



FACULTEIT DER GEESTESWETENSCHAPPEN
Afdeling Geschiedenis, Europese Studies & Religiestudies

**HISTORY OF HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY
AND RELATED CURRENTS**

REPORT 2017



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1. Introduction

An important event for HHP this year was Mike Zuber's public defense of his PhD dissertation *Spiritual Alchemy from the Age of Jacob Boehme to Mary Anne Atwood, 1600–1900*, which took place on 20 June 2017. The committee consisted of Dr. H.J. Borsje, Prof. Dr. G.H. Janssen, Prof. Dr. M.B. Pranger (all University of Amsterdam), Prof. Dr. HG.M. Jorink (University Leiden), Prof. Dr. H. Hotson (University of Oxford) and Prof. Dr. L.M. Principe (Johns Hopkins University). Zuber was awarded the doctorate *cum laude*, which means that two HHP doctorants in succession have now received that rare distinction.

As mentioned in the previous Report, Dr. Julian Strube (University of Heidelberg) has been replacing Marco Pasi during the academic year 2016-2017, and has been teaching the latter's courses in the Bachelor and Master, to general satisfaction. The number of students in the Master has remained on the same good level as the previous year, and we are very pleased with their intellectual quality and enthusiasm about the program.

Finally, two new Phd candidates joined HHP this spring: John MacMurphy and Mriganka Mukhopadhyay. Their personal information and research projects are provided below.

2. Personnel

Two new PhD candidates have joined GHF in 2017:

John MacMurphy (USA) obtained his B.A. in Psychology from the University of California at Berkeley, and his Research M.A. in Western Esotericism (*cum laude*) from the Center for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam.

Mriganka Mukhopadhyay (b. 1990, India) obtained his B.A. (2012) and M.A. (2014) in History from Presidency University, Kolkata (India). He also did his M.Phil. (2017) in History from Ambedkar University, Delhi (India) where he wrote a dissertation on *The Esoteric World of Bhadrakok: A Study of the Theosophical Movement in Bengal*.



3. Teaching: Program and Levels of Participation

1st semester 2016-2017, block 3

Master

Religionism and Historicism (W.J. Hanegraaff). 8 students.

2nd semester 2016-2017, block 1-2

Bachelor

Western Esotericism from the 18th to the 20th Century (J. Strube). 20 students

Master

Occult Trajectories II: Modern Western Esotericism between East and West (J. Strube), 8 students

1st semester 2017-2018, block 1-2

Bachelor

Western Culture and Counterculture (W.J. Hanegraaff). 35 students

Western Esotericism in the Early Modern Period (P.J. Forshaw). 14 students

Master

Contested Knowledge (W.J. Hanegraaff). 12 students.



Renaissance Esotericism II: Occult Philosophies (P.J.Forshaw). 12 students.

Other teaching

Master

Core Module Nature and the Supernatural (P.J.Forshaw, K. van der Toorn). 4 students.

4. Research

4.1. Research Program

John MacMurphy

Western Esotericism Approach to the Study of Jewish Alchemy

This project addresses the current gap that exists in academia between occult philosophies within Western Esotericism and their Jewish influences. For the first time ever, Jewish alchemy will be examined as a self-contained phenomenon and not just a stream that is ancillary to the Christian practice. Focus will be placed on alchemical references in exoteric and esoteric Jewish sources demonstrating alchemical application in both theory and applied methods which, in turn, influenced dominant thinkers and currents studied under the field of western esotericism. This study shall target both obscure enigmatic figures – such as Yohanan Alemanno (c.1435-c.1504) an Italian Jewish humanist, kabbalist, and alchemist who still does not have a major study devoted to him in the academy – as well as luminous personalities such as Hayim Vital (1542-1620), best known for being one of the most famous students of Isaac Luria (1534-1572), the father of Lurianic Kabbalah, the highly influential kabbalistic trend from the 16th century until today. This research will demonstrate that the synergetic fusion between alchemy and Kabbalah manifested praxis involving the “laboratory of consciousness” for the transmutation of the soul – showing not only Jewish elements in alchemical thought and



practical applications but also a clear form of spiritual alchemy – contradicting the academic contention that this occurrence did not happen prior to the 18th century.

Mriganka Mukhopadhyay

Occultism in the Orient: Dissemination of the Theosophical Ideas in Bengal and the Role of Bengali Theosophists

This research project seeks to explore the historical development of Theosophy in Bengal in the colonial socio-spiritual space thus locating it within the broader understanding of Western Esotericism. The Bengal Theosophical Society, established in Calcutta in 1882, drew large numbers of members from the intellectual and social elites of Bengal and infused a curiosity among the Bengalis regarding occultism and Western Esotericism in general. This led to the appropriation of occult currents from the West within indigenous colonial society and also refashioning of modern Hindu thought-world. The dissemination of western esoteric ideas to the society and culture of Bengal created a profound impact upon religion, politics, art and literature. Therefore, this project will investigate the process by which western occult ideas disseminated in the oriental society and culture of Bengal through the activities of the Bengal Theosophical Society during the colonial period and what was the role of the Indian, and specifically Bengali, Theosophists in this process.

