

Brother Jean-Claude Vilespy and Austria No. 2044

MSCNY Article No. 83

Brother Jean-Claude Vilespy wrote and provided another interpretation of Austria No. 2044 featured in the June 2016 Masonic Philatelist. He provided the following:

The painting used for the stamp is displayed in the Wien Museum, Austria, and it was the object of an in-depth and erudite study by H. C Robbins Landon in his book: *Mozart and the Masons*.

The stamp was created for the 250th anniversary of the birth of Mozart and depicted the Lodge Zur Gekronten Hoffnung (Crowned Hope) in Vienna; the lodge of Mozart and his father. The painting is unsigned; confirmed to me by the museum.

After comparative studies of the Members Lists of the Lodge, H.C. Robbins Landon, places the painting creation date between January 1 and February 15, 1790.

The painting “reveals” in the profane world a Masonic “reception.” Certainly every freemason is entitled to his own interpretation, but I would like to present it in the context of 1790.

The 18th century in Europe, quite particularly in France, Germany and Austria, it was a period of exceptional creativity. In the profane world regarding Freemasonry it was known as the “Age of the Enlightenment” (Siècle des Lumières).

France played a role of undisputed leadership in the creation of the Masonic “Higher Degrees” and “Rites,” which we know today as “Perfection Degrees” before 1765, “Rite Ecossais Rectifié” in 1778, and “Rite Français” in 1786, which became the basis of the “Rite Ecossais” or “Ancient Accepted” (Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite (AASR); coming to Europe from Louisiana, USA, in 1804.

For this period, Freemasonry evolved under the influence of the Rosicrucians and the Alchemists. We find all these influences in the rites and in particular here in this painting.

From a general point of view, we can think that the picture describes several specific “points” of the “reception” in a Lodge as follows:

1. The primary plan describes the reception recognized thanks to the “blindfold” (central figure). The artist depicts the “transmission of the touch” (handshake); more exactly the check by the Supervisors that the applicant understood well the touch. We see five important “Officers” in the scene: 1st, 2nd Supervisors, Master of Ceremonies (“Frère Terrible”—shown in French in the Lodge documents found by Robbins) and the new candidate. At this point of the ceremony, the candidate wears his personal clothes (no longer in the form he was when he first entered the Lodge). He also holds his hat in his hand.

2. In the East part of the Lodge, we can see the Master of the Lodge holding a mallet in his right hand with two brothers to his left; one of whom appears to be reading text, and the other holding candles to provide light. We might conclude that what is being read (or has been read) is the “Obligation” and consequently the commitment of the new initiated.



3. The brethren in attendance seem to be at ease and in discussion with each other. This indicates that the lodge has just gone to “refreshment” (a pause while waiting for the next important phase of the ceremony). It is likely the point where the candidate has been examined by both Supervisors to make sure of the correct transmission of the “Signs, Words and Touches.”

The Description of the Lodge:

1. Behind the Master there is the Sun (a traditional symbol) on the left and in the lower right a rainbow. The rainbow is a likely a recollection of the Alchemy and the Old Testament where it is one of the major signs of “the Alliance.” The Sun contains in the center a Star of David or Solomon’s Hexagramme; a very important Alchemist’s symbol, but rather rare in Freemasonry. The Sun placed on the left gives evidence of a practice of a rite of “Ancients.” The Moon (another traditionally symbol) is missing. This East wall also represents the name of the Lodge because the rainbow is a symbol of Hope and revival of life after the great flood.

2. As for candelabras, it is necessary to remember that at that time they served only to illuminate the Lodge, not the symbolic sense of “Lights.” (The 3 symbolic “Lights” of the Lodge being the Master and the 1st and the 2nd Supervisors).

3. The main lights (used to enlighten) are the 3 candles put on the table with the skull and sword. Later and by extension these 3 candles were placed in diverse places in lodge (according to the rite) in the form of candelabras. It was also customers that pillars in certain rites corresponded to the three virtues of Strength, Wisdom and Beauty, and they attributed to the “3 Lights.” Later, but always in the 18th Century, 3 Lights were placed on 3 pillars, and the set eventually symbolized the 3 Lights of the Lodge.

