

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DANISH FREEMASONRY

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(Translated by Bro. Hugo Heinberg)

INTRODUCTION

Anyone 'fond of having fables making his ears itch' will be glad to learn that in the library of the National Grand Lodge of Denmark is preserved an old manuscript from the year 1800 with the title *Autentische Geschichte des Freimaurer-Ordens* (Authentic History of the Freemasons). In this it is alleged that one or more lodges existed in Denmark as early as in 1612. It is also claimed that an English captain by the name of John Philips constituted a masonic lodge in 1726.

The former statement is never likely to be confirmed, though there is a remote chance that the latter is true. As a matter of fact, before the foundation of the first lodge in Denmark (1743), Danish citizens were initiated in lodges abroad before returning to their native country and this may have enabled the aforesaid John Philips to gather sufficient brethren to found a lodge. It was the same John Philips who was appointed Provincial Grand Master of Russia in 1731.

STARTING AT THE WRONG END

There is a tradition that a lodge was established in about 1726, though conditions were very unfavourable for the Craft at that time. However, in the year 1741 an 'Anti-masonic Society' was founded in Copenhagen, apparently on a German model, the laws of which were confirmed by King Christian VI in person, and at the same time the King himself and his German-born Queen Sophie Magdalene joined the society.

The King undoubtedly possessed many good qualities but was somewhat hampered by his pious views which were shared by his wife. Nevertheless religious motives do not seem to have played any part in the affair, nor was this the case with the Papal Bull of 1738 against Freemasonry. It goes without saying that this action of the Catholic Church could be of no importance whatsoever to a Protestant king. The laws of the 'Society' clearly stated its intentions as follows:

No other order has attracted so great an attention as that of the freemasons, but a lot of people have considered it dangerous to join this order, particularly because its members decline to reveal its secrets to the highest authorities, and moreover because without any right whatsoever the female sex is excluded from Freemasonry.

In addition to the fact that the royal couple attached so great an importance to the grandeur of royal power, it is quite obvious that they had taken an aversion to Freemasonry. It is also evident that, as a result, Freemasonry had to operate under difficult conditions on account of this negative attitude of the court.

Further it must be taken into consideration that the aims of the 'Society' were idealistic, based on the well-known principles of Freemasonry: to practise virtue and good works, especially by aiding the poor and needy. Members were under an obligation to avoid any strife and unkindness and to maintain silence about the affairs of the order.

If it was suspected that strangers were present at the meetings various forms of warning signals were agreed on, for example 'It smokes' or 'It is dark'. There were also different signs, tokens and words. Persons speaking contemptuously of God and religion or practising contemptible ways of behaviour were excluded from membership, but otherwise: 'Gentlemen over 20 years of age and ladies over 16 years were admitted'. It is a fact that this 'Society' was in existence as late as 1779.

THE RIGHT BEGINNING

King Christian VI passed away in 1746 and it is quite surprising that, in spite of the 'Society', two masonic lodges were founded in his lifetime. The first of these was on 11 November 1743,

a fact that is fully substantiated by two minute books still existing. This lodge was called St. Martin and from its oldest minute book, written in German (at that time the official court language in Copenhagen), I quote the following:

Today on the 11th of November in the year 1743 at six o'clock p.m. five masters of the freemasons' venerable Company were assembled in order to receive into this brotherhood various persons who had applied for membership. Having thus been initiated they desired to form a lodge of their own. The following common laws and specific rules were laid down . . .

This preamble, followed by sixteen sections mainly on the same lines, was well known to the brethren from lodges in Germany where they had seen the light: three from *Absalom* in Hamburg, one from *zu den drei Weltkugeln* (The Three Globes) in Berlin, whereas the mother-lodge of the fifth member is unknown.

