
Johann Valentin Andreae has been as unlucky in his defenders as in his detractors. He became so dismayed by the reception of “Rosicrucianism” — he called it a *ludibrium*, a humorous plaything — that he spent much of his life distancing himself, becoming one of the first to repudiate the “vulgar alchemy and sectarian lunacy” thought to characterize the Brotherhood. Frances Yates’s *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (1972) no doubt caused him to rotate in the grave, and her sponsorship again obscured Andreae’s real aims and contribution to seventeenth-century intellectual and religious culture. Now he has the good fortune to be a central subject of this comprehensive reappraisal, which situates his life and work freshly in the complex webs of idealistic and purposeful brotherhoods and societies of early modern Europe. In a *tour de force* of scholarship, Donald R. Dickson reveals an extraordinary culture of intellectual and religious exchange, operating over decades and throughout Protestant Europe (and beyond, to the North American plantations), pursuing spiritual, social, and scientific betterment in, at times, acutely hostile circumstances.

*The Tessera of Antilia* investigates the activities of numerous remarkable societies and networks with persistence and sophistication, and it demonstrates their significance in the creation of some central institutions of the modern world. As well as drawing on extensive printed materials, Dickson has undertaken formidable research in major manuscript repositories. He cites extensively, and with the assurance of long familiarity, materials in German, Latin, and English. The difficulty of knitting together these collections of correspondence and exchanged tracts should be recognized, as should that of reconstructing the social and intellectual contexts of the correspondents. Even more impressive is the
measured care with which Dickson evaluates his subjects, neither denigrating nor
over-praising their more naïve enthusiasms, avoiding overstatement and over-simplification. He takes judicious notice of recent debates on the writing of intellectual and cultural history, and the result is scholarship that is both firm and subtle.

*The Tessera of Antilia* begins, indeed, by surveying the historiography of the Christian brotherhoods, societies, and academies of the seventeenth century and the difficulties scholars have had in representing accurately the interplay between secrecy and dissemination, science, the occult, and religion. The volume then turns to the career of Andreae himself and “the fable of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood.” In seeking to rescue Andreae from the more extreme enthusiasts for hermeticism, Dickson cannot tell a simple, black-and-white story, much as he might like to. The truth, as Andreae himself recognized, is that his relationship to the fable was complex and shifting. Having collaborated in the composition of the initial texts, Andreae rapidly reacted “against what the ‘secret brotherhood’ of the Rosicrucians had become in the public eye” (p. 40). Andreae was appalled when others took “Rosicrucianism” so seriously, their concerns distracting them from his utopian objectives. Throughout his life Andreae had to fight, never completely successfully, to establish his orthodoxy as a minister of the Lutheran reformed church. As Dickson persuasively demonstrates through his careful study of the reception of Rosicrucianism, and of Andreae’s attention to that reception, Andreae manipulated his own biography and carefully cultivated ambiguity in matters of authorship, always trying to separate himself from the damaging public conception of “Rosicrucianism” while salvaging the ideal of societies of like-minded and sustaining individuals, societies he believed held a key to the revitalization and renewal of Lutheran, irenicist Protestantism in the dark days of European conflict.

The first three chapters establish a more sophisticated narrative of Andreae’s life, demonstrate the fateful misunderstanding of “Rosicrucianism” from the very start, and depict Andreae’s interests and activities, emphasizing the centrality of religious and social reform. The final three chapters broaden to consider societies and individuals influenced by Andreae and the German idealistic societies and networks with which he was connected. The first demonstrates the pervasiveness of idealistic, often exclusive societies in Protestant Europe and their connections with the world of learning, particularly experimental science. In the second, Dickson considers the extraordinary contribution of Samuel Hartlib and the pan-European correspondence network of which he was the centre (including the key figures of John Dury and Jan Amos Komenski [Comenius]). Finally, Dickson considers “Utopian and Learned Societies in England in the 1650s.” Dickson’s masterful mapping of the overlapping societies and groupings and of the personal histories of their key members forms one of the best accounts to date of the immensely complex intellectual world of Protestant Europe in the mid-seventeenth century (a few conventional maps would have helped, it should be said). He demonstrates convincingly the connections between enthusiasm for religious and
social reform and the pursuit of scientific knowledge in the service of the amelioration of the human condition.

In an “Afterword” — “Philosophical and Mathematico-Mechanical King: Charles II and The Royal Society” — Dickson intervenes in the continuing debate concerning the origins of the Royal Society and thus the definition of “science” at the beginning of the modern world. Dickson rightly cautions that most accounts still take Thomas Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society* (1667) at close to face value, failing to give due weight to the Society’s embattled condition and Sprat’s polemical purpose. Close reading of the Society’s early activities reveals a shape to the conception of natural science that is markedly different from our own, the boundaries between “science” and “magic,” rational and irrational, not being where we place them, and sometimes not there at all. Dickson also contends that Sprat’s account disproportionately features the Oxford group of natural scientists, while marginalizing others, in the period before 1660, giving a misleading impression of the original agenda of the Royal Society and its members.

Perhaps the least satisfactory thing about *The Tessera of Antilia* is its title — “tessera”? . . . “Antilia”? These words smack of arcana and the heterodox — ironically, what Andreae sought for so long to escape. Despite euphony and ample justification for the phrase, one wonders how many potential readers will not bother to reach for their dictionaries and encyclopedias. Any deterrence would be a shame, for *The Tessera of Antilia* is an important contribution to seventeenth-century studies. It reinforces the need to look beyond the famous names and recognize the dense and complex networks of those participating in the political, social, religious, and intellectual ferments of the day.

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D’emblée, le nouveau livre de Dominique de Courcelles retient l’attention, par son titre qui met en relation la mystique et la modernité, et par la diversité des auteurs convoqués dans cette étude, de la Flamande du XIIIe siècle Hadewijch d’Anvers à Michel de Cervantes. La thèse soutenue dans ces pages est qu’il y a une continuité intellectuelle entre les mystiques et le fondateur du roman moderne. Parallèlement au savoir structuré par les grandes sommes de la scolastique latine, les mystiques fondent en langue vernaculaire une théologie originale, où Courcelles n’hésite pas à voir un existentialisme avant la lettre. Leurs écrits bouleversent les fondements de la pensée chrétienne. Dans leur sillage, Cervantes, laïc, à la fois homme de plume et d’épée, propose un art d’écrire la parole castillane qui est en même temps activité philosophique. Après un rappel du rôle inaugural d’Augustin, sont analysées tour à tour l’action et l’écriture de Hadewijch, Raymond Lulle, Catherine de Sienne, Juan de Valdés, Thérèse d’Avila, Jean de la Croix, pour conclure sur