Symbolic Dimensions of 19th Century Dutch Colonial Settlement at the Cape of Good Hope

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Abstract

During the 19th century the Dutch Reformed Church became a major agent in promoting the spread of Dutch settlement into the southern African interior. After 1841 it began to set out its villages according to a standard plan, known as the *kerkplaats*, which made use of a central *nachtmaal plein*, surrounded by residential stands. Key plots were allocated for the village church, a residence for the pastor and a Drostdy for the Resident Magistrate. The remaining stands were then auctioned off to parishioners to fund the construction of the church, and for over a century these settlements remained at the heart of Dutch, later Afrikaner, cultural, political and social life. The design of the first *kerkplaats* was probably owed to Willem Hertzog, Deputy Surveyor General of the Cape, who was also prominent in the Craft of Freemasonry, and there are strong indications that his plan was based upon an idealized reconstruction of the Temple of Solomon, also used by Freemasons in their planning of Masonic lodges. It appears likely, therefore, that throughout the 19th century the Masonic movement exerted a powerful influence in the affairs of the Dutch Reformed Church that was only broken off for political reasons in 1962. This paper examines the historical origins of Dutch colonial settlement in southern Africa during the 19th century, and posits that its roots lie in Masonic ideals commonly circulating in colonial society of that time.

Keywords: Dutch colonial villages, *kerkplaats*, *nachtmaal*, Freemasonry, architecture, town planning, religious symbolism

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Introduction

The idea that human settlement constitutes an inner core of social harmony surrounded by a natural wilderness where danger, wild animals, armed enemies and potential death lurks at every turn, is a concept that has dominated the cosmological beliefs of many human societies. Ancient Egyptian religion, for example, held that in the beginning the god *Kamatef* emerged from the primeval chaos of the *Nun* and, through his intellect, brought order to the world. This event is celebrated in the planning of their cities and in the architecture of their temples. Their ordered environment was ruled by the rhythms of life: the daily appearance of the sun, the turn of the seasons and the annual flooding of the Nile, beyond which lay chaos. Consequently, one of the tasks that Pharaoh was charged with was the maintenance of cordial relations with the relevant deities so that order may continue to prevail over chaos (Davies & Friedman 1998: 14-27).

A similar model involving the relationship between in-and-out, order-vs-chaos, was also used by indigenous South African groups to explain their world view (Frescura 1991). Traditionally their settlements were circular in plan, with a cattle byre at its centre. Within this were located their ancestral burials, their emergency grain stores and their wealth in the form of cattle. Most importantly this is also where the meetings of the men took place, where customs were upheld, where laws were enacted, and where justice was dispensed. In local cosmology this area was the domain of men and was thus deemed to be inherently *cool*. Beyond it lay a residential belt where the dwellings were located. Being under the control of the women, this area was held to be *hot*, most specifically during the menses, and had to be constantly *cooled* down by the liberal application of a mixture of clay and cow-dung to all wall and floor surfaces. Beyond lay an environment populated by wild animals, venomous creatures and uncontrolled vegetation. Thus *in* was associated with laws, tradition, ancestral custom and men, whereas *out* was associated with disorder, danger and chaos.

This uneasy relationship between the *in-and-out* of human settlement, the town and its surrounding countryside, was depicted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1319-1348), whose fresco in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena celebrates the 'Effects of Good Government and Bad Government' (Ragionieri 2009: 34-42). The town, obviously Siena, is depicted as clean and well-run, a place where traders freely go about their business and young maidens dance in

the street with garlands in their hair. The countryside beyond, on the other hand, rapidly degenerates from well-tended and harmonious farmland into a landscape dominated by brambles and weeds till ultimately it is taken over by dense forests where brigands and wild animals await the unwary traveler.

By the late Middle Ages the town had gained added status as a haven for those landed peasantry wishing to break from the hardships of feudal service, giving rise to a proverb which proclaimed that '*town air breathes free*' (Cronin, 1969). Thus, by the time Portuguese, Dutch and English traders had arrived in the East Indies, South Africa and South America, they brought with them an established culture of urban symbolism which saw the town as an outpost of civilization, good government and political freedom. These were all major factors which were to play a role in the colonial settlement of southern Africa.

Arrival of the Dutch

In 1568 the Dutch rose in revolt against their Spanish rulers, and in 1581 the Union of Utrecht proclaimed their independence from the Catholic south. Nonetheless this struggle carried on for another 67 years, until 1648 when the Spanish finally recognized the sovereignty of the new Dutch state. At issue was not only the territorial independence of the Protestant north from the Catholic south, but also the control of the lucrative North Sea markets in spices and exotic products imported from the east, which the Spanish had inherited in 1580 when, for a time, they had assumed the government of Portugal. The questions of religious belief, national identity and financial interest were therefore closely identified.

The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) arose out of the Protestant Reformation movement of the 16th Century and was formally constituted in 1571 at the Synod of Emden. Although it was never adopted as a state religion, the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK), as it was known in South Africa, was closely associated with the Dutch government, and by law all public officials had to be its *communicant* members.

The first Dutch vessels to visit the Cape were the *Mauritius*, *Hollandia*, *Duijfken* and *Amsterdam*, which dropped anchor in Table Bay on 4 August 1595. They were outward bound for the Indies, and by the time they had reached the Cape their crews had been decimated by scurvy. Before long

the Dutch had adopted the Cape as their regular port-of-call, and by 1601 fourteen Dutch fleets, or a total of 65 ships, had found their way to the Indies, having first made landfall at the Cape.

It was soon realized that this kind of individual opportunism was not sustainable, and in 1602 seventy-three trading companies joined to form the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), with an initial operating capital of 6.5 million guilders. The VOC's charter allowed it to build forts, enter into treaties, maintain an army and establish a sound form of government over its colonial holdings. It ran the empire of the Dutch East Indies for nearly two centuries, finally collapsing in 1799 under accusations of corruption and incompetence.

Thus when the VOC established its first permanent settlement at the Cape in April 1652, it brought with it a legacy of Dutch nationalism and a powerful streak of Puritan religious belief. The residents of Amsterdam moved in a class-less society where conspicuous consumption and affectations of dress were looked down upon. Their social elite had no official robes, and upon state occasions wore the same black coats as any merchant, professional, or business man. A British diplomat once remarked with surprise that the Burgomaster of Amsterdam, Gillis Valcknier, '*walks about the street just like an ordinary shopkeeper*' (Burke 1994: 78). Even affluent families led a relatively simple lifestyle, with few affording the attendance of a servant, and in 1655 a law was passed against -the holding of sumptuous wedding feasts.

Once removed from European shores, however, the Dutch were not slow in adopting a more lavish lifestyle, and although the Company attempted to implement strict sumptuary laws in its colonies, in a country whose population included both indigenous residents and imported slaves a caste system was not slow to evolve. In 1755 Rijk Tulbagh, Governor of the Cape 1751-71, set out strict orders for court protocol, social etiquette and military discipline and, as result, codified into law social differences between company officials, *free* Dutch burghers, persons of mixed race, indigenous inhabitants and slaves (Theal 1897: 99-100). A similar and even more complex system of relationships was developed in South America by both Spanish and Portuguese colonial administrators during the 17th and 18th centuries (Morner 1967: 53-62).