It seems that the decrees were written *ad hoc* because the lodge was an occasional or at least a temporary one. The brethren were aware that, owing to lack of time, the foundation had not been confirmed by 'The High Worthy Grand Master'. It is impossible to say whether it was the Grand Master in London or the one in Berlin that was referred to. This took place in 1743 and it is certified that up to this year some twenty Danes had entered lodges abroad. Several of these ought to be mentioned by name but consideration of space forbids it. Only one of them shall be singled out here - Bro. Georg Nielsen. In 1743 he became a Bachelor of Divinity (*candidatus theologiae*) and the following year he was appointed teacher of the pages at the royal court, paradoxically in view of the fact that the King personally dissociated himself from Freemasonry. It stands to reason that Georg Nielsen, conforming to the practice of those days, kept his membership of the lodge strictly secret. Moreover he was a blameless character with a deep moral sense of loyalty and honesty coupled with extensive learning in many fields. Throughout half a century he performed his duties in an exemplary manner, not only in Freemasonry but also at court. After the death of Christian VI the attitude towards Freemasonry changed in a very positive way.

As far as St. Martin's Lodge was concerned practically nothing was done in order to secure for it a lawful Warrant of Constitution. Georg Nielsen was dissatisfied with this situation and at last he lost patience and resigned together with two brethren from St. Martin's. In 1744 they founded another lodge called *Zorobabel*.

On 4 May 1745 twenty brethren forwarded a request to London for a Warrant of Constitution. It is known to have been accepted and duly signed by the Grand Master, James, Lord Cranstoun, but for unknown reasons it did not reach Copenhagen until three years later, in 1748.

Also, St. Martin's Lodge at last obtained its Warrant, dated 9 October 1749 and issued by William, 5th Lord Byron. At the same time Count Danneskiold-Laurvig was nominated as the first Provincial Grand Master of Denmark and Norway, in those days a united kingdom.

In the capital of Norway, Christiania, Lodge *St. Olav til den hvite Leopard* (St. Olav of the White Leopard) was established (AQC 13, pp. 35-6).

In Denmark *Zorobabel*, later merged with its sister lodge *Frederik til det kronede Haab* (Frederick of the Crowned Hope), as the oldest existing lodge in Scandinavia, has recently celebrated its 233rd anniversary, and the old Warrant has become a valuable possession of the lodge.

But otherwise Freemasonry in Denmark was more characterized by initiative than by stability. For a number of years new lodges came and went. Efforts were made to obtain rituals and regulations from England but in vain, although various consultations are known to have taken place. Approaches to Scottish lodges were also made on the basis of German Warrants and even a ladies' lodge seems to have been in operation.

STRICT OBSERVANCE RITE

In about the middle of the eighteenth century the 'Inner Order' or *Observantia Stricta* was advancing through Germany under the leadership of Baron von Hund. Unfortunately this phenomenon found much support among Danish masons in the period 1765-82. After this interlude, on the proposal of Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick, Danish lodges accepted the rite of *Les Chevaliers Bienfaisants de la Cité Sainte*, the so-called 'Rectified Rite'.

When Ferdinand passed away in 1792, Charles, Count of Hesse-Cassel (1744-1836) was naturalized as a Prince of Denmark and was later appointed a Field Marshal and the Grand

Master of the Masonic Order. This versatile personality had in 1778 adopted the title of *Protector et Superior Ordinis in Daniae*.

During his leadership, work continued in a quiet way. Of the many lodges founded in this period only one remains, namely *Maria til de tre Hjerter* (Mary of the Three Hearts), founded in 1791.

It was due to Prince Charles's efforts that in 1792 a royal ordinance secured for the Order official recognition. His personal correspondence was very extensive and he collected much masonic material which later became the nucleus of the rich and valuable archives at the National Grand Lodge of Denmark's headquarters in Copenhagen. It was also during his leadership that the Order came to acquire its first building, Freemasons' Hall, the *Stamhus*, in 1807.

When Charles of Hesse died in 1836, his successor according to royal ordinance was Crown Prince Christian (later King Christian VIII), after whose death in 1848 King Frederick VII succeeded as Grand Master.

