to understanding that the Scottish Masons were manipulating the composition and orientation of the new national congress, working in obscurity “without the powers of the people, of whose fortune they disposed from inside their caves<sup>51</sup>.”

Dávila’s account is part of the anti-Scottish narrative that began from 1823, and as such its contents should be analyzed with caution. I have not been able to locate other documents, which could enable me to confirm this fusion between the two superior bodies of the Scottish Rite in 1824, but it remains an attractive possibility to consider. As I mentioned previously, there are indications that in those same years there were lodges or another type of Scottish Masonic body in the central area of the country and Mexico City in addition to the grand consistories of Veracruz and Yucatán. If around 1824 all of these bodies decided, with an eye on politics, to unite to form one single Scottish organization in the country; if as we saw, an important part of its members were Spanish; and if we believe Alamán’s version that many of them were inclined toward a constitutional monarchy<sup>52</sup>—all of this would help us understand why some members of the rite, such as the very José María Chavero or José María Tornel<sup>53</sup>, were worried about the strength that it was acquiring and decided to abandon it in

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<sup>50</sup> Logia Aurora Yucateca, [Carta...]

<sup>51</sup> Dávila, *Taller de coherencia*, 11-12

<sup>52</sup> Lucas Alamán, *Historia de Méjico desde los primeros movimientos que prepararon su independencia en el año de 1808 hasta la época presente* (México, Libros del Bachiller Sansón Carrasco, 1986), Tomo V, 89.

<sup>53</sup> Both Chavero and Tornel recognized having belonged to the Scottish Masonry and being worried about the political tendency that it manifested and its possible actions to obstruct the government. Tornel claims that he also didn’t support the idea of establishing a New York rite organization. Chavero, “Comunicado...”. José María Tornel, *Breve reseña histórica de los acontecimientos más notables de la nación mexicana, desde el año de 1821 hasta nuestros días* (México: Imprenta de Cumplido, 1852), 46.

order to create their own Masonic group, which a little later became known as the Yorkino party<sup>54</sup>.

But even if this was not the case, it is clear that by 1823 the Grand Consistory of Veracruz had succeeded in absorbing groups from other jurisdictions and had constituted itself into the principal Masonic force of the country. The activity that the *Aurora Yucateca* lodge displayed—and probably other lodges whose actions for which we still do not find records—shows that this Masonry already also began to be considered a political force whose secret character, organizational structure, and hierarchical order provided a useful platform to coordinate actions and wills at a broader level than the local. Perhaps the primitive objective of creating social, professional, and economic networks continued to be present, if already subordinated to political interests, as the dispute between the Yorkinos and the Scottish (*escoceses*) show from 1825 to 1830.

### **Final considerations**

In what is today the Mexican territory, Masonry's origins are not unique. Beyond the Masonic works which might have existed in New Spain in the eighteenth century, organized Masonry appears to have been established between 1816 and 1822, years during which diverse lodges and superior bodies were founded alongside one another, practiced the York and Scottish Rites, and obtained their dispensations from distinct North American, French, and Cuban authorities.

Though it is probable that some bodies also existed in Mexico City and surrounding provinces, the nucleus of Masonic activity in the period was the coastal region of the Gulf of Mexico. We can thus observe a pattern of Masonic diffusion similar to the one described by Maurice Agulhon for the Provenza, where secret societies were established first in the port zones and from there radiated to the center<sup>55</sup>. And we can appreciate that one of the principal means of Masonic diffusion in the area was the navy, whether military or commercial.

The earliest nineteenth-century Masonry was not necessarily born with political objectives. In the hopes of locating documents which might permit me to make a broader sample of its social composition, I dare to maintain that Mexican Masonry was established with the same aims as North American Masonry of the time: to create centers of social conviviality and human support, forge networks of professional and economic loyalty broader than local ones, and provide ties of indispensable trust in commercial activity.

The political orientation that Mexican Masonry acquired a little later was a reaction to the conjunction of independence, the empire, and the republic. While Mexican Masonry expanded, it succeeded in concentrating itself around a superior resident body in Mexico—the Grand Consistory of Veracruz—and no longer abroad (Paris, Louisiana, Cuba). With this, Masonry showed it had a perfect structure for political organization. This characteristic did

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<sup>54</sup> For the establishment of new York Rite obediences beginning in 1825 see Vázquez Semadeni, “Las obediencias masónicas del rito de York como centros de acción política, México, 1825-1830”, in: *Liminar. Estudios Sociales y Humanísticos* VII, no. 2 (2009): 41-55.

<sup>55</sup> Maurice Agulhon, *Pénitents et Francs-Maçone de la ancienne Provence* (Paris: Fayard, 1968).

not go unnoticed by its members, and soon they used it to create centers of political action indispensable to the system and which proved to be necessary for the new republican order.

In addition to presenting these considerations and raising numerous questions which I hope to answer as I advance my research, this paper had another objective: to show the importance of continuing to look for primary sources in order to study the history of Mexican Masonry.

The traditional accounts of the earliest nineteenth-century Masonry contain both provable and improvable historical facts. Locating Masonic documents enables us to distinguish between reliable information and constructed narratives intended to legitimize or delegitimize the fraternity. It is not my intention to propose a return to historiography wherein history can only be produced with documents, or which understands only provable events as historical processes. My goal is to make a separation between a) the history of Masonry as an institution—that is to say, from its origin, development, membership, structure, affiliations, and transformations, and b) the analysis of narratives constructed about Masonry with other ends: asking who constructed them, when, on what bases and for which objectives, their reception and consequences. I don't believe that any one of these goals is better or more important than the other. In fact, I have devoted a good part of my work to the second, with results that I believe are useful for the study of nineteenth-century Mexican political culture<sup>56</sup>. But I do indeed maintain that they should be understood as separate aspects, and that in studies of Masonic institutional history we should not employ mythical narratives as reliable sources.

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<sup>56</sup> Vázquez Semadeni, *La formación de una cultura política republicana. El debate público sobre la masonería, México, 1821-1830* (México: IHH-UNAM/Colmich, 2010).

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