Given the fact that, unlike the Spanish, the Dutch had never practiced slavery, the introduction of slave-ownership in their overseas colonies must have presented their church ministers with a considerable moral enigma. A pragmatic way forward was shown in 1609 by the Dutch States General who,

in appointing the first Governor General of the growing VOC territories, ordered him:

> '*not only to continue but also to expand, as far as is possible, the East Indian trade so that the name of Christ, salvation of the heathen, [and] the honour and reputation of our nation may be spread, and also to the profit of the Company*' (Schoeman 2008:308).

Indeed, the VOC thereafter made it standard practice to take into service ordained ministers of religion and post them to the colonies '*so that the name of Christ and the service of the Company may be properly propagated*' (Schoeman 2008: 308). The first ordained DRC minister arrived at the Cape in 1665, and the first communion service, or *nachtmaal,* as it was known, was held soon after in a timber shed within the Castle. In 1666 work was begun on a more substantial fortification, and from 1677 its hall was used for religious purposes. This was located between the Oranje and Leerdam bastions, and was generally known as '*de Kat*'. The first formal Dutch church was built in the Company's gardens at a cost of £2200, and was consecrated on 6 January 1704. This then became known as the *Moeder-kerk*, the Mother Church, and all subsequent congregations in the Cape derived their charter from it.

However, the VOCs insistence that Cape Town remain the focus of all administrative, economic, social and religious activity, made the life of settlers living in the outlying districts increasingly difficult. Their dependence upon colonial staples such as sugar, guns, gunpowder and lead meant that the interests of the preacher, the trader and the company official were never far apart.

Nachtmaal

These interests conflated into *nachtmaal*, a Dutch term meaning quite literally a *'night meal'*, a reference to the last supper held by Christ and his disciples during Passover. During the 17th century the holding of a quarterly *nachtmaal* was already an established custom of the DRC in Holland and, in time, became widespread among Dutch communities living in southern Africa. Every three months the residents of a farming district would travel to the nearest regional

centre, known as a *kerkplaats*, ostensibly to worship at the church, but also to purchase staple goods, conduct business, allow teenagers to go courting, exchange news, court potential spouses, arrange marriages, hold baptisms, discuss government edicts, and debate current political ideas. Ox-drawn wagons, the main form of colonial travel, would be drawn up on the *nachtmaal plein*, a square reserved for this purpose in front of the church, where most of the social functions associated with it would also be held. Better-off families had the use of a *dorphuis*, a modest townhouse which they kept for such occasions, but most families slept in the open field in or under their wagons.

Attendance at these events was almost mandatory for the survival of the small settler community, and in order to attend, a family often had to travel by ox-drawn wagon for a week or more in either direction. Thus the establishment of many *kerkplaats* was motivated by a need to make *nachtmaal* more accessible to remote farming communities.

In 1679 Governor Simon van der Stel began to investigate the feasibility of Dutch expansion into the interior, and before long new settlement was taking place at first along the Cape south coast, and then into the more arid interior. The first was Stellenbosch in 1686, then Malmesbury in 1743, Swellendam in 1747, Graaff-Reinet in 1785 and Tulbagh in 1795. However each of these districts covered a wide area and the distances that farming families had to travel still remained long.

By the end of the 18th century the practice of a quarterly *nachtmaal* had become an integral part of Dutch colonial life, and an increasing number of communities had begun to clamour for a greater degree of autonomy in their religious affairs. Initially *nachtmaal* services could be held at the home of one of the local farmers, with the assistance of a preacher willing to travel in from one of the neighbouring centers, but as farming communities grew in permanence, so did their demands for a resident pastor of their own.

The need for a smaller, decentralized form of government was strengthened in 1795 when the residents of both Swellendam and Graaff-Reinet rose in rebellion and established short-lived republics. This was also recognized early on by the British following their annexation of the Cape in 1806, and before 1840 thirty additional towns were established, of which the DRC was instrumental in the setting out of only eleven. However, its plans were not always in accord with the new Government's planning, and only eight of these were allocated their own Resident Magistrate.

There followed a hiatus of about ten years, during which time the DRC

was instrumental in the founding of only five new settlements: Riebeeck East in 1842, Prince Albert in 1843, Victoria West in 1844, Burghersdorp in 1848, and Adelaide in 1849. Only three were Divisional Magistracies, and none were laid out according to the principles of *kerkplaats* planning. Thus some time was to pass before the *kerkplaats*, the church-based village, became an acknowledged feature of Dutch settlement at the Cape.

The *Kerkplaats*

Kerkplaats is a generic Dutch term used to describe, quite literally, a '*place where church activities take place*', which could just as easily include a barn, a school, a dwelling, or even an open field. In the colonial context it was also used to describe a formal settlement, or village, located on a specific farm. The missionary John Mackenzie remarked upon this in 1859:

> The colonial villages or towns - as some of them may now be properly termed - have usually grown up round the Dutch Church as a nucleus; and it has been remarked that these church or town sites had been chosen with great skill by the Dutch colonists. I have come into contact with those who had seen the growth of considerable villages from the solitary farm-house of the first owner. As soon as the church is built, there is no doubt as to a certain amount of business being done where it stands (1971: 18).

Sellick commented in 1904 that *'most South African towns evolved from a kerkplaats (church place) to a dorp (village)'*, and that:

> ... knowing the character of the pioneer, the Government would invest in the outlay of building a drostdy and a church ... certain that in the end they would be amply recouped for the expenditure ... Hence, too, originated a custom which obtains in our time - the Nachtmaal Service (1904).

In most cases the pattern of growth followed by a *kerkplaats* was approximately the same. A group of farmers, tired of travelling long distances every three months for *nachtmaal*, would petition their regional Church

Council for permission to establish a separate congregation in their district. Under the guidance of the *mother* church a site would be chosen and the ground purchased. Sometimes a parishioner would donate a portion of his farm to the church for this purpose or, in some instances, land was received as a grant from the Colonial Government. Once transfer had taken place a surveyor would be employed to set out a village, with key positions being reserved for a Dutch church, a *nachtmaal plein* before it, a *pastorie* or parsonage alongside it, and a *drostdy*, the residence for the local magistrate.

The main east-west access road, usually known as *Kerk Straat*, or Church Street, was laid out on an axis with the church while a second road ran at right angles passing in front of the church. Roads had to be wide enough to allow a span of oxen make a complete U-turn. The site was usually chosen for its slight fall which allowed a system of furrows to provide each resident with water for domestic and small agricultural use. Residential plots giving onto the river were known as '*wet stands*', whereas those further away were known s '*dry stands*'.

The remaining plots were sold off by public auction, and after the professional fees of the land surveyor had been deducted, profits were used to build the church. Stands were usually purchased by local farmers, who used them to erect modest dwellings, known as *dorphuise* or *nachtmaal huise*, which were then used by the family as a residence over the *nachtmaal* week-end. As a result most *kerkplaats* were left uninhabited for long periods of the year. Emil Holub visited Philippolis, in the Orange Free State, in August 1872 and found that

> the majority of the houses being unoccupied, scarcely a living being
> was to be seen, so that the barrenness of the spot was only equaled
> by its stillness (1881: I: 39).

To begin with, the administration of the settlement would have been in the hands of the Church's Council of Elders, but as the village attracted more permanent residents, so then its civil government was allowed to pass over to an appointed Health Committee or an elected Village Management Board. Where the town was selected by the Government as a Divisional centre, the administration of justice was vested in a Resident Magistrate supported by a system of rural veld-cornets. In time the growing settlement would be accorded

municipal status, leading to the election of a Mayor, and the appointment of a Town Clerk.

