



FACULTEIT DER GEESTESWETENSCHAPPEN
Afdeling Kunst-, Religie- en Cultuurwetenschappen

**HISTORY OF HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY
AND RELATED CURRENTS**

REPORT 2012



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1. Introduction

This year was marked by several short-term and longer-term personnel changes. Dr. Justin Sausman (UK) stepped in for one semester, teaching Marco Pasi's MA course "Occult Trajectories" during the latter's NIAS research fellowship (January-June). Tessel Bauduin's PhD appointment ended in January and she defended her dissertation on December 20, thereby becoming the second PhD produced by our program; and she also stepped in to teach Marco Pasi's BA course "Westerse esoterie in de vroeg-moderne periode". Egil Asprem's PhD appointment ended on September 1 and he was admitted to the defense of his dissertation on February 5, 2013. Thanks to a generous gesture by the vice-dean of the Faculty of Humanities, it proved possible to extend his position for the rest of the year, so as to allow him to prepare several funding applications for postdoctoral research. In case his pending application for an NWO *Veni* scholarship is successful, this will allow Asprem to continue working at GHF as a postdoc. The board of the Foundation GHF agreed to "match" Asprem's extended salary for the period of January through April 2013, during which he is put in charge of coordinating the new GHF website, which is being built by a small company called MIAX and is expected to go online in April or May 2013. Finally, two new PhD candidates were appointed as of September 1: Mike A. Zuber (Switzerland) and J. Christian Greer (U.S.A.).

Teaching and research have continued as normal. A point of concern is the noticeable decline in the number of students, particularly international students. Partly this is the reflection of a trend that can be observed in the Humanities generally, due to the effects of the financial crisis combined with political decisions that are currently affecting higher education not just in the Netherlands but internationally; and partly it can be attributed to the successful expansion of the study of Western esotericism to other universities than the University of Amsterdam, resulting in increasing competition from e.g. the University of Groningen (Kocku von Stuckrad), the University of Gothenburg (Henrik Bogdan), or Rice University in the U.S.A. (Jeffrey J. Kripal, April DeConick, Claire Fanger, Brian Ogren, William B. Parsons). We are now taking initiatives to increase our



visibility, e.g. by organizing more public events and, most importantly, modernizing the website and making efficient use of the new opportunities offered by social media.

2. Personnel

As mentioned under 1, two new PhD candidates have joined GHF.

Mike A. Zuber (b. 1987, Switzerland) obtained his B.A. in English and German Philology from the University of Basel and his M.A. History of and Philosophy of Knowledge from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zürich. Ph.D. research project:

J. Christian Greer (b. 1983, U.S.A.) obtained his B.A. in Religious Studies from Boston University, his M.A. History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents from our program at the University of Amsterdam, and a M.Div. Religious Studies from Harvard Divinity School. Ph.D. research project:

2. Teaching: Program and Levels of Participation

2nd semester 2011-2012

Bachelor

Hermetica II: Westerse Esoterie in de Oudheid en de Middeleeuwen (D. Waarsenburg). 8 students

Hermetica IV: Westerse Esoterie sinds de Verlichting (T. Bauduin). 15 students

Master

Occult Trajectories II (J. Sausman), 9 students

1st semester 2012-2013

Bachelor



Westerse Esoterie en Religieus Pluralisme (W.J. Hanegraaff). 53 students

Westerse esoterie in de vroeg-moderne periode (P.J. Forshaw). 12 students

Master

Contested Knowledge I: Gnosis and Alterations of Consciousness (W.J. Hanegraaff). 11 students

Renaissance Esotericism I (P.J. Forshaw). 9 students

Other teaching

rMA Core Module Methods and Theory in the Study of Religion (M. Pasi, coord.). 4 students

rMA Core Module Polemics on Religion and the Politics of Religious Identity (P.J. Forshaw, G. Wiegers). 4 students.

4. Research

4.1. Research Program

New Projects:

J. Christian Greer

Countercultural Esotericism:

The Popularization of Esoteric Discourses in North America Between 1950-1970.

In mapping the ways in which a close knit countercultural elite – specifically Alan Watts, William Burroughs, and Timothy Leary – confronted, evaded, and eventually overturned both literary censorship in America and cultural taboos in general, this project investigates the question of how the historically situated interplay of esoteric discourses in 1950s North America created the conditions for a mass popularization of esoteric discourse that would blossom into the cultural paradigm shifts of the 1960s and beyond.