This somewhat primitive and in many respects rather mundane sovereign won world-wide fame by signing the first parliamentary Constitution of the Kingdom of Denmark in 1849, whereby the absolute monarchy, established in 1660, was definitely abolished. Moreover, among Danish freemasons his memory has retained a special sort of glory. Both as King and as Grand Master he proved his ability to communicate and associate with brethren in a personal and straightforward manner. When making a speech (always unprepared) there was not the slightest doubt but that he had familiarized himself with all the details of Freemasonry.

THE SCANDINAVIAN RITE

It was during King Frederick VII's reign that Danish lodges decided to go over to the Swedish system, developed in Sweden a hundred years earlier and later extended to Northern Germany, Iceland, Norway and Denmark and for that reason usually referred to as the Scandinavian Rite. The change-over in Denmark took place on 6 January 1855 and was carried through under the King's auspices and with his personal co-operation.

The prime motivator was Knud Gad, a successful business man and shipping agent who, in 1851, had founded Lodge *Kosmos* in Elsinore just across the narrow waters of the Øresund separating Denmark from Sweden and the town of Helsingborg. For 85 years Danish lodges had made good progress under the Rectified Rite, to the satisfaction of everybody, until Gad and his brethren became acquainted with the Scandinavian Rite. It was only a short trip across the Sound and a great number of the *Kosmos* brethren took the opportunity of visiting sister lodges in Helsingborg and other Swedish towns to participate in their working. They became enthusiastic about a system which offered advancement to higher degrees which were not available in Danish lodges at the time.

Only five months after the foundation of *Kosmos* Lodge, an approach was made to the so-called 'Old Scottish Freemasonic Directorate' to suggest the introduction of the Scandinavian Rite in their own lodge. The application was granted and on 24 June 1853 the new rite was officially introduced in the presence of the King himself.

As with all regular Freemasonry, the Scandinavian Rite had its origin in England and, for the sake of completeness, it should be stressed that all the old landmarks are duly preserved. Yet it was the French version with which the Swedes became acquainted.

Two great names in this connection are Count Wrede Sparre and Baron Carl Frederick Schäffer, initiated in Paris in 1731 and 1737 respectively. After his return to Stockholm the former founded the first masonic lodge in Sweden.

Schäffer was in all respects extremely active but it is quite remarkable that he brought home to Sweden the French version of the first Old Charge, the beginning of which runs as follows:

In bygone centuries freemasons were obliged to confess to the Catholic Church, but for many years their thinking has not been investigated especially from that point of view, but it is provided that in any circumstances they must be Christians . . .*

* Dans les siècles passés les Francs-Maçons étoient obligés de professer la Religion Catholique, mais depuis quelque temps on n'examine pas sur cela leurs sentiments particuliers, pourvu toutefois qu'ils sont Chrétiens, fidèles à leur promesse et gens d'honneur et de probité, de quelque manière qu'ils puissent être distingués d'ailleurs.

This assumption has been maintained and may be considered to be the corner-stone of the Scandinavian Rite. Most likely it was this particular circumstance which, from a Danish point of view, was the most attractive and it manifested itself when the motto for St. John's Lodge came to be chosen. It was St. John's Gospel 10.16 and for the St. Andrew's Lodge, St. John's Gospel 16.9. When the Swedish Rite was first used in a Danish lodge, Gad spoke on its nature and form as well as on the worship of the Almighty for the improvement of mankind and on the relationship to its primary source, the Threefold Great Architect of the Universe. This wording in Gad's speech seems to indicate that Danish lodges had given up the Rectified Rite because they were left with the feeling of an incurable deficiency.

The introduction of the Scandinavian Rite was indeed good news for the mentally-starved brethren. The foundation was, as already mentioned, provided in 1852 when King Frederick VII was personally initiated into the higher grades in a special ceremony at Fredericksborg Castle.

Epiphany 1855 was the date of the foundation of Danish masonry in its present state.