The decade from 1851 to 1860 proved to be key to the spread of the *kerkplaats* plan, and during this time at least 19 such towns are known to have been founded by the DRC in the Cape, while a number of others were established in the new territories of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. It is a credit to the DRC's various Building Committees that the sites chosen for the establishment of such villages were usually sound and subsequently proved suitable for residential expansion. Very few cases have been recorded where such a settlement had to be abandoned for want of water resources. This was recognized by the Colonial authorities at the Cape, who often used the founding of a *kerkplaats* as the motivation for making the village the focal point of a new magisterial district, or division. Once the new settlement had been raised to the status of a regional administrative centre and the seat of the Resident Magistrate, it would also begin to attract small traders, rural service industries and a core of permanent residents.

This was an important development as a number of individual farmers began to use the establishment of a village on their land to provide their families with the financial means to make the transition from a rural proletariat to an urban middle class. Often the gift of land to the DRC was also subject to a number of preconditions, such as the family being given first choice of a number of key residential stands, or retaining a monopoly over local water rights. In addition the farmer continued his ownership of adjoining lands which could be parceled off at a later date to provide the growing village with additional residential stands at an enhanced price. This often proved to be a source of litigation when neighbours also took advantage of such opportunities.

Although the use of religious settlements founded by small agrarian communities became the basis for the spread of colonial administration into the South African interior, this did not prevent the Colonial Government from establishing its own centers of administration, such as at Somerset East, Queenstown and Aliwal North, whose planning was decidedly different from the *kerkplaats*. Thus, the use of the typical *kerkplaats* plan became a distinct feature of Dutch colonial expansion in southern Africa, and much like its architecture before the British annexation in 1806, it became a marker of Dutch identity.

Franco Frescura

The Origins of the *Kerkplaats* Planning

Lewis Mumford has argued that early human settlement was based upon kinship ties and was organic, contour-sensitive and reflected the consensual nature of local government. It was also the product of a cooperative, collaborative process of agrarian production. However, '*where hoe culture supported hamlets, plow culture could support whole cities and regions*' (1961: 27), and with the rise of agricultural surpluses came changes to settlement structure. It was at this stage that the '*male symbols and abstractions*' of patriarchal rule begin to emerge:

> *The insistent straight line, the rectangle, the firmly bounded geometric plan, the phallic tower and the obelisk, finally, in the beginning of mathematics and astronomy, whose effective abstractions were progressively detached from the variegated matrix of myth. It is perhaps significant that while the early cities seem largely circular in form, the Ruler's citadel and the sacred precinct are more usually enclosed by a rectangle* (Mumford 1961: 27).

It may thus be argued that the Dutch male-dominated social system and its patriarchal church would have looked to a highly structured and well-regulated form of settlement planning to best reflect their male-orientated values.

The Roman *Castrum*

These men would have had any number of historical models to use as points of reference. Pre-eminent among them would have been the reticulated plan involving the imposition of a grid over a landscape regardless of its topography. Despite the fact that it has been known since ancient Egyptian times, it is commonly associated with the planning of Roman towns. The myth of '*Roma quadrata*' goes back to the eighth century BCE when its founder, Romulus, is told by legend to have laid out its walls in a square plan. In reality Rome's planning was probably organic and never had a square basis, but nonetheless this became the model for the Roman *castrum*, the camps built by the military to provide the support infrastructure for their campaigns (Rowland & Howe 1999: 156).

The *castrum* was laid out with two main roads, the *cardo* and the

decumanus, crossing at the central town square. The Latin word *cardo* was also used to denote the axis of the Earth, and thus one can presuppose that the road had a north-south orientation. Thereafter the town itself was laid out as a series of large blocks, or *insulae*, approximately 72m square whose corners were marked by permanent beacons. The town square was normally reserved for public buildings, while an adjacent space was given over for market uses. The similarities between the plans of the Roman *castrum* and the *kerkplaats* are too obvious to ignore, but given that the last Roman settlements were built in the 5th century CE, or nearly 1400 years before the colonial conquest of southern Africa, it is doubtful that the Dutch consciously used this as their model for their settlements.

It is also true that South African settlement differs from its European counterpart on one significant point. Since the 5th century most new European towns have grown organically about a central focal point, usually located at the intersection of trade routes, an overnight halt, a landing place, or a river crossing, whereas in the Cape most towns have been imposed upon the landscape independent of any economic factors. This means that, with the exception of some notable examples, virtually all major colonial settlement has been the outcome of arbitrary administrative or political action.

It is natural therefore that, during the setting out process, their surveyors should have followed a practical approach in their designs. The *gridiron* pattern is probably the most sensible and cost-effective way of setting out a residential township in a region whose topography is singularly unbroken by the intrusion of either great rivers or tall mountain ranges. The flat, rolling grasslands of the great southern African interior were highly suited to the pragmatic mentality of Dutch farmers, and, with the exception of Cape Town, their choice of locations seldom involved the drama of a picturesque landscape.

Baroque Grid-Iron Planning

The imposition of man's will upon the landscape must have struck a strong emotive note with the Dutch whose Calvinist beliefs held that human beings had been placed by God upon the earth to reap its benefits. In about 1594 the Dutch mathematician, Simon Stevin, published a scheme for an ideal city which made extensive use of the gridiron plan (Fransen 2006: 21), and although he located its *Groote Kerk* at the head of a large square, he proposed

to use this space as a stock-exchange (Illustration 1).
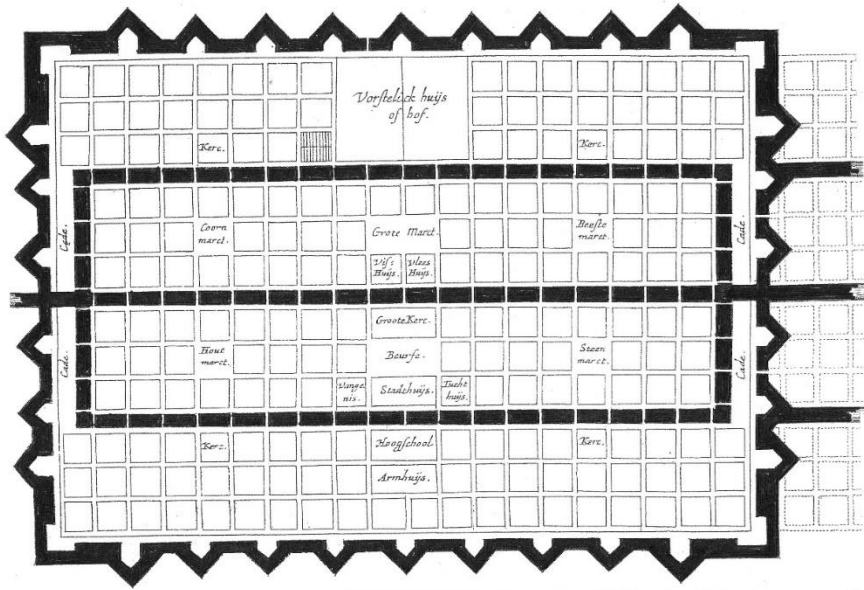
Illustration 1. Scheme for an ideal city: Simon Stevin

It is not difficult to see how, to a frontier society, a well-regulated grid, laid out on the veld could have come to symbolize the imposition of order upon natural chaos, the introduction of European values to a foreign and alien landscape, and the bringing of Christian belief to a heathen land. John Campbell warned that:

> *Missionary stations are surrounded by moral atmospheres, or have a moral and civilizing influence to a considerable distance around, beyond which it is extremely hazardous for white men to go* (1815: 224).

but his sentiments could just as easily been voiced by a resident of Siena in the 14th century. The view of the town as an outpost of European Christian culture bringing law and order to a heathen wilderness must therefore have been an influential component of colonial mythology.