Mike A. Zuber



Theosophical Alchemy in the Early Eighteenth Century

Considering recent developments in the historical study of alchemy, this project seeks to shed light on the relation between alchemy and religion by investigating ‘theosophical alchemy’. This term refers to the phenomenon of iatrochemical and transmutational alchemy combined with Jacob Boehme’s speculative theosophy and natural philosophy, as well as radical Pietist and Philadelphian notions of faith and spirituality, including doctrines such as millenarianism and universal reconciliation. Around 1700, various factors led to a revival of what has been called ‘theo-alchemy’, which saw its first heyday among Paracelsians and Rosicrucians in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries: the wider availability of Boehme’s works (from 1682), the spread of Pietism (esp. from 1689/90), and the Amsterdam-based dissemination of Philadelphian works in German translation (around 1700). These developments led alchemists—such as Johann Conrad Dippel (d. 1734, Johann Philipp Maul (d. 1727), Georg von Welling (d. 1727) and the mysterious Sincerus Renatus (fl. 1700s; Samuel or Siegmund Richter)—to innovate in ways distinctly at odds with models of scientific chemistry, developed in London, Leiden and Paris around the same time. The attempts of these pious alchemists to bridge the widening gap between science and religion (heightened, for instance, through deism and Cartesian dualism) represent an important but untold story that will contribute to a deeper understanding of the Janus face of the early Enlightenment.

4.2. Research Output.

Egil Aspren

Arguing with Angels: Enochian Magic and Modern Occulture, Albany: State University of New York Press.

“Parapsykologi.” In: Kjetil Hope & Mona Hide Klausen (ed.), *Skepsis: Guide til kritisk tenkning*, Oslo: Humanist forlag, 184-198.

Review of: Heather Wolfram, *The Stepchildren of Science: Psychical Research and Parapsychology in Germany, c. 1870-1939*. *Aries* 12:2, 281-302.



Review of: Marco Pasi, Kocku von Stuckrad & Boaz Huss (eds.), *Kabbalah and Modernity: Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations. Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 7:1, 99-104.

Tessel M. Bauduin

The Occultation of Surrealism: A Study of the Relationship between Bretonian Surrealism and Western Esotericism, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, <http://dare.uva.nl/record/433563>.

“Science, Occultism, and the Art of the Avant-Garde in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 5:1, 23-55.

“Modern Art Revisited: A Fascination for the Occult,” *all-over: Magazin für Kunst und Ästhetik* 2, 44-51

“Claude Cahun,” *Photography & Culture* 5:2, 239-242.

“Gemeentemuseum Den Haag: Mondriaan en De Stijl, nieuwe permanente tentoonstelling.” *De Witte Raaf* 26 (155), Ondertussen, 8.

Review of: June Leavitt, *Esoteric Symbols: The Tarot in Yeats, Eliot, and Kafka*. *Aries* 12:2, 288-290.

Peter J. Forshaw

Review of: Peter J. Grund, *Misticall Wordes and Names Infinite: An Edition and Study of Humfrey Lock's Treatise on Alchemy*. *Isis* 103:3, 575-577.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

“Западный эзотеризм: следующее поколение,” *Aliter* 1, 7-24.

“Entheogenic Esotericism,” in: Egil Asprem & Kennet Granholm (eds.), *Contemporary Esotericism*, Sheffield: Equinox, 392-409.

“Western Esotericism: The Next Generation,” in: Sergey Pakhomov (ed.), *Mystic and Esoteric Movements in Theory and Practice, Fifth International Conference: History and Discourse, Historical and Philosophical Aspects of the Study of Esotericism and Mysticism*, St. Petersburg: Russian Christian Academy for Humanities, 113-129.

“Foreword: Bringing Light to the Underground,” in: Henrik Bogdan & Martin P. Starr (eds.), *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, vii-x.



“Imagining the Unconscious,” Review article of Angus Nicholls & Martin Liebscher (eds.), *Thinking the Unconscious: Nineteenth-Century German Thought. Intellectual History Review* 22, 563-568.

“Schöpfung und Zerstörung: Bemerkungen zum Geheimnis der Esoterikforschung,” *Gnostika* 50, 20-23.

