



FACULTEIT DER GEESTESWETENSCHAPPEN
Afdeling Kunst-, Religie- en Cultuurwetenschappen

**HISTORY OF HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY
AND RELATED CURRENTS**

REPORT 2011



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1. Introduction

There have been no major or structural changes. The crisis of the *Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica* has continued to be a source of great concern during this year.

2. Personnel

Due to the crisis of the *Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica*, Joyce Pijnenburg (who was already formally connected to the UvA as “recognized external Ph.D. candidate”) lost the BPH’s financial support for her Ph.D. research project on Giordano Bruno and the *Lampas triginta statuarum*. The research Institute for Culture and History has been so kind as to make use of the Matching Fund to solve this situation by appointing her as Ph.D. candidate at the Faculty of Humanities for the remainder of the research period. Osvald Vasicek’s period of appointment as Ph.D. candidate has come to an end as per 1 september 2011.

2. Teaching: Program and Levels of Participation

2nd semester 2010-2011

Bachelor

Hermetica II: Westerse Esoterie in de Oudheid en de Middeleeuwen (D. Waarsenburg). 11 students

Hermetica IV: Westerse Esoterie sinds de Verlichting (M. Pasi). 13 students

Master

Occult Trajectories I: Western Esotericism between East and West (M. Pasi, E. Asprem), 12 students

1st semester 2011-2012



Bachelor

Hermetica I: Inleiding Westerse esoterie (W.J. Hanegraaff). 80 students

Hermetica III: Westerse esoterie in de vroeg-moderne periode (P.J. Forshaw). 16 students

Master

Contested Knowledge I: Cosmotheism and Disenchantment (W.J. Hanegraaff). 14 students

Renaissance Esotericism I: Occult Philosophies (P.J. Forshaw). 13 students

Other teaching

Core Module Methods and Theory in the Study of Religion (M. Pasi, coord.). 8 students

Core Module Polemics on Religion and the Politics of Religious Identity (P.J. Forshaw, G. Wiegers). 7 students

4. Research

4.1. Research Program

As announced in the previous report, the research of GHF has been integrated in the new ICG/ASCA research program “Religious Dynamics and Cultural Diversity”. The following research projects are now running:

Egil Asprem

Esotericism and Scientific Naturalism in the 20th Century: Dialogue and Polemics

This research project takes the Weberian notion of *Entzauberung* (“disenchantment”) as a starting point for analysing relations between the natural sciences, religion, and esoteric discourses in early 20th century intellectual culture. While Weber famously stated that all “mysterious incalculable forces” had vanished from the world partially as a result of modern science, his colleagues in biology, chemistry, and physics were forced to think twice about central concepts such as causality and mechanism. And while



Weber saw a distinct chasm between science and religion, requiring the religious believer to make not only a jump of faith, but also an “intellectual sacrifice” of scientific rationality, new types of “natural theology” were being formulated by European academics in the first decades of the century, significantly influencing modern religious thought. Suggesting that disenchantment was an intellectual *problem* rather than an irrevocable *process*, this research project looks at a series of responses in the period from 1900-1939, that cut across cultural spheres from the natural sciences to the study of “psychic phenomena,” from academic and popular philosophy to “the occult.”

Tessel M. Bauduin

The Occultation of Surrealism: A Study of French Surrealism and Occultism

French Surrealism has often been linked with occultism, or with western esotericism more generally. This has been fuelled by Surrealism itself; for example, in his *Second Manifesto*, surrealist front-man André Breton demanded “a veritable and profound occultation” of Surrealism. But what, in fact, does such “occultation” entail? This Ph.D. research project investigates why connections between Surrealism and occultism or esotericism have been made, on what they have been based, and further, what the associations of Surrealism with occult or esoteric trends such as spiritism, alchemy, or magic in fact imply.

Peter J. Forshaw

Christian Cabala in the Early Modern Period

The goal of this project is to write a study of Christian Cabala in the early modern period that will provide a sound foundation for students unfamiliar with the subject and at the same time be of interest to specialists in the history of esotericism. From a brief introduction to Jewish Kabbalah, the work then investigates, for example, the Genesis of Christian Cabala; the presence of Cabala in occult philosophy and practical magical treatises; the impact of Cabala on alchemical theory and practice; the new wave of Lurianic Kabbalah; Kircher’s Saracenic Cabala; critical responses, including Colberg’s condemnation of Cabala as ‘Fanatic Theology’ and Brucker’s ruminations in *Historia critica philosophiae*.