The Temple of Solomon

Juan Baptista Villalpando was a Spanish Jesuit scholar and architect who specialised in the examination (exegesis) of the Scriptures. In 1596 he published a '*Commentary on Ezekiel*', based upon the visions of the prophet, which sought to reconcile the Vitruvian theory on the origins of the classical orders with the Old Testament. Vitruvius' *De Architectura*, which had been widely circulated during the Renaissance, had traced their history back to the influx of Doric, Ionic and Corinthian tribes into the Greek peninsula. Villalpando, on the other hand, theorized that the roots of classical architecture lay in the Old Testament, thereby linking it directly to the word of God (Rykwert 1996: 27).

His *Commentary* included depictions of Jerusalem as well as a speculative reconstruction of the Temple of Solomon (Illustrations 2 and 3) which proved influential in its time and was widely circulated among builders and architects of Europe. His use of the grid became a feature of baroque town planning (Hersey 200: 114), and his imagery was used in the design of 17th century monasteries, Protestant churches, and synagogues (Kravtsov 2005).

Villalpando's *Commentary* was also known to Isaac Newton, who used the work in his own architectural studies (Goldish 1998). Although Newton was primarily a scientist, he was also interested in alchemy, sacred geometry and numerology, and was a member of the Royal Society at a time when it was in the forefront of the nascent Masonic movement (Knight & Lomas 1997: 453).

It seems probable therefore, that the Masonic use of Villalpandian ideas on architecture can be traced back to Newton's era. This was not limited to the adoption of the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian orders as symbols of the Masonic virtues of Strength, Wisdom and Beauty, but was extended to the planning of the Masonic lodge, whose layout was based directly upon Villalpando's reconstruction of Solomon's Temple (Illustration 4).
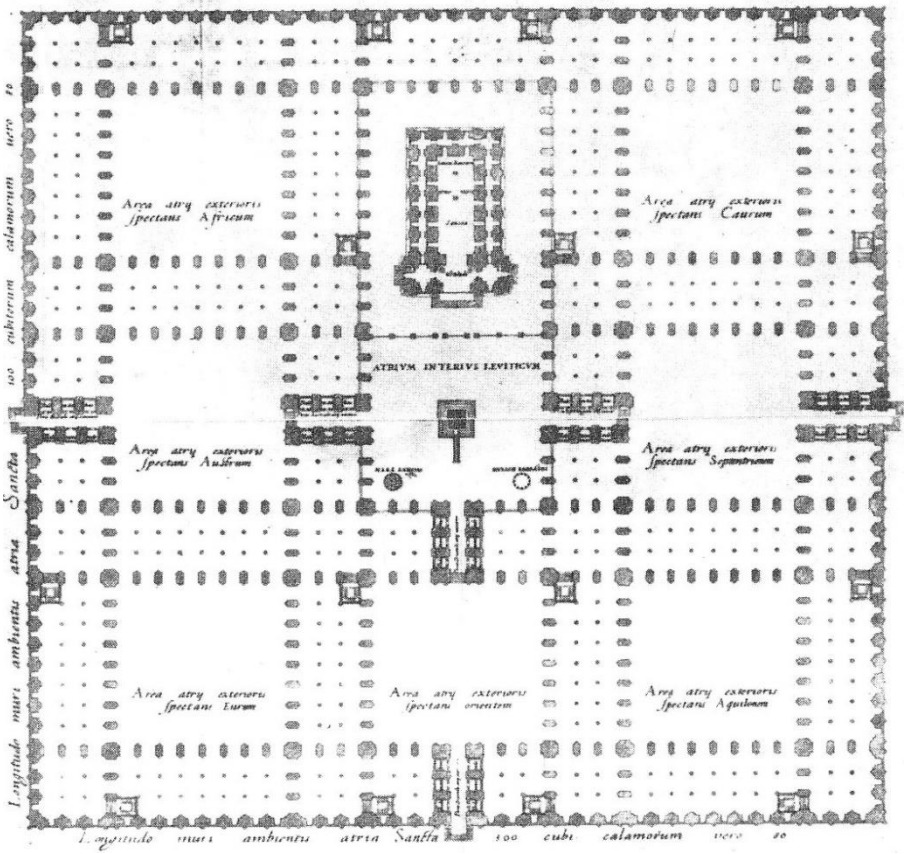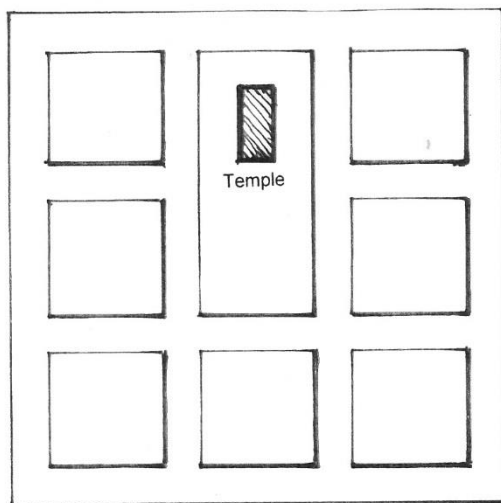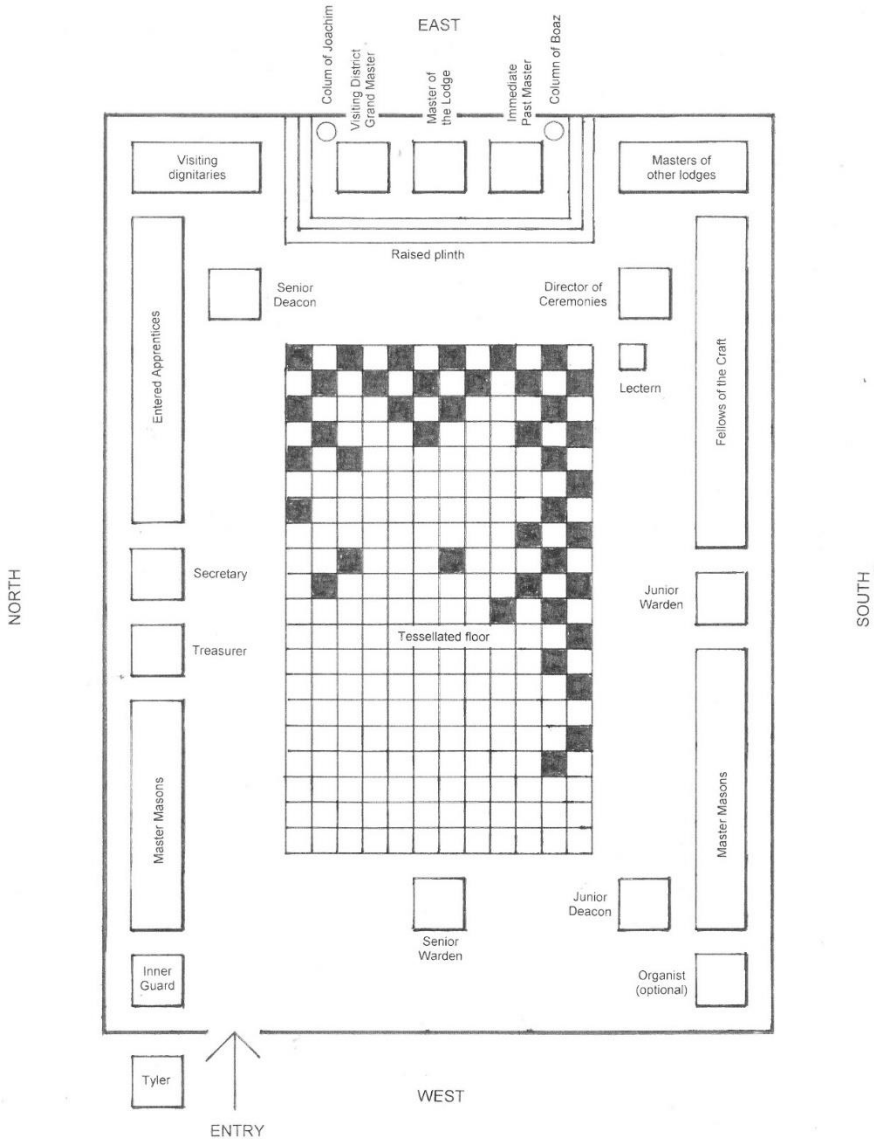
Illustration 2. Reconstructed plan of Solomon's Temple: Juan Bautista Villalpando