“Per aspera ad fontes,” *Pentagram* 34:1, 18-25.

Review of: Kocku von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities. Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 66:1, 72-73.

Review of: Monika Neugebauer-Wölk (ed.), *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Rezeption, Integration, Konfrontation. Aries*, 12:1, 181-185.

Marco Pasi

“September 1930, Lisbon: Aleister Crowley’s Lost Diary of his Portuguese Trip, *Pessoa Plural* 1, 254-285.

[with P. Ferrari] “Fernando Pessoa and Aleister Crowley: New Discoveries and a New Analysis of the Documents in the Gerald Yorke Collection,” *Pessoa Plural* 1, 286-317.

“Homo Oeconomicus: Humanwissenschaften und Esoterikforschung,” *Gnostika* 50, 25-29.

“Varieties of Magical Experience: Aleister Crowley’s Views on Occult Practice,” in: Henrik Bogdan & Martin P. Starr (eds.), *Aleister Crowley: An Anthology of Essays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 53-87.

“Aleister Crowley in Cefalu: The Works from the Palermo Collection,” in: R. Buratti (ed.), *The Nightmare Paintings: Aleister Crowley, Works from the Palermo Collection*, North Fremantle (Australia): Buratti Fine Art.

“Sympathy for the Invisible,” in: J. Koester (ed.), *I Myself am only a Receiving Apparatus* (pp. 171-182). Amsterdam - Hanover - Köln: If I Can’t Dance, I Don’t Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, Kerstnergesellschaft, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 171-182.

Joyce Pijnenburg

“Does Woman Exist? Agrippa von Nettesheim and Slavoj Žižek on Women and (their) Presence,” 25 Oktober. <http://www.ritmanlibrary.com/2012/10/does-woman-exist-agrippa-von-nettesheim-and-slavoj-zizek-on-women-and-their-presence/>



5. Public Activities

Egil Asprem

Lectures

“Religion and Scientific Change: The Case of the New Natural Theologies between the World Wars.” Spui25, Amsterdam / Illustere School, April 12.

[with M.K. Granholm] “Esotericism and Sociology: Some Preliminary Considerations.” *Ends And Beginnings: Annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religion*, Södertörn University, Sweden, August 24.

[with M.K. Granholm] “Opening address.” *1st International Conference on Contemporary Esotericism*, Stockholm University, August 27.

Conference Organization

[with M.K. Granholm], *1st International Conference on Contemporary Esotericism*, Stockholm University, August 27-29.

Panel “European Identity Politics and the Memory of Paganism.” *Regimes of Religious Pluralism in the 20th Century*, Amsterdam, April 20.

Tessel M. Bauduin

Lecture

“On ‘the Spiritual’ in Modern Art. Two Case Studies: Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian.” *Centenary and Impact of Kandinsky's Book Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, University of Leiden, September 21.

Peter J. Forshaw

Lectures

“As Above, So Below: Medieval and Early Modern Conjunctions of Astrology and Alchemy,” Guest lecture at *EMPHASIS*, London, 4 February.

“Professing Esotericism? Scholars, Students, Practitioners and the Idea of a Holistic Curriculum,” *4th Israeli Conference for the Study of Contemporary Spiritualities*, Invited Speaker, University of Haifa, Israel, 20 March.

“Chymical Cabala: Early Modern Permutations in the Book of Nature,” *2nd Annual INASWE Conference, Lux et Tenebrae: Scientific and Demonic Dimensions of Western Esotericism*, Keynote Lecture, University of Haifa, Israel 22 March 2012.



“Utterly unphilosophically, they separate the Oratory and Laboratory!': An Early Modern Theosophical Alchemist on Christ and the Philosophers' Stone,” Conference *From Alchemy to Chemistry*, Invited Speaker, University of Galway, 13 April.

“Amulets, Seals and Talismans in Early Modern Europe,” Conference *The Materiality of Magic*, Invited Speaker, Internationales Kolleg Morphomata, University of Cologne, 23-25 May.

“Morbo spirituali medicina spiritualis convenit': Paracelsians, Madness, and Spirits,” *Purgatio Spiritus: Banishment and Purification of the Spirits in the Sixteenth Century*, Invited Speaker, University of Tübingen, 5-7 October.

