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[Review of: A. Faivre (2018) De Londres à Saint-Pétersbourg : Carl Friedrich Tiemann (1743-1802) aux carrefours des courants illuministes et maçonniques]

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Antoine Faivre, *De Londres à Saint-Pétersbourg: Carl Friedrich Tieman (1743–1802) aux carrefours des courants illuministes et maçonniques* (Lumina 7), Archè: Milano 2018. xxviii + 658 pp. ISBN 9788872523506.

Antoine Faivre is known to readers of *Aries* as the foundational scholar who succeeded in establishing Western esotericism as a field of academic research, originally in France since the 1960s and then internationally since the 1980s. His famous definition of esotericism, in terms of four intrinsic and two non-intrinsic characteristics, played an important role in convincing academics about the existence and importance of this scholarly domain. While some readers may also have read or at least dipped into his two volumes of collected essays in English, it is fair to say that relatively few scholars today are familiar with Faivre's voluminous scholarly output published in French. However, next to numerous articles and several smaller volumes, he authored large and fundamental historical monographs devoted to his special field of expertise within the wider context of Western esotericism: eighteenth-century Illuminism and Christian Theosophy as well as its continuations in German *Naturphilosophie* during the Romantic period. In 1966 Faivre published a study of the international Illuminist networks that were active during the pre-revolutionary period, by focusing on one of its minor representatives, Nicolas-Antoine Kirchberger (1739–1799); this title was followed just three years later by an even larger monograph about the important Christian theosopher Karl von Eckartshausen (1752–1803). To these we might add a volume of collected essays about Theosophy and Illuminism published in 1976. All these large and extremely well-documented books have become indispensable references in the domain of research that was originally placed on the agenda of scholarship by Auguste Viatte, with his classic 2-volume study *Les sources occultes du Romantisme* published in 1928. Although the Theosophical-Illuminist milieus of the decades around 1800 are of absolutely pivotal importance to the history of esotericism in European modernity, due to the increasing dominance of English they remain largely unknown in international scholarship. This has begun to change only very recently, notably with Robert Collis' and Natalie Bayer's monograph about the Avignon Society and Illuminism in Europe published by Oxford University Press in 2020; but by and large, it is fair to say that the field remains *terra incognita* for most esotericism scholars on the international scene.

Faivre's impressive new monograph on Tieman is similar in approach to his first volume about Kirchberger. Both studies focus on a minor figure who produced no original work of his own but was an extremely active participant in the Illuminist-Theosophical networks of eighteenth-century Freemasonry and was personally acquainted with all its important representatives. Spend-

ing most of his life as a professional companion or “governor” of young Russian noblemen who had to make the “grand tour” of Europe as part of their education, Tieman (who never married and was therefore free to move where he wanted) enjoyed unique opportunities for traveling the length and breadth of the European networks of Illuminist Freemasons, meeting everybody who played a minor or major role in this cosmopolitan (sub)culture. A highly sociable person with a mild and pleasant character, he seems to have been well liked and appreciated by almost everybody in these milieus; and as a result, his letters are a rich mine of historical information. Faivre describes Tieman as a Mercurial figure, not unlike himself in some respects: ‘with winged feet, always willing to offer his services, to establish contacts between persons and organizations’ (xxiv).

The first part of this monograph provides a meticulously documented chronological overview of what we know about Tieman’s life and activities. Thanks to Faivre’s lucid and flexible style of writing, what could easily have become a dry account of facts and data is presented as an engaging narrative through which the reader is introduced to fascinating masonic networks marked by profound Christian piety, millenarian excitement, and fascination with occult phenomena (not to mention remarkable degrees of credulity among some of their participants). First we are informed about Tieman’s childhood in a German pietist milieu and his studies at the University of Wittenberg; we learn about his early visionary experiences (on the basis of an autograph printed as Document 11), his personal development from an Enlightenment to a Christian-theosophical worldview, his initiation into Freemasonry, and his involvement notably in Jean-Baptiste Willermoz’s Rectified Scottish Rite; and throughout the bulk of the discussion, we follow him on his extensive peregrinations through Russia, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, and England. Along the way, we are introduced to a whole series of debates and controversies that were going on in Illuminist and Masonic milieus during the decades before the Revolution and the years following; we learn about the deep fascination in these circles with such phenomena as Rosicrucianism, Neo-Templarism, Mesmeric Somnambulism, the millenarian sectarian movement known as the *Illuminés d’Avignon*, as well as the vogue of “Jewish-Masonic” conspiracy theories; and we are given meticulous descriptions of Tieman’s encounters and discussions with major figures such as Johann Caspar Lavater, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, and Johann Georg Hamann, next to a large host of slightly less famous but still quite important ones. The great and lasting value of these discussions lies in an extremely detailed descriptive historiography, grounded in a mastery of archival materials that is utterly impressive by any standard. The very high level of detailed information on display throughout the first

narrative part of the book is complemented by a wealth of primary sources that are made available in the second part. Over 260 pages long, it contains transcripts of important but otherwise inaccessible archival documents, with French translations for texts written in German and Russian; Tieman's correspondence (almost two hundred pages long, notably with C.P.P. Savalette de Langes, J.C. Lavater, J.B. Willermoz, C. de La Harpe, F. de Brunswick, B.F. de Türkheim, J.G. Hamann, A.M. Golitsyn, C. von Hessen Darmstadt, C.D. von Meyer, and Frédérique Sophie Dorothee Duchess of Württemberg); and a series of complementary notes about other important personalities relevant to the story (O. Cappelli, J. Du Chenteau, L.M.F. de La Forest Divonne, S. Giraud, K.H. von Gleichen, K.R.I. von Keller, R.A. Kochelev, F.A.H. de Lefort, P.J. Massenet, C.D. von Meyer, S.I. Plechtcheev, F.J. von Thun und Hohenstein, C.E. von Wächter, J.I. Woukassovitch, V.N. Zinoviev). A detailed index of names and persons makes the contents of this encyclopedic volume accessible for readers interested in checking specific details relevant to the Illuminist milieu. While the editing and typesetting are of excellent quality, it must be said that a scholar of Faivre's status would have deserved his book to be printed with a much better cover. Unfortunately the publisher has paid absolutely no attention to exterior appearances, so that this monograph looks like a privately printed student thesis. It is to be hoped that this can be fixed in a reprint.

In sum, this book is a model example of true devotion to the hard but necessary work of detailed historical and textual scholarship. Keeping in mind that the author has reached an age at which lesser scholars might neither be able nor willing anymore to muster the enormous amounts of time and energy required for research at this level, one can only admire the enormous achievement that this volume represents. It is not easy to even begin imagining the countless hours of diligent labour that are required to produce a book with this degree of documentation and deep grounding in archival research. The volume will take its place in Faivre's oeuvre as an indispensable reference work that will be consulted far into the future by specialists of Freemasonry, Illuminism, Christian Theosophy, and related traditions such as Swedenborgianism and Mesmerism. It demonstrates once more why the study of Western esotericism must be grounded in close empirical-historical investigation of primary sources that would otherwise remain unknown.

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