4. I will not comment on the Bible and the sword, but the skull needs explanation. Few rites describe it on the altar. Certainly we think of the 3rd degree, but, it seems to me, that the skull comes rather from the Reflection Room which was

introduced after 1751. It is described for the 1st time in Rose-Croix's Degrees (*nec plus ultra*) of Speculative Masonry. During every meeting (not only for the reception of candidates) every Brother was confronted with this major Masonic symbol, which places each of us in front of our future reality, and incites us to Humility.

5. In the center the Master of Ceremonies and "Frere Terrible", (in French) in the list of the Lodge, proves the French influence.

6. Brothers in the general assembly dressed in their city clothes, more or less specific of their social position. We can see in particular two

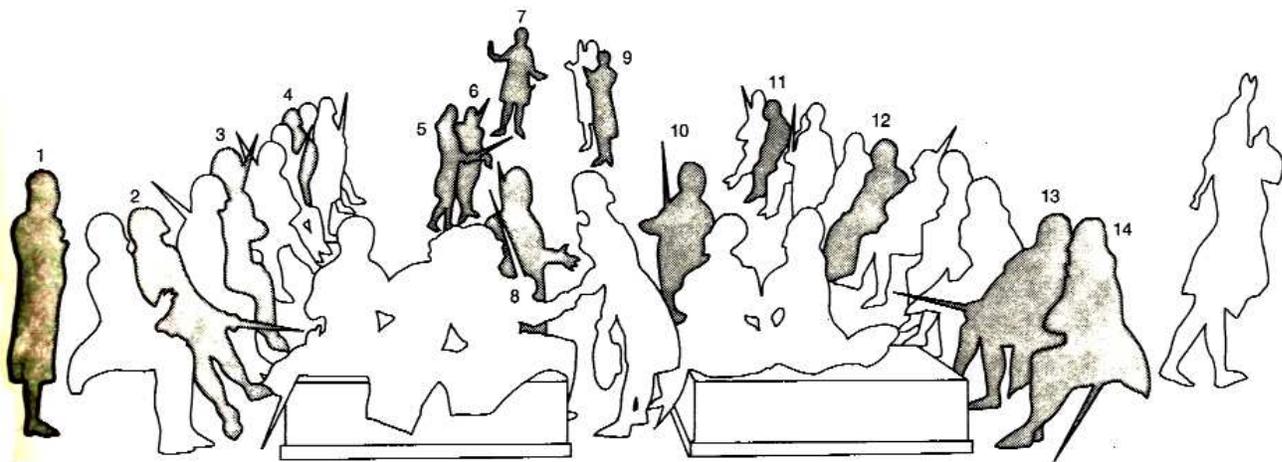
prelates (in white and in chestnut (Franciscan), on the South side. There are also soldiers.

7. All members present wear 3 symbols of equality: the Sword, the Gloves and the Hat. We also notice that they all have a Square which was (normally) the jewel of an installed master. Thus, they all seem to be masters, including the candidate, which is surprising.

Below is the painting from which the stamp was designed along with an "official" key to the individuals shown.



NOTES
 Other Masons known but unidentified in the painting are Philipp Freiherr von Vukassewicz, Lieutenant Colonel; Ludwig von Lehrbach, Private Councillor in the court, and Carlo Mechetti, editor. As to the "official" key: Number 5—we cannot see his face, he is unidentifiable; Number 8—he is not that Brother but the one who is before him in front; Number 9—Robbins never said that; the individual is Shikaneder.



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| 1 Joh. Nep. Esterházy | 6 Ferdinand Harrach | 11 P. Ignaz Faber |
| 2 Ignaz Alberti | 7 Johann Esterházy, Meister vom Stuhl | 12 Joh. Lambert von Hanotte |
| 3 Karl Ludwig Giesecke | 8 Nikolaus Esterházy | 13 Emanuel Schikaneder |
| 4 Christ. Friedr. Wappler | 9 Niering von Löwenfels | 14 W. A. Mozart |
| 5 Ludwig Lehrbach | 10 Wenzel Tob. Eppstein | |