Schematic reconstruction of
Solomon's Temple

**Illustration 3. Schematic reconstruction of Solomon's Temple**

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Illustration 4. Schematic plan of a Masonic Lodge

The First *Kerkplaats* Plan

In 1817 the British established an administrative centre at Somerset (West), in the Western Cape. The village was surveyed by William Hertzog who, as was custom at the time, named it in honour of his employer, Lord Charles Somerset, Governor of the Cape from 1814-1825. It is pertinent to note, at this stage, that both Hertzog and Somerset were active in the Masonic movement, a factor which will become relevant later on in this paper (Cooper 1986: 17).

Somerset was set out as a series of rectangular blocks with a central square left open for church activities (Illustration 5). Appropriately known as '*Predikant square*', it was faced by a Dutch church on its northern side, while its parsonage stood on axis on the opposite side. The square was probably not big enough to become a *nachtmaal plein* by later standards, but nonetheless the intention of creating a religious focus for the community cannot have been far removed from Hertzog's end.
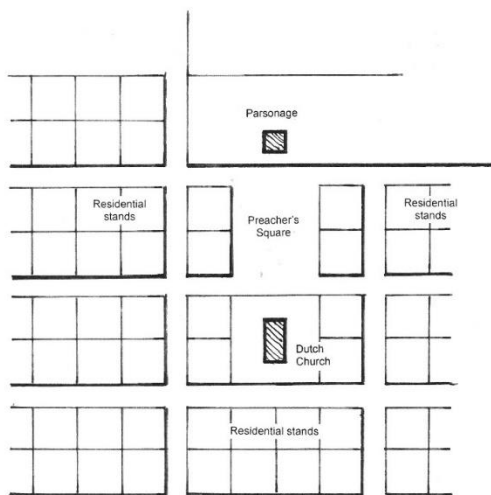
Hertzog's plan for the
Somerset West village centre

Illustration 5. Hertzog's plan for the Somerset West village centre

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Soon afterwards, in 1819, Hertzog was commissioned by the colonial government to set out another village, at Worcester. The design was probably carried out under the personal guidance of Somerset, and consisted of a grid of 24 square blocks laid out in a 8 x 4 pattern with a central High Street marking its east-west axis. A central square was set aside for the Dutch church while a large market square was sited at the western end of town. The design called for the central axis created by the High Street to be emphasized by locating the Drostdy at one end, and the church at the other, thus setting up a strong symbolic link between temporal and spiritual government (Illustration 6).
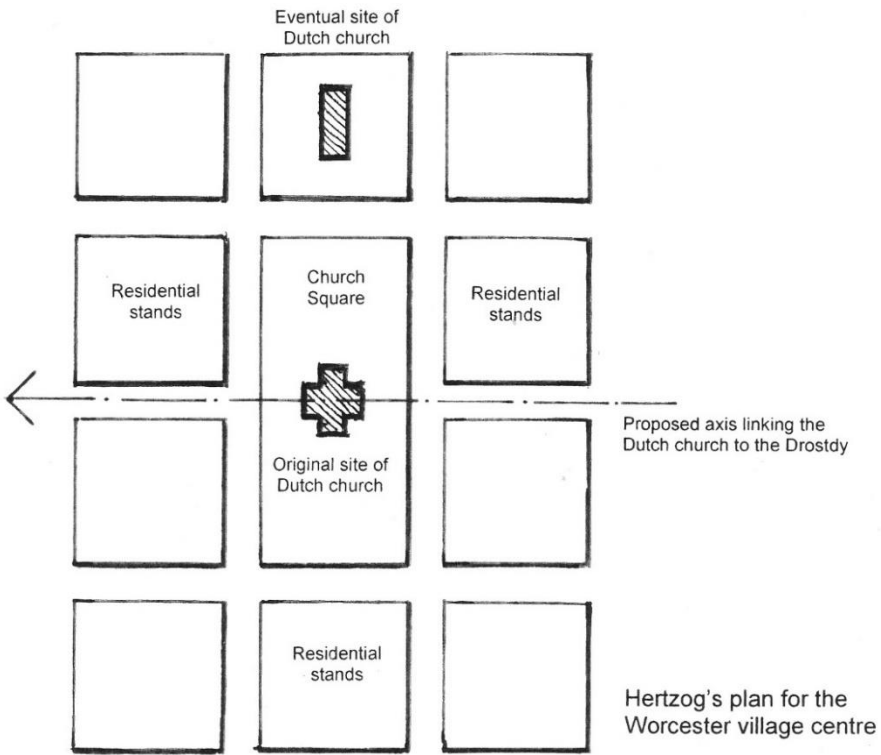
Illustration 6. Hertzog's plan for the Worcester village centre

Similar arrangements were also implemented by British planners in Grahams-town in 1814 and in Somerset East in 1825 respectively, and were designed to impress '*on the inhabitants a visual appreciation of law and order*' (Lewcock, 1963: 408-410). A plan of symbolic meaning was clearly intended, and Somerset was an autocrat who would not have been averse to forcing the residents of Worcester:

> *... into a preconceived framework of streets (which) necessarily subjects human interests to the tyranny of a higher authority ... Worcester represented the Governor's law, the Governor's order, the Governor's society, imposed by a single mind working under his command* (Lewcock 1963: 408-410).

Clearly, in his planning of Worcester, Somerset must have had his quarrelsome Dutch burghers in mind. As matters turned out, he returned to England in 1825, and Hertzog became Assistant Surveyor-General in 1828, a post he held until his death in 1847. The Dutch church was not built until 1832, and then only after it was removed by common consent to a site on the northern end of the square (Illustration 7) (Fransen 2006: 174-177).

Illustration 7. Worcester NGK church and *nachtmaal plein*

By then the Rhenish, Lutheran and Anglican faiths had built chapels on the southern side of the square, and this area had rapidly become the social and economic focus of the new town. Faced with this shift in emphasis, the Resident Magistrate accepted the inevitable, and although he retained the original Drostdy as his residence, he removed his administrative functions to buildings closer to the center of the village (Lewcock 1963: 408-410).