4.2. Research Output

Peter J. Forshaw

(ed.), *Lux in Tenebris: The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism*, Leiden: Brill 2017.

'The Hermetic Frontispiece: Contextualising John Dee's Hieroglyphic Monad', *Ambix* 64:2 (2017), 115-139.

'Khunrath, Heinrich', in: Marco Sgarbi (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*, Springer 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02848-4>

'Casmann, Otto', in: Marco Sgarbi (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*, Springer, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02848-4>



Wouter J. Hanegraaff

- 'Religion and the Historical Imagination : Esoteric Tradition as Poetic Invention', in : Christoph Bochinger & Jörg Rüpke, in cooperation with Elisabeth Begemann (eds.), *Dynamics of Religion : Past and Present* (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten Bd. 67), De Gruyter : Berlin 2017, 131-153.
- 'The Great War of the Soul : Divine and Human Madness in Carl Gustav Jung's *Liber Novus*', in: Lutz Greisiger, Alexander van der Haven & Sebastian Schüler (eds.), *Religion und Wahnsinn um 1900: Zwischen Pathologisierung und Selbstermächtigung / Religion and Madness Around 1900: Between Pathology and Self-Empowerment*, Würzburg: Ergon Verlag 2017, 101-135.
- 'The Theosophical Imagination', *Correspondences* 6 (2017), 3-39.
- 'Religia i wyobrażenia historyczna: Tradycja ezoteryczna jako kreacja poetycka' (Polish translation of 'Religion and the Historical Imagination: Esoteric Tradition as Poetic Invention' [2017]; 'transl. M. Kruk & A.Świerzowska), in: M. Rzezycka, A. Świerzowska & I. Trzcińska (eds.), *Imaginatio, 'Światło i Ciemność'*, vol. 8., Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego: Gdańsk 2017, 9-40.
- 'Идолопоклонство', *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* IV (2017), 33-38 (Russian translation of 'Idolatry' [2005]).
- 'C'è una luce in fondo al tunnel ? La qualità come risposta al neoliberismo e all'eccesso informativo' (Italian translation of 'Profile 2016'), *Roars : Return on Academic Research*, 17 April 2017. <http://www.roars.it/online/ce-una-luce-in-fondo-al-tunnel-la-qualita-come-risposta-al-neoliberismo-e-alleccesso-informativo/>

Marco Pasi

- 'Antonio Fogazzaro e il movimento teosofico: Una ricognizione sulla base di nuovi documenti inediti', in: Hans Thomas Hakl (ed.), *Octagon. La ricerca della totalità. Riflessa in una biblioteca dedicata alla storia delle religioni, alla filosofia e, soprattutto, all'esoterismo*, Gaggenau: scientia nova, 2017, vol. 3, pp. 231-265.
- 'Aleister Crowley et l'islam', *Politica Hermetica*, 31 (2017), pp. 101-118.
- 'Die Macht der Magie, die Magie der Macht', in: Suzanne Witzgall (ed.), *Reale Magie*, Zürich - Berlin, diaphanes, 2017, pp. 179-182.
- Suzanne Witzgall, 'Natürlich dreht sich alles um Macht. Im Gespräch mit Marco Pasi', in: Suzanne Witzgall (ed.), *Reale Magie*, Zürich - Berlin, diaphanes, 2017, pp. 183-188.
- PierLuigi Zocatelli, 'Università e studio dell'esoterismo. Un'intervista a Marco Pasi', CESNUR website, November 2017.
http://www.cesnur.org/2017/marco_pasi_torino.htm.



Julian Strube

- 'Socialism and Esotericism in July Monarchy France,' *History of Religions* 57:2 (2017), 197-221.
- 'Occultist Identity Formations Between Theosophy and Socialism in *fin-de-siècle* France,' *Numen* 64:5-6 (2017), 568-595.
- 'Revolution, Illuminismus und Theosophie: Eine Genealogie der 'häretischen' Historiographie des frühen französischen Sozialismus und Kommunismus,' *Historische Zeitschrift* 304:1 (2017), 50-89.
- 'The 'Baphomet' of Eliphas Lévi: Its Meaning and Historical Context,' *Correspondences* 4 (2017), 37-79.
- 'Monika Black/Eric Kurlander, Revisiting the Nazi Occult,' *The German Quarterly* 90:3 (2017), 396-398.
- 'Peter Staudenmaier, Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era,' *Aries* 17:2 (2017), 254-259.