Ora et Labora: Alchemy and Religion

The “New Historiography of Alchemy” rejects a monolithic view of the subject, recognising the rich variety of approaches by which practitioners from many schools of thought competed and coexisted. In the process of challenging earlier representations of alchemy, however, there has been a reaction against late nineteenth- and twentieth-century spiritualised or psychologised interpretations of alchemical endeavour. This project investigates the relations between alchemical and religious thought in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. The focus is on the Christian West, though, as alchemical texts contain a great deal of material from earlier periods, the intended monograph and articles will include a fresh historical-critical appraisal of evidence from the middle ages and antiquity, including relevant Greek, Arabic and Hebrew sources. Research themes include: exegesis, images, vision and revelation, confessional identities, “spiritual,” “supernatural” and “theosophical” alchemy and “the experience of transmutation.”



Wouter J. Hanegraaff

A Guide to the Study of Western Esotericism

The goal of this project is to write a short and accessible guide that will help academic teachers and students in various disciplines of the humanities to find their way in the contemporary study of Western esotericism, and make it easier for them to differentiate between reliable and unreliable information in this domain. In ca. 150 pages the reader will be introduced to the main historical currents and themes that belong to the field, its relevance from the perspectives of the main disciplines in the humanities, theoretical and methodological approaches, problem areas and controversial aspects, and so on. The book will contain a bibliographical guide that will help students and teachers in finding reliable literature, an overview of relevant academic organizations and study programs, and a list of online resources with commentary. The book will be published by Continuum Press as *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed*.

German Romantic Mesmerism and the Nightside of Nature

This project will focus on the reception of Mesmerism in German Romanticism, with central attention to the neglected key figure of Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert (1780-1860), the author of *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft* (1808), *Die Symbolik des Traums* (1814) and *Die Geschichte der Seele* (1830). Schubert's concept of "the nightside of nature" became central to the novel conceptualizations of Mesmerist somnambulism by a range of contemporary authors, such as Justinus Kerner, A.K.A. Eschenmayer, and Franz von Baader. At least since Henri Ellenberger's pioneering *Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970), it has been known to specialists that the foundations of modern psychology were created in this German Romantic mesmerist context, but an in-depth study is still missing; and especially in the English-speaking domain, virtually no reliable studies have been published after Ellenberger. The goal of this project is to fill that hiatus.

Marco Pasi

The Problem of Magic in Western Culture after the Enlightenment

This project focuses on the role played by the idea of magic in modern, post-Enlightenment Western culture. Few concepts have such a complex history as that of magic. Since its earliest use in classical Antiquity, it has often been used to designate ideas and/or behaviours perceived as dangerous, illicit, and exotic. During the Enlightenment, magic was equated with superstition, and it was understood that, with the forthcoming emancipation of humanity from the shadows of ignorance, it would soon disappear. The prediction, which was seen as self-evident throughout the 19th and the 20th centuries by generations of historians, anthropologists and sociologists, has been far from fulfilled. Magic has survived well into our contemporary, supposedly secular age and is still alive and well today. This research project aims at investigating the ways in which and the reasons why this "survival" has been made possible.

Fernando Pessoa and Esotericism

This project will focus on the influence of western esotericism in the work of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935). Pessoa has been long recognised as one of the most significant figures in 20th century literature worldwide. However, and unlike other similar cases such as William Butler Yeats, his deep fascination for esoteric ideas remains largely unexplored territory. Very little has been published on this subject,



especially in languages other than Portuguese. This project aims at a careful study of Pessoa's esoteric writings in view of a critical edition of the same and the production of a monograph on the subject. This project will also benefit from a resident fellowship of six months at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS).

Joyce Pijnenburg

Giordano Bruno's *Lampas Triginta Statuarum* (LTS), its Place in his Oeuvre and Time.

Giordano Bruno's *Lampas Triginta Statuarum* (LTS), its Place in his Oeuvre and Time Bruno's later works from his so-called 'German period' (1586-1591), primarily LTS, display a renewed metaphysics and epistemology. These are identified in this dissertation as effects of the metaphysical crisis enhanced by his acceptance of heliocentrism and the concomitant infinity of the universe. These new foundations of philosophy, which gave room for innovative appropriations of Neoplatonism and Hermeticism, informed Bruno's ideas about science and nature as well as his system of memory and classification of knowledge. This Ph.D. research project describes Bruno's LTS in detail, focusing on its metaphysics, epistemology and use of imagery. These will be placed in the context of the philosopher's works, especially the later ones. The study will also reveal aspects of Bruno's "modernity" and his influence on and from the German intellectual culture he found himself in in late 1580s and early 1590s.