It is ironic that the Dutch residents of Worcester were able to take ownership of an evidently authoritarian concept and turn it to meet their own social and spiritual values, creating a plan that was adopted by the DRC and used as a model for similar settlements it established in the Cape as well as other parts of southern Africa (Illustration 8).
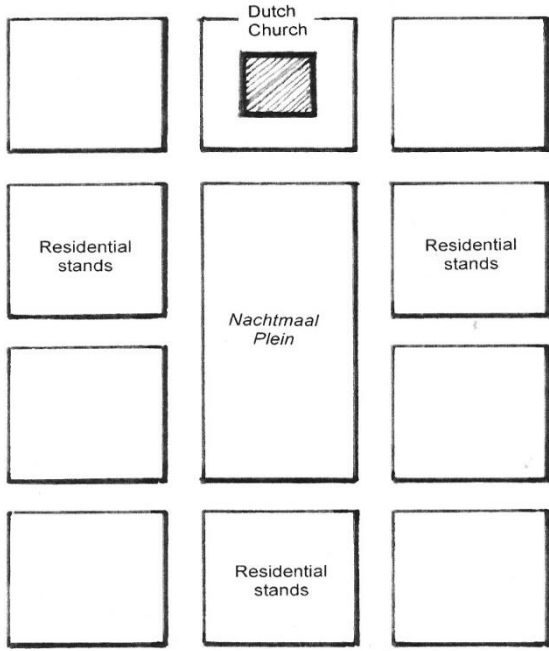
Schematic plan of prototypical
Kerkplaats village centre

Illustration 8. Schematic plan of a prototypical *kerkplaats* village centre

The next village to be surveyed along the same lines was Piquetberg, whose establishment was mooted in 1835, but whose plan was only set out in 1841 (Illustration 9). Although the British established a number of other towns in the Cape over the next decade, it was not until 1851 that the *kerkplaats* plan was used once again, at Calvinia (Illustration 10), and over the next decade at least eighteen more towns were established by the DRC in the Cape using the same planning principles. All of them became known as '*church towns*' or *kerkplaats*, and rapidly became the focus of rural Dutch economic, political and religious life.

Illustration 9. Picketberg NGK church and *nachtmaal plein*: Poortermans
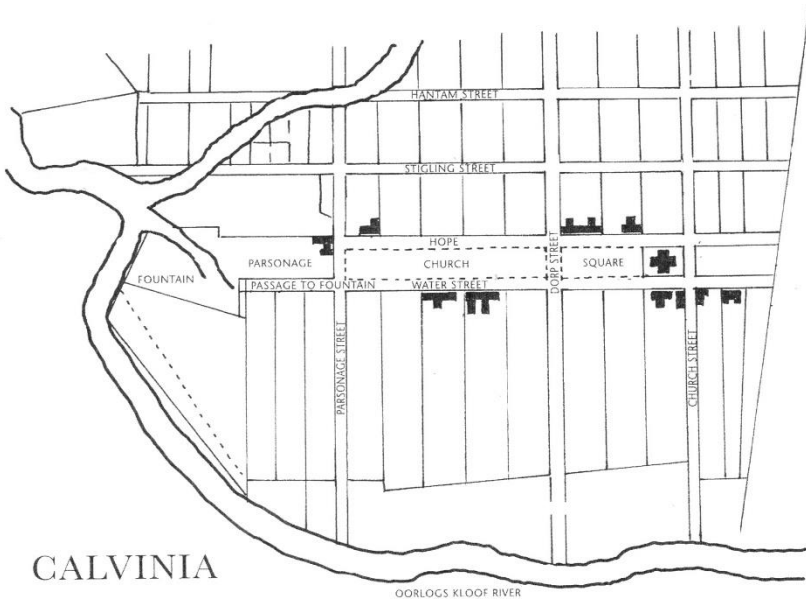
Illustration 10. Calvinia *Kerkplaats* Plan

The DRC and Freemasonry

Freemasonry is not a religion, but because it draws freely from the texts and symbols of an established Judeo-Christian tradition, this has created a certain amount of ambiguity and its practice has been severely curtailed by a number of religious jurisdictions. In 1738 Pope Clement XII prohibited the practice on pain of excommunication, the Greek Orthodox faith considers Masonic teachings to be contrary to its own form of Christianity, and in 1978 the Islamic Jurisdictional College of El-Azhar University in Cairo published an opinion which, among others, found that '*Any Muslim who affiliates with (Free-masonry), knowing the truth of its objectives, (to be) an infidel to Islam*' (Hodapp 2005: 77-78).

The Protestant churches have held a more ambiguous approach, and have varied in their attitudes. English-speaking Protestants have generally been

more tolerant of Freemasonry, and some of their clergy have held high office in the movement, while the Methodists have strongly discouraged its membership (Anonymous 1985). Few are known to have prohibited the practice outright. The Dutch Reformed Church in Holland, on the other hand, has always held an antagonistic viewpoint. Despite this, many Dutch residents, both in the Netherlands and in their colonies, still joined the movement, and in South Africa the DRC allowed its members to retain their Masonic membership right up to 1962 (1962 NGK Algemene Sinode, Agenda: 103-107).

Freemasonry at the Cape

On 24 April 1772 sea captain Abraham van der Weijde, a Freemason and Deputy Grand Master of the Grand East of the Netherlands, landed at Table Bay. Soon after, on 2 May, he called a meeting of ten fellow brothers for the purpose of establishing the first Masonic lodge at the Cape. Known as Lodge De Goede Hoop, its first Master was Abraham Chiron, a young man from Frankfort-am-Main who, as an employee of the Dutch East India Company, had arrived at the Cape in 1769 and had married a local woman in 1770.

Initially the movement made little progress. In a report to the Grand East of the Netherlands in June 1774 Chiron pointed out not only that '*warnings from the pulpit had caused wives to persuade their husbands to hold aloof from Freemasonry*', but that Masonic teachings of equality among all men were meeting stiff opposition in Cape Town's highly stratified and socially conscious society. As a result the lodge went into recess in 1781 (Cooper 1986: 16-17).

Interest in the Craft was renewed when the British occupied the Cape in 1795, bringing with them a tradition of military lodges. The colony was returned to Dutch rule in 1802, and in 1803 the new Batavian governor, Jacob Abraham de Mist, arrived at the Cape. De Mist was also Deputy Grand Master in Holland, and during his administration, a new Masonic temple for the Lodge De Goede Hoop was completed in Cape Town at a cost of £10,000.

After the British annexation of the Cape in 1806 civil society at the colony, including the churches, was subjected by the new Colonial Government to a systematic process of anglicization. In 1812 all persons holding official positions had to be proficient in English, and in 1822 English

became the official language of government.

Matters were compounded in 1820 when some 4000 English immigrants arrived at Port Elizabeth, and in the 1840s and 50s when a further 11,000 settlers travelled to the Cape and Natal. Many of these brought their Craft with them, and by the 1870s the establishment of Masonic lodges beyond the bounds of the Western Cape had become a common feature of colonial life. Few public buildings were inaugurated without Masonic honours, and masons marked the installation of their new masters, traditionally held on 24 June, St John's Day, with a procession in full regalia through all major towns. Even a small village like Adelaide, in the Eastern Cape, which in 1875 had a total population of 809 souls, could boast of its own lodge (Frescura 2002: 27).