Mike Zuber

- Spiritual Alchemy from the Age of Jacob Boehme to Mary Anne Atwood, 1600–1900* (Proefschrift, Universiteit van Amsterdam), 2017.
- 'Theosophische Spekulation und erbauliche Frömmigkeit: Jacob Böhme, die neue Wiedergeburt und ihre Alchemisierung', in: Claudia Brink & Lucinda Martin, eds., *Grund und Ungrund: Der Kosmos des mystischen Philosophen Jacob Böhme* (Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2017), 114–29.

5. Public Activities

Peter J. Forshaw

Lectures

- 'Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*', *Divine Wisdom - Divine Nature* Conference, National Széchényi Library, Budapest, 18 February 2017.
- 'Grades of Cognition & the Ladder of Union in Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom* (1595/1609)'. *EMPHASIS*, University of London, 4 March 2017.
- 'Jung and Alchemy', The Jung Club, London, 6 March 2017.



Wouter J. Hanegraaff

Lectures

Contribution to Workshop “Knowledge, Aesthetics, and Politics of the Occult: New Perspectives on the Study of Esotericism,” Center for the History of Knowledge, ETH Zürich, 10-11 March 2017.

Public Lecture ““Esoteric Tradition as Poetic Invention”, ETH Zürich, 10 March 2017.

Keynote lecture “Imagining Swedenborg’s Heaven”. Conference *Emanuel Swedenborg and the Arts*, Bryn Athyn, U.S.A., 6-9 June 2017.

John MacMurphy

Lectures

“Magic & Prophecy: The Seventy-Two Letter Name of God”. ESSWE 6 Conference *Western Esotericism and deviance*, Erfurt, Germany, 1-3 June 2017.

Mriganka Mukhopadhyay

Conference Lecture

“The Theosophical Cobweb: Transcontinental Nexus between Indian Nationalism and Occultism and the Significance of Bengal”, *European Association for the Study of Religion* (EASR) Annual Conference, Leuven (Belgium), 21 September 2017.

“Besant and Bengal: Shaping the Political Culture in the Twentieth Century Calcutta”, *Conference on Annie Besant*, Theosophical Society in England, London (United Kingdom), 1 October 2017.

Outreach

“Theosophy in Bengal”, Bengal Theosophical Society, Kolkata (India), 10 March 2017

Organized five sessions of “Captain Zeppos Society” at Kapitein Zeppos Café, Amsterdam (Netherlands) between September-December 2017. (Captain Zeppos Society is an informal study club organized by Mriganka Mukhopadhyay along with some of the students of the M.A programme in “Western Esotericism” studying at the UvA . This group encourages academic discussion on Esotericism and Occultism outside the formal setting of classroom and aims to promote the study of the history of Esotericism from the students’ point of view.)

“Indian Fake Gurus”, Filmhuis Cavia, Amsterdam (Netherlands), 22 November 2017



Marco Pasi

Lectures

'At the Sources of the Rivers of Life: Lady Caithness and the Early History of Occultist Sexual Magic'. Invited paper for the symposium *The Occult Revival in and Beyond Victorian Scotland*, University of Stirling, 27 October 2017.

'Giuseppe Mazzini's Spiritual Nationalism: Sources, Features, and Echoes'. Paper presented at the annual conference of the *European Association for the Study of Religions* (EASR), University of Leuven, 21 September 2017.

'Liquid Magic: Materials towards a Cultural History of Bodily Fluids'. Keynote lecture for the AOTO conference *The Mountain of Truth. From Abiegnus to Ascona*, Monte Verità, Ascona, 26 August 2017.

'Italian Culture and Theosophy at the Turn of the Twentieth Century through the Lens of Antonio Fogazzaro's Case'. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the *American Comparative Literature Association* (ACLA), University of Utrecht, 7 July 2017.

'The Debate on Esotericism and Right-Wing Culture in Contemporary Italy'. Invited paper for the conference *Kultur von Rechts: Materiale Überprüfung von Furio Jesis Forschungshypothese*, a.r.t.e.s. Graduate School for the Humanities, University of Cologne, 28 June 2017.

'Painting the Spiritual World: Victorian Spirit Art in Light of Swedenborg's Doctrines'. Invited paper for the conference *Swedenborg and the Arts*, Bryn Athyn College, Bryn Athyn, PA, 6 June 2017.

'The Precarious Resonance of the Individual: Western Esotericism at the Max Weber Kolleg'. Keynote lecture for the 6th biannual conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE): *Western Esotericism and Deviance*, Max Weber Kolleg - University of Erfurt, 3 June 2017.