Osvald Vasicek

Kabbalistic Language and Christian Signification: Reuchlin's "Ars Cabalistica" as a Semiotic Process of Deificatio

This is a study of the philosophical structure of Reuchlin's *ars cabalistica* and its historical implications, as it is presented in *De verbo mirifico* (1494) and *De arte cabalistica* (1517). The central focus is the relation between the form of presentation (Kabbalistic language and symbolism) and its content (Christian philosophy and theology). Being a participant in the contemporary discourse about the *prisca theologia*, Reuchlin used new expressions for more traditional and conventional Christian dogmas and ideas. This study will analyze the dynamics of this presentation using modern semiotic theories (Eco, Barthes, Lacan) as a reading tool and conceptual framework. The translation into modern language will deepen the understanding of these historical texts, making them more accessible to the modern reader. As such, this study will not only present a new discussion of Reuchlin's work, but also a new approach of historical material.

4.2. Research Output.

Egil Aspren

"Pondering Imponderables: Occultism in the Mirror of Late Classical Physics," *Aries* 11:2, 129-165.



Review of: Mark S. Morrisson, *Modern Alchemy: Occultism and the Emergence of Atomic Theory*, Oxford University Press 2007, *Aries* 11:1, 110-114.

Review of: Tore Ahlbäck & Björn Dahla (eds.), *Western Esotericism: Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Western Esotericism, Held at Åbo, Finland, on 15-17 August 2007*, Donner Institute: Abo 2008, *Aries* 11:2, 259-283.

Tessel M. Bauduin

“Van dada tot surrealisme: Joodse avant-gardekunstenaars uit Roemenië,” *De Witte Raaf* 26, 6-7.

Peter J. Forshaw

(with Stephen Clucas & Valerie Rees, ed.), *Laus Platonici Philosophi: Marsilio Ficino and his Influence*, Brill: Leiden.

“Marsilio Ficino and the Alchemical Art,” in: Stephen Clucas, Peter J. Forshaw & Valerie Rees (eds.), *Laus Platonici Philosophi: Marsilio Ficino and his Influence*, Brill: Leiden, 249-271.

“Behold, the Dreamer Cometh: Hyperphysical Magic and Deific Visions in an Early Modern Lab-Oratory,” in: J. Raymond (ed.), *Conversations with Angels: Essays Towards a History of Spiritual Communication, 1100-1700*, Palgrave MacMillan: Basingstoke, 175-200.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

(with Jeffrey J. Kripal, ed.), *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, Fordham University Press: New York.

“Joseph Ennemoser and Magnetic Historiography,” *Politica Hermetica* 25, 65-83.

“Teaching Experiential Dimensions of Western Esotericism,” in: William B. Parsons (ed.), *Teaching Mysticism*, Oxford University Press, 154-169.

“Kabbalah in *Gnosis* magazine (1985-1999),” in: Boaz Huss (ed.), *Kabbalah and Contemporary Spiritual Revival*, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press: Beer-Sheva, 251-266.

“Ayahuasca Groups and Networks in the Netherlands: A Challenge to the Study of Contemporary Religion,” in: Beatriz Caiuby Labate & Henrik Jungaberle (eds.), *The Internationalization of Ayahuasca*, Lit: Zürich / Berlin, 85-103.

“Prospects for the Globalization of New Age: Spiritual Imperialism versus Cultural Diversity,” repr. in Véronique Altglas (ed.), *Religion and Globalization: Critical Concepts in*



Social Studies, vol. II, Routledge: London, 15 pp. (n.p.).

Marco Pasi

“Varieties of Magical Experience: Aleister Crowley’s Views on Occult Practice,” *Magic, Ritual & Witchcraft* 6:2, 123-162.

“Anges gardiens et esprits familiers dans le spiritisme et dans l’occultisme,” in: Jean-Patrice Boudet (ed.), *De Socrate à Tintin: Anges gardiens et démons familiers de l’Antiquité à nos jours*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 249-265.

“Breaking through to the Other Side: Contemporary Art and the Occult,” in: *Opening Rijksakademie International Residency 2011*, Amsterdam: Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten: Amsterdam, 3-13.

5. Further Activities

5.1. Lectures and Conference Participation

Egil Asprem

“Blind Spots of Disenchantment: Science, Psychological Research, and Natural Theology in the Early 20th Century,” Lecture given to a Master Class with Peter Burke, Huizinga Instituut. Amsterdam, 5 April.

“Blind Spots of Disenchantment: Science, Psychological Research, and Natural Theology in the Early 20th Century.” Barchem Symposium, Huizinga Instituut, Barchem, 11 April.

“Enchantment, Emergence, and the Vital Force: Where Weber Was Wrong.” Conference “Sciences, Fables et Chimères: Croisements.” Museum d’Histoire Naturelle, Toulouse, 10 June.

“Visions Beyond Sight: Representational Practices in Science and Esotericism c. 1900.” European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism, 3rd Biannual Conference, Szeged (Hungary), July 6-10.

“Ateistisk samtidsreligion: Sam Harris som nyreligiøs talsperson.” FINYAR conference, Sigruna (Sweden), 27 October.

“Deus ex Machina: On Technofetishism.” Annual Conference of the American Academy of Religion, San Francisco (USA), 21 November.