Despite injunctions that lodges were to maintain a neutral stance on matters of politics and religion, a divergence of opinion based upon language, political and cultural differences eventually began to emerge. On 14 January 1843 the Lodge De Goede Hoop, whose membership was largely Dutch, hosted for dinner officers from the Dutch ship *Palembang* that was visiting the Cape at the time. It was later alleged that when a toast to the English Queen was proposed, a number of those present refused to drink and turned their glasses upside down. Inevitably the story reached the press and in the ensuing rumpus, three men who had been at the dinner presented the Governor, Sir George Napier, with a memorandum assuring him of the loyalty of their lodge. One of the three was Willem Frederik Hertzog, then Assistant Surveyor General of the Cape Colony and the planner responsible for the design of the first *kerkplaats*.

Generally differences appear to have been the result of Dutch members wanting to be instructed in their own language, and at a time during the 19th century when it would have been difficult to find a prominent member of the male colonial community who was not a Freemason, many members were Dutch speaking. These included dissident leaders such as Andries Pretorius, his brother Marthinus and Andries Potgieter, as well as Presidents Burgers, Brand and Reitz. Thomas Burgers, who had served as a DRC minister at Hanover (Illustration 11), in the Cape, and was prosecuted repeatedly by his Church for his '*liberal views*', eventually left his parish in 1872 to become Vice-President of the Transvaal Republic (SESA 1972). Sir Christoffel Brand, first Speaker of the Cape Parliament in 1854, was also Deputy Grand Master National, and under his leadership Freemasonry became firmly established in

the Dutch republics north of the Gariep, while the Rev. Johannes Henoch Neethling, DRC missionary and educator, was also English Deputy Provincial Grand Master (Cooper 1986: 45-46).
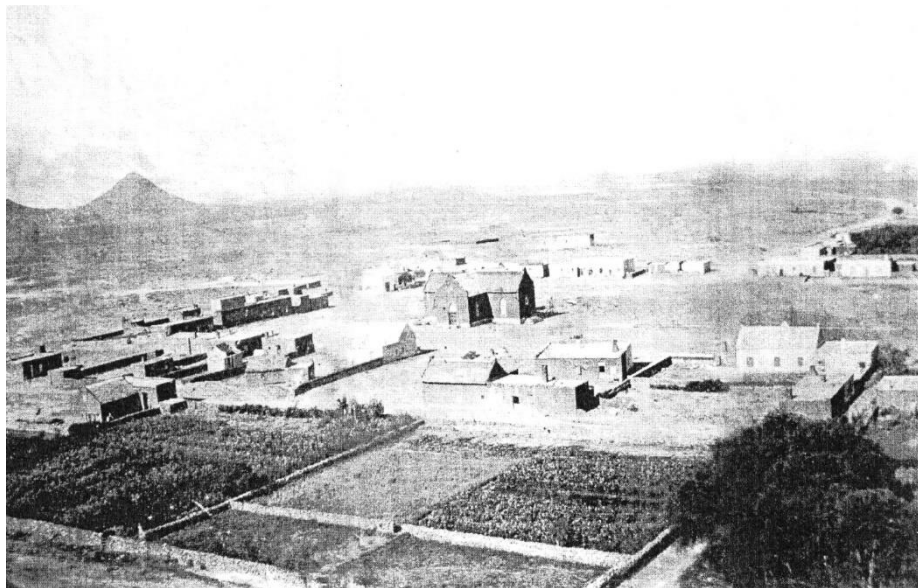
Illustration 11. View of Dutch settlement at Hanover, c.1900

In addition, on 18 April 1833, when the foundation stone of a new Dutch Reformed Church in Bree Street, the *Nieuwe Kerk*, was laid, brothers from the De Goede Hoop Lodge were in attendance in full Masonic regalia. Despite playing such an obviously prominent role in Freemasonry, many conservative, God-fearing Dutch burghers still identified Freemasonry with the English. In 1849 members of the DRC Synod complained of a *Liberal Methodist* presence in the Church.

> *In die gees van verdraagsaamheid is byvoorbeeld die Vrymesselaars vrye toegang verleen. Op onkerkregtelike wyse word die Gesangbundel in 1814 in die Kaapse Kerk ingedra. Ook op maatskaplike gebied het 'n geheel newe gees posgevat. Onder*

> *Engelse invloed het nuwe vorme van vermaak veral in die stede en dorpe posgevat* (Anonymous 1959: 16).

The anonymous writer claimed that, in the spirit of tolerance, Freemasons (Vrymesselaars) had been given entry into the DRC, and that the hymnbook had been introduced into the Cape Church in a most '*unchurchlike manner*'. Moreover, under English influence, new forms of entertainment were taking root in the cities and towns (my translation). As matters turned out, Masonic involvement in DRC affairs continued for over a century, until 1962 when, following the declaration of a South African Republic, growing Afrikaner nationalism and the rise of an Afrikaner Broederbond made such divided loyalties difficult to maintain.

The Seal of the Dutch Reformed Church

The first Synod of the Cape DRC was held on 2 November 1824, and brought together the representatives of 14 congregations. Two years later a proposal was put forward to the second Synod by Ds RJ Varma for the design and manufacture of an official seal for the DRC. After he also offered to finance the project, the proposal was adopted and the Secretary of the Synod, Ds JC Berrange, was tasked with its implementation. Little was then done in this regard for a number of years and the matter was raised again at the Synod of 1852 when Ds Van Der Riet, a grandson of Ds Varma, stated that in memory of his grandfather, his family was still willing to meet the costs of making the seal.

The outcome may have been a circular design that was used by the DRC on the frontispiece of its Almanac for 1865, which bore an anchor, obviously symbolizing Hope, with a reference to a Biblical quotation 1 Cor 14.v.40 (Hofmeyr 2002: 111).

A second, and more decorative, circular design that was brought into use in about 1885, depicted a woman seated on an ashlar block with a book on her lap and a cross at the end of a long staff resting on her shoulder. Behind her part of an anchor was clearly visible in the original design, while in the distance a ship is seen sailing into Cape Town harbour. On her right is a pedestal upon which stands a burning heart, while the base is engraved with a Biblical reference to I COR XIV 40. A sun shines in the top left-hand quadrant.

Barring a few minor changes this basic design appears to have remained in use until 1962 when it was replaced with a candelabra with seven arms (Author's personal archive).

A Masonic Reading of the Seal of 1885

It would have been difficult during the 19th century to escape the symbols of Freemasonry, in either an overt or covert form. Masonic temples and hotels were an integral part of the local urban landscape, businesses displayed Masonic symbols and advertised special rates to members of the Craft (Illustration 12); on feast days masons paraded in their regalia through town streets, and the corner stone of many public buildings were laid with Masonic honours. Even the heraldry of non-Masonic institutions was liable to reflect Masonic imagery.
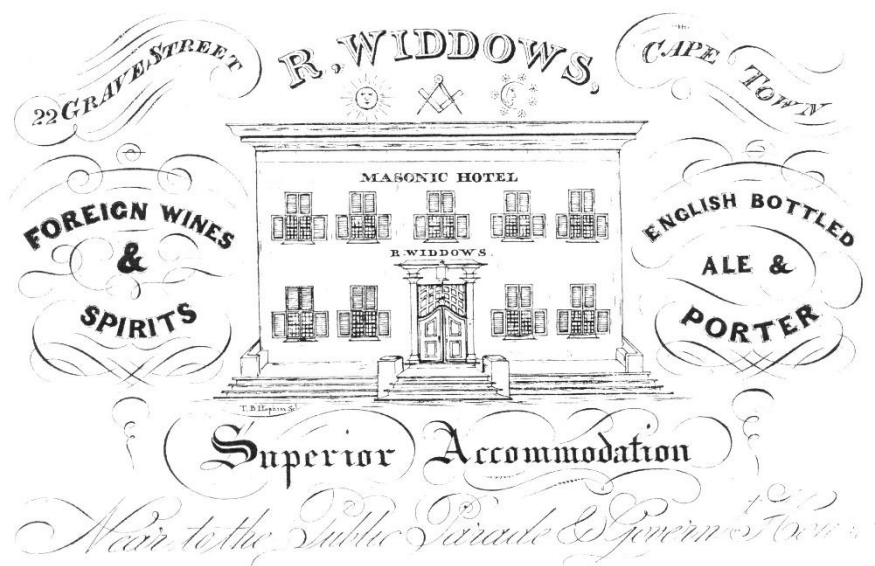
Illustration 12. Advert for the Masonic Hotel, Cape Town, c.1850