King Frederick VII died in 1863 and was succeeded by King Christian IX who was not a freemason, but who consented to become Protector of the National Grand Lodge. Until his death Cosmus Bræstrup, the Prefect of Copenhagen, was the Grand Master. He was followed by Crown Prince Frederick (*later* King Frederick VIII) who ruled the Order for 41 years. His two sons succeeded him, first Crown Prince Christian (*later* King Christian X) from 1912 to 1947, thereafter Prince Harald. After the latter's death in 1949 his office was transferred to a well-known surgeon, Frode Rydgaard, who retired in 1973 and died two years later, highly respected by all freemasons and a most distinguished honorary member of the Order.

At present the Grand Master of the National Grand Lodge of Denmark is Erik Kay-Hansen, managing director and graduate in law.

A RETROSPECT OF THE LAST 125 YEARS

Many things have happened since the National Grand Lodge of Denmark was inaugurated in 1855, almost 125 years ago.

In 1868 the Order erected its second Freemasons' Hall which, in 1927, had to be replaced by a still larger building covering 13,000 square metres. The Order is also the proprietor of two large and beautiful buildings in Odense and Aarhus as well as smaller lodge buildings in most provincial towns in Denmark.

By and large, Freemasonry in Denmark has undergone a sound and quiet development. From time to time it has, however, been subject to banal persecutions in situations where people have been motivated by prejudice against matters of which they had not the slightest knowledge whatsoever. In this respect the situation has been the same as in many other countries.

One of the more serious attacks took place towards the end of the 19th century. The aggressor was Fredrik Nielsen, a Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Copenhagen. His reputation and position made it easy for him to gain attention and his critical attitude was indeed not to be underrated, although any freemason could perceive with half an eye that in this controversy he had obviously jumped to the wrong conclusions. His principal sources lay in the older German literature that dealt with matters of an obsolete nature and was quite irrelevant to modern Freemasonry.

Fredrik Nielsen was not an easy antagonist. He was the editor of a Christian periodical in which, in 1879, he published a series of critical articles, inspired by a clerical attack on the Scandinavian Rite. He concluded that 'the darkness brooding over Freemasonry will deter any Christian who has not forgotten the words of our Lord and the Apostles'. However his first assault did not rouse much attention, being limited mostly to the narrow range of the readers of the periodical in question.

Professor Nielsen did not give up easily. He continued his studies and in 1882 he was ready again for action. The occasion arose when it appeared that a Danish missionary in Santalistan, Lars Skrefsrud, was a freemason, a fact much disapproved of by his pious supporters. In a private letter to the leader of his circle he argued that the basis of Freemasonry was our Christian faith, with Jesus Christ as the centre.

A fragment of this letter was quoted in a Norwegian newspaper and this made Professor Nielsen maintain that this statement by Skrefsrud was contrary to the truth. A few weeks later he published a pamphlet, *Masonry in Scandinavia*. It attracted much attention and was twice reprinted and was later also translated into German. This German edition fortunately gave G. A. Schiffmann (an ardent freemason and Archdeacon of Stettin) the opportunity of writing

an open letter to Professor Nielsen. In it the Christian basis of Freemasonry and its historical and factual background were cleverly analysed.

Here the controversy might have come to an end if it had not been for an able and zealous man of letters, a member of the Order, who continued the discussion with Professor Nielsen in a most unfortunate and clumsy manner. His contribution was published under the pseudonym 'An Old Mason' and in fact he thereby furnished his opponent with new ammunition, to the great despair of the Order.

Later Professor Nielsen declared as his conviction that freemasons asserted that they possessed a revelation unknown to the Church, that they maintained Anderson's deism and so-called 'historical' views, that the Scandinavian Rite was a mixture of gnosticism, mysticism and alchemy, plus here and there some sprinkling of Christianity, and finally that the said system was 'begotten in superstition and born in fraud' - and so forth.

It was most awkward, particularly because Fredrik Nielsen beyond any doubt was an honest and sincere character and wrote in good faith. In one of his five books he stated that he attacked the Order for defending people who did not take the Christian faith seriously. Nobody informed him that the ideal aim of Masonry was exactly the opposite: to disseminate and defend the Christian faith and teachings. Consequently there was in fact no real schism between Skrefsrud and himself.

