HISTORY OF HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY
AND RELATED CURRENTS

REPORT 2011
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Personnel
3. Teaching and Levels of Participation
4. Research
   4.1. Research Program
   4.2. Research Output
5. Further Activities
   5.1. Lectures and Conference Participation
   5.2. Editorial Activities
   5.3. Other
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 Cultur 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

1nd 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 Asprem

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


Tessel M. Bauduin

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

Peter J. Forshaw


Wouter J. Hanegraaff


Marco Pasi


5. Further Activities

5.1. Lectures and Conference Participation

Egil Asprem

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


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


Peter J. Forshaw


“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.


Wouter J. Hanegraaff


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


“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


“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.


“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 Lampana 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


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

**Wouter J. Hanegraaff**


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


(advisory board) *Esoterica* [http://www.esoteric.msu.edu](http://www.esoteric.msu.edu)

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

(advisory board) *Nova Religio*, University of California Press.


**Marco Pasi**


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

(editorial board) *Politica Hermetica*.


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

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

### 5.3 Other

**Tessel M. Bauduin**


**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.