

Book Review

MARKNER, Reinhard, NEUGEBAUER-WÖLK, Monika, SCHÜTTLER, Hermann (eds), *Die Korrespondenz des Illuminaten-Ordens*, Vol 2: January 1782–June 1783 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), xxv + 711 pp., 149.95€ / \$210.00 eBook; 149.95€ / \$210.00 Hbk, €229 / 321\$ Print/eBook, ISBN: 978-3-11-029500-9.

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The international Convention of Freemasons was held in Wilhelmsbad from 16 July to 1 September 1782. The first volume of Illuminati correspondence, published in 2005, covered the period from 1776 to 1781, the letters of this more selective volume date from 4 January 1782 to 28 June 1783. The research community as a whole will be grateful to the editors for continuing to make correspondence immediately accessible, which has remained largely secret for the better part of two centuries.

Neugebauer-Wölk follows her foreword with an historical introduction setting out the focal points of interest in five chronological subdivisions. Markner writes an introductory survey of the history of the documentation, from which most of the material is drawn, the 'Schwedenkiste'. He offers persuasive evidence that, against the received view, neither J.J.C. Bode, the collector of the various contents of the chest, nor Herzog Ernst II of Sachsen-Gotha-Altenberg, to whom Bode sold them, nor the Swedish Grand Lodge, to which they were entrusted for safe-keeping after Herzog Ernst's death in 1804, had intended them to remain secret forever. New perspectives are offered on the complex history of the 'Schwedenkiste', which the Soviet Union returned to the German Democratic Republic in 1957 and which, after unification, was transferred to the Secret State Archive of Prussian Culture in Berlin. Attention is drawn to a circular, dated 15 March 1934, from the incoming Director General of the Bavarian State Archives, Josef Franz Knöpler, which required a list to be presented of all records and literature held there on the freemasons and the Illuminati. One consequence was a re-cataloguing of the Illuminati files held in Bavaria's Secret House Archive. The list was then handed to the Political Police, as a result of which extensive files on the freemasons and the Illuminati were 'borrowed' by the Bavarian State Security Service, which, on 28 August 1935, admitted to having transferred them to Berlin. The promise to return them in due course was never fulfilled, Markner concluding that at least some of the Illuminati files originally held in the Secret House Archive were therefore not destroyed in the bombing of Munich on 24–25 April 1944. Two questions remain for him unanswered: their location in the meantime and the original reason for 'borrowing' them, other than the Bavarian State Police's declared suspicion of links between the Illuminati of former times and the pre-war Order of Freemasons.

The correspondence reflects the orthographic variety, regional variations and occasionally idiosyncratic usage of German in the 1780s. The few passages in French are not translated, although, for the Latin tags, modern German equivalents are provided

in the footnotes. In order to promote better understanding of letters containing secret signs and symbols, most of which will be familiar to freemasons, and secret codenames for correspondents, contacts and geographical locations, Markner appends an index of abbreviations and a register of the names and places behind the codenames. The apparatus includes a list of the German, Dutch, Danish and Russian archives used and a brief list of printed sources and literature to supplement the one in the first volume. The printed page of each letter is provided with informative footnotes and each letter has alphabetically arranged endnotes to explain quirks of language or immediate context. Markner's scholarly conscientiousness in all these matters is exemplary.

The letters throw further light on an already well-researched subject. As Markner points out, their publication reduces the significance previously attached to the Illuminati documents published by the Palatine and Bavarian government in 1787. The volume's most important contribution is arguably the detail provided of the working relationship between the two leading Illuminati of the time, Adam Weishaupt (Spartacus) and Joseph Freiherr von Knigge (Philo), and of the tensions leading to the termination of their friendship in summer 1783. From 1776, when he founded the Order, Weishaupt had been supreme and absolute leader, his true identity kept a closely guarded secret even from members of the Order's highest committee, the 'areopag'. Knigge's duties were to carry out Weishaupt's wishes, advance the interests of the Order, recommend suitable persons for initiation, extend the secret network, map out local and regional territories, and develop the administrative structure and the system of higher degrees. Disillusionment with Strict Observance was growing even before the Wilhelmsbad Convention, but that meeting's final decision to close down the system was to benefit the Illuminati with an influx of new members.

Already on 16 February 1782 Weishaupt's letter to Zwackh contained a diagram of his system for internal organization. As he explained:

I have two people directly under me, into whom I breathe my whole mind, and each of these two has another two directly under him, and so on. This is the simplest way of setting thousands of people in motion and all aflame. It is precisely in this way that orders must be passed down and operations carried out in the political field.

Different sides of Weishaupt's personality are revealed, arrogance being one of them. Knigge's implementation of what was tantamount to pyramid selling was so successful that the numbers involved soon began to make the project unmanageable. Various personal responses in the letters to the enforcement of secrecy, the requirement of absolute obedience towards unidentified superiors and the cultivation of elitism within a strictly hierarchical structure, already contained the seeds of the Order's eventual destruction. The decrees against freemasonry and the Illuminati, to be passed by Carl Theodor, Electoral Prince of the Palatinate and Bavaria, in 1784 and 1785, were only the external catalyst.

The two volumes of the series are an invaluable, if as yet incomplete resource for a new refined and balanced evaluation of the original Order of the Illuminati, which might also provide answers to Markner's two unanswered questions. The 'Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft' is to be applauded for funding the research so far, but it is to be hoped that this sterling editorial work by three distinguished German scholars in the field will both continue, and continue to be funded, until completion.