“Words of Hermes - Alchemy of the Word,” *Poëzie en Bezwinging*, Invited Public Lecture, Perdu, Amsterdam, 12 October.

“Early Modern Alchemy and the Hermetic Worldview,” *Alchemy on the Amstel*, Invited Speaker, Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam, 19 November.

“Why Study Western Esotericism - And How Should We Do It?“, Invited Public Lecture, University of Gothenburg, 27 November.

Radio Interview

“Alchemy & the Ripley Scroll,” BBC Radio 3, *Night Waves*, 25 April.

Webinars

“Infinite Fire Webinar Series - Introduction,” *Hermetically Open*, in collaboration with the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam, 2 September.

“The Alchemy of the *Amphitheatrum*,” *Hermetically Open*, in collaboration with the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam, 19 October.

“The Emblemata of the *Atalanta Fugiens*,” *Hermetically Open*, in collaboration with the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam, 30 November.

Workshop Organization

ESSWE Magic Thesis Workshop, University of Amsterdam, 6 July.

J. Christian Greer

Lectures

“Not opium of the Masses but Marijuana of the Lunatic Fringe: Discordianism and its Material History.” *Ends And Beginnings: Annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religion*, Södertörn University, Sweden, 25 August.



“Bob was a Futurist and I am a Luddite: Intersections of Esoteric Anarchism and Anarchist Esotericism between Robert Anton Wilson and Peter Lamborn Wilson.” *1st International Conference on Contemporary Esotericism*, Stockholm University, 27 August.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

Lectures

“How Hermetic was Renaissance Hermetism?” Invited Public Lecture, Singleton Center for Premodern Europe, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, U.S.A., February 13.

“The Dialectics of Eranos Religionism: Gershom Scholem, Henry Corbin, and Mircea Eliade.” Invited Public Lecture, Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University, February 16.

“‘Rejected Knowledge’ en de geschiedenis van de filosofie.” Invited public lecture, Department of Philosophy, University of Groningen, February 29.

“The Cultural Roots of Resistance against Paganism and Entheogenic Shamanism.” *Our Magical Mind: Paganism and Neo-Shamanic Ritual, its Function in Mind, Society, and our Technological Future*, Behavioural Science Institute, Medical Faculty, Radboud University Nijmegen, March 20.

“Justinus Kerner and the Seeress of Prevorst.” Lichtenberg Kolleg, University of Göttingen, Germany, 22 May 2012.

“Will-Erich Peuckert’s Memories of a Magician.” *Trance and Folklore*, Workshop at the University of Siegen, Germany, June 22.

“Historiography versus Mnemohistoriography: The Case of Renaissance Hermetism.” *Results and Desiderata of the Study and Documentation of the European Mnemohistory of Ancient Egypt*, Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Germany, June 28-29.

“Response.” Session “The Beginning and End of Esotericism? A Discussion of W.J. Hanegraaff’s Book *Esotericism and the Academy*.” *Ends and Beginnings: Annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions*, Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden, August 23-26.

“Entheogenic Esotericism.” *1st International Conference on Contemporary Esotericism*, Stockholm University, Sweden, August 27-29.

“Stefan George and Mythical Paganism.” Internationale Tagung *Stefan George und die Religion*, Universität Bielefeld, Bingen am Rhein, Germany, October 19-21.

“Entheogens and Contemporary Religion.” *Interdisciplinary Conference on Psychedelic Research*, OPEN Foundation, Amsterdam, October 6-7.



“The Exclusion of Altered States in Western Rationality.” *Interdisciplinary Conference on Psychedelic Research*, OPEN Foundation, Amsterdam, October 6-7.

“Heidense Christenen, Protestantse Exorcisten, en Obscure Verlichters”, Amsterdamse Alumni Vereniging (AUV), Study Day, November 3.

“Platonic Orientalism.” Expert Meeting *Testing the Limits* (Fault Line 1700: Early Enlightenment Conversations on Religion and the State), University of Utrecht, December 3.

Marco Pasi

Lectures

“Um grande além mago e mudo: Fernando Pessoa and Esotericism.” Oporto meeting of *Ouvroir d’Univers Potentiels* (OuUnPo), Casa da Musica, Oporto, Portugal, 4 April.

“The Depths of a Purple Sea.” Public talk about Vincent Verhoef’s art exhibition “The Depths of a Purple Sea”, Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam, 5 May.