One such instance was the Seal of the DRC, whose design has come under critical scrutiny in recent times (Swart 2010). Although much of its symbology belongs to a straightforward colonial Christian lexicon, many of its parts are open to Masonic interpretation (Illustration 13).

Illustration 13. Seal of the NGK, c.1885

The seating of the female figure against the backdrop of Table Mountain together with a portion of an anchor visible behind her quite clearly identifies her as Hope which, together with Faith and Charity, is one of the three pillars of Masonry. The three may also be identified as columns in the three classical orders: Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. She is seated on a block of squared ashlar, which is a metaphor for *being on the square*, or a member of a Masonic lodge.

The large volume precariously perched on her hip bears no markings, but is probably a Bible, a book which plays a significant role in Masonic ritual.

The cross she holds is too long for a conventional Christian symbol, and is probably a reference to the two wands, one bearing a level, and the second a plumb, which are carried by the Senior and Junior Wardens respectively during lodge meetings while bearing messages on behalf of the Grand Master. This may be interpreted to mean that Hope is a messenger for the word of Christianity on behalf of the Great Worshipful Master of all things.

The message of Faith, Hope and Charity is repeated in the scenery behind the female figure. While the ship sailing into Table Bay may be interpreted to represent the arrival of Van Riebeeck at the Cape, this is conventionally shown as three ships. A single ship, on the other hand, is a symbol of Faith, sailing over a sea of troubles, while Table Bay represents a safe haven provided by Masonic charity to the poor. It does not signify European immigration as, by the 1850s this was commonly represented by an ox-wagon.

The plinth or altar to the left and behind Hope is perhaps the most enigmatic element in the design. The DRC has no place for an altar in its liturgy, and the use of a vacant plinth on their seal makes little religious sense. On the other hand such a base is used during Masonic meetings to rest a Bible, which remains open for the duration of proceedings. The base is inscribed with a reference to Corinthians 14: 40, '*but all things should be done decently and in order*', which does not appear to have a leading meaning in the doctrines of the DRC, but makes a great deal of sense in the context of highly structured Masonic meetings and Masonic world view.

Lastly, placed upon the pedestal is a burning heart. The burning of incense has no place in either the DRC or in Masonry, so the allusion must be metaphorical. The flaming heart is typically a Roman Catholic symbol and thus anathema to the DRC faith. On the other hand in Masonry '*the symbol of a pot of incense is used as an allegory for a pure heart and the prayers that arise from it to heaven, symbolized by the clouds of rising smoke*' (Hodapp 2005: 143). As such it can probably be taken to represent the Masonic *Five Points of Fellowship*.

Significantly, when the DRC published its paper *De Kerkbode* from about 1910, its cover featured very few of these symbols. Hope is now depicted standing, holding a large shield bearing the symbols of the four Union provinces, with a large anchor behind her. Symbols of white farming affluence may be seen in the background, together with Table Bay and a number of sailing ship in the bay. In this context none of these elements can be interpreted as Masonic. On the other hand the frame below depicts a Bible, a handshake,

a sword and a tall candle stand, all of which are arguably symbols of Freemasonry.

Masonic Symbolism and Village Planning

Given that Freemasons were active within the DRC throughout the colonial era, it becomes possible to examine the establishment of Church-sponsored towns in the Cape with a different understanding.

In 1806 there had been nine DRC congregations in the colony, six of them within a radius of 120km of Cape Town, and although there was a need to establish new congregations further afield, this was hampered by a shortage of suitably-qualified clergy. The colonial government sought to relieve this shortage by the introduction of pastors from the Scottish Presbyterian Church and until 1837, at least half of the Cape Synod consisted of Scottish-born ministers, some of whom may have belonged to the Craft. Meanwhile the establishment of new villages in the colony's interior was left largely in the hands of the colonial Government.

The design of the prototypical *kerkplaats* plan was first set out by Willem Hertzog at Somerset West in 1817, and was not taken up by him again until 1832 when the plan of Worcester was finalised. By that stage he had been appointed Deputy Surveyor General of the Cape, a post he held until his death in 1847, and it seems probable that the concept of a standard plan for the *kerkplaats* was developed at this time in Cape Town under his guidance. Nonetheless it was not employed again until the design of Piquetberg in 1841 and Calvinia a decade later.

Thus, while the connections between Hertzog, Freemasonry, the *kerkplaats* and the hypothetical reconstruction of Solomon's temple are unmistakable, the body of evidence is still lacking one conclusive item of proof. It needs an official directive to the surveying profession, or a DRC position paper, or even a sermon from the pulpit to make the final connection.

While it would be feasible to argue that the *kerkplaats* plan was simply a good idea whose time had come, its concept was linked too strongly to a Dutch colonial identity for its arrival to have been serendipitous. Given its widespread implementation after 1851 it seems most probable that the plan was the subject of formal discussion and that, at some point, it became the standard measure against which DRC village plans were measured.

This means that, at some stage, discussion must have taken place, possibly in the formal confines of a Synod session, or as part of a professional briefing. It is also possible that the pastors of the DRC were attracted by its supposed Biblical roots: the idea that each *kerkplaats* was a Temple of Solomon in its own right is a metaphor that these learned men of God would have found profoundly satisfying, giving scope for any number of analogies to be drawn from the pulpit.

Conclusions

After the initial period of dissemination that took place between 1850 and 1860, the *kerkplaats* plan continued to be used in the setting out of church-sponsored towns and villages, mostly in the Dutch republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. However its use slowly petered out, and the last known *kerkplaats* in the Cape were set out at Aurora in 1906 and De Hoop in 1908.

By that stage its symbolism as a Dutch plan had been forgotten, save in the colonial literature. Many English-speaking immigrants who chose to live in the arid South African interior after 1860, did so for reasons of health, and areas which had previously been identified as a *Dutch heartland*, such as the Karroo, became anglicized, and remained so until well into the 1920s.

The practice of holding of *nachtmaal* on the public square also became less prevalent, and slowly fell away as rural congregations became more affluent and motorized transport began to replace the ox-drawn wagon. Following WWII South Africa entered a period of intensive industrial development, many aspects of rural Dutch culture were rapidly eroded, and the last-recorded *nachtmaal*, in the traditional colonial sense of the word, was held at Middelburg, in the Transvaal, in about 1942 (Stuart Larrabee, personal communication 1982).

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