The matter was never definitely settled and gradually the debate died away. It is obvious, however, that as time passed Professor Nielsen took a more liberal view of Danish Freemasonry. He ended his career as Bishop of Aarhus, where he died in 1907.

As mentioned earlier, Crown Prince Frederick had been installed as Grand Master in 1870, twelve years before the Nielsen attack. It was obvious that he was personally deeply grieved at this as it was also an attack on his own Christian faith and honour. He maintained a show of great self-control at this critical stage though he, *intra muros*, contributed much to calm and comfort the distressed brethren.

The clerical members of the Order were, quite understandably, also oppressed by the attack, not because their confidence in the Order had been shattered but because they were often met with scepticism in the outer world.

The whole dispute, which lasted for several years, did not restrict the flow of new members to the Order. The total number of brethren in 1880 was about 3,000 and in 1896 was about 3,800. The latest roll of members shows a total of 14,541 (1978), grouped in about a hundred lodges all over the country. This may not seem a high figure but it should be remembered that Denmark is a small country with only 5 million inhabitants; approximately 2 per cent of the male adult population are freemasons.

Not all masonic lodges under the National Grand Lodge adhere to the Scandinavian Rite. During the last decades collaboration has been established with a number of lodges working an English ritual (Emulation) and another lodge is working the Schröder (German) ritual, in both cases in the Danish language.

The idea behind this has been cleverly expressed as follows: 'In Denmark we have three masonic rites, but only one Masonry'. It is therefore clear that the National Grand Lodge is working openly and following a far-sighted policy. But of course it maintains the basic principle of keeping initiations and progress in the degrees secret. It is universally recognized that no one can be initiated into something that he knows in advance.

THE GERMAN OCCUPATION AND WHAT HAPPENED LATER

During the first years of the German occupation of Denmark (1940-5) no direct obstacles were put in the way of Danish freemasons but on 21 September 1943 the *Stamhus* in Copenhagen was seized by German troops and their Danish collaborators, few as they were. Freemasonry was not directly forbidden but in the circumstances most lodges chose to close down their activities and go underground. On 4 May 1945, the glorious day of liberation, the building was taken over by the resistance movement but later, on the order of the Danish authorities, it was required for the quartering of refugees from Germany. During all these vicissitudes the building had been heavily damaged but it was restored mainly by financial aid from American brethren. Now, 50 years after its Consecration, our *Stamhus* stands more beautiful than ever.

At one point during the German occupation it was feared that members of the Order would be persecuted and possibly deported to concentration camps. Actually, a large number of freemasons participated in the liberation movement and many sacrificed their health and even their lives.

In 1974 another problem arose. The Danish Broadcasting System decided to produce a television programme with the title 'The Secret Denmark', having Freemasonry as its subject. At first the Grand Lodge adopted a co-operative attitude, but when it appeared that the idea was to ridicule the Craft and not to give honest information about it, further co-operation was refused. The producer of the television programme insisted on proceeding with his plans with or without the consent of the Order, and went on to make a faked reconstruction of some of the ceremonies, based on what he had read or heard. In view of this situation the Order decided to bring a legal action against the Broadcasting Corporation in order to prohibit the programme. Actually, on the very day before it was to be televised, the injunction was granted by the court of law. This judgment was at once appealed against and taken to a higher court by the Broadcasting Corporation and the case is not yet settled (June 1977) but it is expected that, whatever the verdict, it will be appealed against either by the Broadcasting Corporation or the Order and taken to the Supreme Court. A final verdict cannot be expected for at least two years.

This case goes far beyond the trivial problem of an alleged, and therefore unimportant, presentation of Freemasonry, whether truthful or not, but it deals with the basic controversy between the right of privacy versus the freedom of expression – a clash between two basic rights in a free, democratic society.

Consequently the final outcome is awaited with the greatest attention by both masons and non-masons.