'Paradigmi esoterici nell'arte moderna'. Invited paper for the third Annual Conference of the *Foro di Studi Avanzati "Gaetano Massa"* ("Renaissance, Ancient And Medieval Patterns Philosophy, Theology, Aesthetics, Religion"), Rome, 29 May 2017.

'The Theosophical Movement in Italy, and Nationalism and Esotericism in Modern Europe', invited lecture for the round-table workshop *Modernity and Esoteric Networks: Work in Progress and Future Directions*, Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University, 11 March 2017.

'Theosophical Themes in Contemporary Art'. Invited paper for the conference *Modernity and Esoteric Networks: Theosophy, Arts, Literature and Politics*, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, 7 March 2017.



'Nationalism, Religious Individualisation, and Western Esotericism in Modern Europe (1823-1939): An Introduction'. Paper presented in the framework of the *Kolloquium program of the Max Weber Kolleg*, University of Erfurt, 31 January 2017.

Conference organization

Panel "Esotericism in the Age of Nationalism: constructing and communicating identities", for the annual EASR conference, University of Leuven, 18-21 September 2017.

Julian Strube

Lectures

'Contested Christianities: Communism and Religion in July Monarchy France', conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions, University of Leuven, 18-22 September 2017.

'La France Martyre, La France Messie: Elitism and Universalism in French Radical Socialism and Occultism', conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions, University of Leuven, 18-22 September 2017.

'Tantra als universelle religiöse Tradition in den Schriften John Woodroffes', conference of the Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft, University of Marburg, 13-16 September 2017.

'Der Streit zwischen Sozialisten und progressiven Katholiken um die 'wahre' Religion im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts', Conference by the International Research Training Group 'Religious Cultures in 19th and 20th-Century Europe', Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, 26 July 2017.

'Embracing Heresy: Radical Social Reform Movements and Esotericism in July Monarchy France', conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism, University of Erfurt, 1-3 June 2017.

'Eliphas Lévi and the Historiography of Occultism', Thesis Prize speech at the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism, University of Erfurt, 1-3 June 2017.

'Die Rückkehr Gottes aus dem Exil: Katholische Polemiken und Apologien neuer Religionsformen in Frankreich', conference *Die Romantik und ihre Religionen*, University of Halle, 17-20 May 2017.

'Hinduism, Western Esotericism, and New Age Religion.' Hinduism in Europe, University of Stockholm, 26-28 April 2017.



'The Socialist Roots of Occultism, or the Occult Roots of Nazism? A Discussion of the Tangled Relationship Between Esotericism and Politics in the Nineteenth Century', workshop at the ETH Zürich, 9-11 March 2017.

Material for Political Education

'Esoterik und Rechtsextremismus,' brochure for the Informations- und Dokumentationszentrum für Antirassismusarbeit, 13 pages, 2017: https://www.vielfalt-mediathek.de/data/strube_esoterik_und_rechtsextremismus_vielfalt_mediathek.pdf

Non-Academic Article

'How Socialism Helped to Seed the Landscape of Modern Religion,' *Aeon*, November 14th, 2017: <https://aeon.co/ideas/how-socialism-helped-to-seed-the-landscape-of-modern-religion>

Mike A. Zuber

'A Heterodox Path to the Moral High Ground: The Alchemical Origins of Born-Again Christianity', *ESSWE6: Western Esotericism and Deviance*, Universität Erfurt, 1-3 June 2017.

'The Secret Lives of an Alchemical Text: Manuscripts of the *Speculum Sapientiae* (1st Ed. 1705) and Their Stories', *EMPHASIS Seminar 2017/18*, Senate House, University of London, 14 October 2017.

'Alchemy and Scribal Publication: The Legacy of a Leiden Rosicrucian', *Seminars in the History of Science, Medicine and Technology*, History Faculty, University of Oxford, 30 October 2017.

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: Maney

(editorial board) *Universal Reform: Studies in Intellectual History, 1550-1700*,
Aldershot: Ashgate

(editorial board) *Apocalypticism: Cross-Disciplinary Explorations*, Bern: Peter Lang
(editorial board) *Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism*, Oxford: Oxford University
Press

(editorial board) *Correspondences: Online Journal for the Academic Study of Western
Esotericism*



(editorial board) *História Revista*
(advisory board) *Magic, Ritual, & Witchcraft*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

(general editor) "The Brill Esotericism Reference Library". Leiden / Boston: Brill.
(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) *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. Carfax
(advisory board) *Gnostica Series*. London: Equinox Publ.
(advisory board) "Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism". Oxford University Press.

Marco Pasi

(editor) *Aries Book Series: Texts and Studies in Western Esotericism*. Leiden / Boston: Brill.
(editorial board) *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*.
(editorial board) *Pessoa Plural. An International Journal of Pessoa Studies*.
(editorial board) *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi*.

Julian Strube

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