Peter J. Forshaw



“Kabbalah and Early Modern Alchemy.” EXESES Study Conference, University of Exeter (England), 26 March.

“Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century,” EXESES Study Conference, University of Exeter, 27 March.

“Heinrich Khunrath and the *Tabulae Theosophiae Cabbalisticae*.” Colloquium der Forschergruppe Topik und Tradition, Free University Berlin (Germany), 20 May.

“Emerging or Merging? Esotericism in the Amphitheatre,” Palladian Academy, Taurenne (France), 1 July.

“Artist & Athlete of Fire: Heinrich Khunrath on the Symbolic Harmony of Christ and the Philosophers’ Stone.” Lux in Tenebris, The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism. 3rd Biannual Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism, University of Szeged (Hungary), 7 July.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

“Superstition - Magic - Occult: The Enlightenment Reinvention of an Unholy Trinity.” Conference Magic and Mysticism: Contested Terms, Material Objects, and Charismatic Figures, Ohio State University, Ohio (U.S.A.), 24 February.

“Esotericism and Hermeticism: The Organization of Secrecy.” Arbeitstagung “Hermetik: Pflicht- oder Kürprogramm der Freimaurerei?”, Quatuor Coronati Nr. 808, Berlin (Germany), 12 March.

“Constructing the Pagan Other: Platonic Orientalism and Western Identities.” Colloquium “Conceptualization (Other) Religions(s),” INTEGON, Religious Studies and Theology, University of Utrecht, 7 April.

“The Archetype of Eranos: Carl Gustav Jung and Western Esotericism.” Keynote Lecture Conference “Western Esotericism: Historical Contexts & Cultural Contacts”, Inaugural Conference of the Israeli Network for the Study of Western Esotericism, University of Beer Sheva (Israel), 18 May.

“The Dialectics of Eranos Religionism: Gershom Scholem, Henry Corbin, and Mircea Eliade.” Public Lecture Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem (Israel), 19 May.

“Ayahuasca and the Study of Religion.” European Ayahuasca Research Symposium. Stichting OPEN, University of Amsterdam, 17 June.

“President’s Address.” 3rd Biannual Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism, University of Szeged (Hungary), 6 July.

“Western Esotericism: The Next Generation.” History and Discourse: Fifth International Conference of the Association for the Study of Esotericism and Mysticism, University of St.



Petersburg (Russia), 3 December (lecture read *in absentia*).

“Per Aspera ad Fontes.” Keynote Lecture at the occasion of the re-Opening of the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam, 16 December.

Marco Pasi

“Breaking Through to the Other Side: Contemporary Art and the Cultural Fashion of the Occult,” Lecture for the opening of the academic year of the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, 20 January.

“Occulta Philosophia: La Massoneria e i Saperi tradizionali,” Invited lecture for the series “All’Oriente d’Italia: Unità, massoneria e saperi tradizionali,” Museo del Risorgimento, Milan (Italy), 6 April.

“A Response to Egil Asprem’s presentation ‘Blind Spots of Disenchantment’,” Promovendi Symposium of the Huizinga Instituut, Barchem, 11 April.

“L’Art contemporain et la mode de l’occulte,” Keynote lecture for the conference “Sciences, Fables et Chimères: Croisements,” University of Toulouse (France), 11 June.

“Strange Bedfellows? Contemporary Art and the Occult,” Palladian Academy, Taurenne (France), 28 June.

“Early Forms of Abstract Art and Spiritualism: Georgiana Houghton’s Spirit Drawings,” 3rd Biannual Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism: “The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism,” University of Szeged (Hungary), 8 July.

“In this World, of this World, out of this World: Varieties of Contemporary Satanism in a Historical Perspective,” Keynote lecture for the Second International Satanism Studies Conference, University of Stockholm (Sweden), 26 September.

“Western Esotericism between East and West: Identities, Boundaries, Polemics,” Keynote lecture for the conference “Between East and West: Cultural and Religious Dialogue before, during and after the Totalitarian Rule,” University of Latvia, Riga, 6 October.

Joyce Pijnenburg

“No Query escapes these *Ideis*”: Imaginary Statues and Lullist Metaphysics in Bruno’s *Lampas Triginta Statuarum*,” 3rd Biannual Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism, University of Szeged (Hungary), 7 July.

5.2. 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) *Nova Religio*, University of California Press.

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

Marco Pasi

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

(book review editor) *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*.

(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*.

5.3 Other

Tessel M. Bauduin

Television appearance: NTR Podium: Nacht op de Kale Berg, Nederland 2, 20 November.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff



Obtained Fellowship Lichtenberg Kolleg, University of Göttingen (Germany) for 2012.

Marco Pasi

Obtained Fellowship Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS) for 2012.