THE PRESENT-DAY SCANDINAVIAN RITE IN DENMARK

It will be obvious from what has been stated that the Scandinavian Rite is not like any other masonic system and therefore it is not possible to relate the working to initiations and to progression in other rites. Nevertheless reference to external similarities, however short and incomplete, may be of interest to readers unfamiliar with this rite.

It consists of eleven degrees, grouped in three sections:

The Lodge of St. John.....	1°-3°
The Lodge of St. Andrew.....	4°-6°
The Chapter.....	7°-10° plus the Order of the Red Cross

The degrees are:

- 1° Apprentice of St. John
- 2° Fellow-Craft of St. John
- 3° Master of St. John
- 4° Apprentice of St. Andrew
- 5° Fellow-Craft of St. Andrew
- 6° Master of St. Andrew
- 7° Brother Steward
- 8° Entrusted Brother of Solomon
- 9° Entrusted Brother of St. John
- 10° Entrusted Brother of St. Andrew
- 11° Most Illuminated Brother Knight-Commander of the Red Cross

The headquarters are, as already stated, in Copenhagen where the highest office-bearers are domiciled. The administration is partly decentralized to the two Provincial Lodges at Odense and at Aarhus. Advancement to the Chapter degrees can be conferred in the Grand Chapter or in the Provincial Lodges. The highest, eleventh degree, abbreviated 'R&K', can be conferred only in Copenhagen..

Seven lodges of St. Andrew confer the 4th to the 6th degrees. By mutual agreement, members of English Royal Arch Chapters are entitled to participate in the working of the 6th degree (Master of St. Andrew).

The number of working lodges of St. John is at present 50; the prefix 'working' indicates that initiation, passing and raising can be effected in these lodges. All freemasons, whatever their degree, must belong to a mother lodge of St. John. The number of members in each of these lodges varies from 50 to 900.

Apart from the working lodges there are several smaller lodges of instruction where initiations or promotions cannot be made. These lodges open and close in exactly the same

way as working lodges but their main function is to lecture on the purposes, means and activities of Freemasonry. It is considered important to educate members in theoretical and practical aspects of masonic philosophy and history.

The Order is governed by the Grand Master and by a Supreme Council consisting of thirteen members as follows:

Grand Master

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Master of Grand Chapter
Deputy Master of Grand Chapter
Grand Chancellor
Grand Director of Information
Grand Director of Benevolence
Grand Inspector
Grand Director of Finances
Grand Director of Lodge Administration
Deputy Grand Director of Lodge Administration
Grand Prelate
Deputy Grand Prelate
Two Provincial Masters

The latest innovation in the administration is the establishment of the Directorate of Information, which is responsible for the following important activities:

Masonic laws and rituals
Publications and masonic research
Masonic communication
Masonic archives and library
Masonic museum
Masonic magazine (*Frimurer Meddelelser*)
Matricula of the Order

This new venture will be copied by the other orders working the Scandinavian Rite.

THE MASONIC MUSEUM OF COPENHAGEN

A special item of interest to all students of Freemasonry is the Masonic Museum of Copenhagen, among professionals claimed as one of the finest of its kind, maybe second only to the unique museum in Great Queen Street, London.

The idea was launched as early as in 1853 but did not reach fruition until 1905. The first curator was the internationally distinguished numismatist, Johannes Rasmussen, whose private collection was donated to the museum before his death in 1940.

Throughout the years the museum has been enriched with many valuable gifts and rare pieces; today it comprises more than 11,000 items and it has recently been opened to the public.

For many reasons Copenhagen is worth a visit and freemasons are always welcome, of whatever degree or rite, to see the Masonic Museum and to participate in lodge meetings up to the 6th degree (if they are Royal Arch masons). Between October and April there are lodge meetings every day of the week except on Sunday. Intending visitors should call at the following address:

Den Danske Frimurerorden
23, Blegdamsvej
DK-2100 Copenhagen

With due reverence to our past we express our sincere hopes that our Scandinavian Rite will continue to prosper, warming and enriching the hearts of those persons who – according to James Anderson – ‘otherwise must have remain’d at a perpetual Distance’.