“Franc-maçonnerie et ésotérisme chez Fernando Pessoa.” Lecture series *Présence de l’ésotérisme chrétien dans la franc-maçonnerie II*, organized by the Groupe de Recherche et d’Étude des Mouvements Maçonniques et Ésotériques (GREMME), Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium, 8 May.

“Fernando Pessoa and the Study of Western Esotericism: Problems and Perspectives.” Conference *Fernando Pessoa and the Esoteric Experience*, Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS), Wassenaar, 23 May.

“The Historical Study of Western Esotericism: An Introduction.” Invited Lecture, University of Graz, Austria, 5 June.

“Esoterismo, nazionalismo ed elezionismo fra Otto e Novecento.” Conference *Popoli eletti: Storia di un viaggio oltre la storia*, Università Ca’ Foscari, Venice, , 27 June.

“Lea Porsager, Occultism and Contemporary Art.” Lecture at the *Anational Congress of the Multi-Breasted Monstrosity*, organized by Lea Porsager for dOCUMENTA13, Kassel, Germany, 26 Juli.

“Bodily Fluids and Contemporary Art.” Copenhagen Art Festival, Copenhagen, Denmark, 30 August.

“Ésotérisme occidental et orientalisme: À l’origine de la notion d’ ésotérisme occidental.” Invited lecture in the framework of the Erasmus exchange program, University of Lausanne, Switzerland, 12 November.



“The Anatta Experiment.” Public talk with artist Lea Porsager, organized by Kunsthuis SYB at Kunstvlaai, Amsterdam, 1 December.

“Fernando Pessoa and Western Esotericism.” Public lecture for the research group “Religious Dynamics and Cultural Diversity”, University of Amsterdam, 7 December.

“I Myself Am Only A Receiving Apparatus.” Public talk with artist Joachim Koester for the book launch of his book *I Myself Am Only A Receiving Apparatus*, organized by “If I can’t dance”, Goethe Institute, Amsterdam, 17 December.

Conference Organization

Fernando Pessoa and the Esoteric Experience. Conference, Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS), Wassenaar, 23 May.

Panel for the “Western Esotericism” group at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Chicago, USA, 18 November.

“The Beginning and End of Esotericism? A Discussion of W.J. Hanegraaff’s Book *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture.*” Panel at the annual conference of the European Association for the Study of Religion (EASR), University of Stockholm, 25 August.

Joyce Pijnenburg

Lecture

“Moed, magie en moderniteit: Giordano Bruno’s antwoord op een zich verwijderende God.” Vrije Gemeente Amsterdam, 1 April.

Mike A. Zuber

Lecture / Conference participation

“Alchemical Characters, Ancient Wisdom and the True Nature of Laboratory Substances.” *Representing Alchemy and Chemistry: Postgraduate Workshop*, Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry, University of Cambridge, 26 September.

Invited participant, *1. Gothaer Sommerseminar: Alchemische Handschriften und Drucke der Frühen Neuzeit.* Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Universität Erfurt, 10-14 September.

6. Editorial Activities

Peter J. Forshaw

(editor in chief) *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism.* Leiden/Boston: Brill.



(editorial board) *Ambix: Journal of the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry*.
London/Boston: Maney.

(advisory board) *Magic, Science, & Witchcraft*

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

(editorial board) *Religion*. Elsevier.

(editorial board) *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*. Leiden / Boston: Brill.

(editorial board) *Aries Book Series: Texts and Studies in Western Esotericism*. Leiden /
Boston: Brill.

(editorial board) *Religion Compass*, Section "New Religions".

<http://www.blackwell-compass.com/subject/religion/>

(advisory board) *Esoterica* <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu>

(advisory board) *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. Carfax

(advisory board) (2008). *Gnostica Series*. London: Equinox Publ.

Marco Pasi

(editor) *Aries Book Series: Texts and Studies in Western Esotericism*. Leiden / Boston: Brill.

(editorial board) *Politica Hermetica*.

(editorial board) *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*.

(editorial board) *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*.

(advisory board) *Secretum: Scienze, saperi, forme di cultura*.

7. Other

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

Research Fellowship Lichtenberg Kolleg, University of Göttingen (Germany), April-June.

Marco Pasi

Research Fellowship Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS), January-June.