



FACULTEIT DER GEESTESWETENSCHAPPEN
Afdeling Geschiedenis, Europese Studies & Religiestudies

**HISTORY OF HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY
AND RELATED CURRENTS**

REPORT 2018



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1. Introduction

While regular teaching and research activities have proceeded as normal, much additional attention this year has gone to preparations for the upcoming 20-year anniversary of HHP in combination with the 7th international conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE) that will take place in Amsterdam from 2-4 July 2019. At the occasion of the conference reception, the anniversary will be celebrated by the public presentation of a collective volume *Hermes Explains: Thirty Questions about Western Esotericism* to be published by Amsterdam University Press (which also published the 10-year anniversary volume *Hermes in the Academy* in 2009). Thirty “friends of HHP” have agreed to write a 3000-word contribution answering a “journalistic” question about some aspect of the field. The ESSWE7 conference theme is “Western Esotericism and Consciousness: Visions, Voices, Altered States.” With eight slots of five parallel sessions each, resulting in a total of forty panels plus three keynote lectures (Yulia Ustinova, Karl Baier, Sonu Shamdasani), this will be the largest ESSWE conference so far. Editorial work on the volume and organizational work on the conference have both been intense and time-consuming, but we are happy with the results.

2. Personnel

An important event for HHP in 2018 concerns the secretary position. Having given birth to twins, Nadine Faber decided to explore new and other directions in her life. Thus an excellent collaboration of five and a half years has come to an end, and we wish to express our deep gratitude to Nadine for all that she has done for our group and our program. During her pregnancy leave, Nadine was replaced by Antoinette Rutten. Since this turned out to be a success, Antoinette has now been appointed as HHP’s new secretary.

A visiting postdoc has joined HHP in 2018 for a period of two years:



Manon Hedenborg White (Sweden) obtained her PhD in the History of Religions at Uppsala University (Sweden) in 2017. Her doctoral dissertation *The Eloquent Blood. The Goddess Babalon and the Construction of Femininities in Western Esotericism* is forthcoming in 2019 from Oxford University Press.

3. Teaching: Program and Levels of Participation

1st semester 2017-2018, block 3

Master

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

2nd semester 2017-2018, block 1-2

Bachelor

Western Esotericism from the 18th to the 20th Century (M. Pasi). 13 students

Master

Occult Trajectories II: Modern Western esotericism and politics (M. Pasi), 13 students

Sufism, Islamic mysticism and Western esotericism (M. Pasi, in collaboration with R. van Leeuwen), 20 students

1st semester 2018-2019, block 1-2

Bachelor

Western Culture and Counter Culture (W.J. Hanegraaff). 38 students

Western Esotericism in the Early Modern Period (P.J.Forshaw). 21 students

Master

Contested Knowledge (W.J.Hanegraaff). 14 students.

Renaissance Esotericism II: History of Alchemy (P.J.Forshaw). 19 students.



Other teaching

Master

Core Module Nature and the Supernatural (P.J.Forshaw, John MacMurphy). 15 students.

4. Research

4.1. Research Program

Manon Hedenborg White

The purpose of this postdoctoral research project is to analyse patterns of female religious agency and authority at different stages of religious emergence through the biographies of three women: Leah Hirsig (1883–1975), Jane Wolfe (1875–1958), and Phyllis Seckler (1917–2004), prominent figures within the religion Thelema, founded in 1904 by the British occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947). Max Weber’s tripartite typology of authority will be applied to the development of Thelema from loosely organised charismatic movement to bureaucratised structure. The project will propose a supplementary category to Weber’s typology: proximal authority, defined as authority ascribed to, and enacted by, a person based on their (perceived) relational proximity to a religious leader. By analysing female agency at different stages of religious emergence, the project contributes to the development of theoretical concepts for understanding female authority in male-led religious movements. The project is based on archival research, and sources consist mainly of unpublished diaries and correspondence. The time frame is 3 years, 2 of which will be spent with Center HHP as a base.

4.2. Research Output

Peter J. Forshaw

“From Occult Ekphrasis to Magical Art: Transforming Text into Talismanic Image in the Scriptorium of Alfonso X,” in: Sarah Kiyarad, Christoffer Theis and Laura Willer (eds.), *Bild und Schrift auf magischen Artefakten*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018, 15-47.



Wouter J. Hanegraaff

西方神秘学指津 (Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed; Chinese translation by Zhang Butian), The Commercial Press: Beijing 2018.

“Hermes Trismegistus & Hermetism,” in: Marco Sgarbi (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*, Springer 2018. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02848-4_180-1

“Vorwort: Rudolf Steiner und die hellseherische Einbildungskraft,” in: Rudolf Steiner, *Schriften – Kritische Ausgabe* (ed. Christian Clement), vol. 8:1: *Schriften zur Kosmogonie und Anthropogenese*, frommann-holzboog: Stuttgart / Bad Cannstadt 2018, vii-xxii.

“Mysteries of Sex in the House of the Hidden Light: Arthur Edward Waite and the Kabbalah,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 40 (2018), 163-182 (special issue; Christian Wiese & George Y. Kohler, guest editors)

Manon Hedenborg White

“The Other Woman. Babalon and the Scarlet Woman in Kenneth Grant’s Typhonian Trilogies.” In Henrik Bogdan (ed.), *Servants of the Star & the Snake: Essays in Honour of Kenneth & Steffi Grant*, London: Starfire Publishing 2018.

“Från renässansalkemi till queerpolitik? Esoterism och ockultism historiskt och idag.” [“From Renaissance Alchemy to Queer Politics? Esotericism and Occultism Historically and Today”], *Religion* 1 (2018), 28-34.

Marco Pasi

Fernando Pessoa & Aleister Crowley, *La Bocca dell’Inferno*, ed. with an introduction and footnotes by Marco Pasi, Saluzzo: Federico Tozzi Editore 2018. 354 pp.

“Introduzione”, in: Fernando Pessoa and Aleister Crowley, *La Bocca dell’Inferno* (ed. by Marco Pasi), Saluzzo: Federico Tozzi Editore 2018, pp. i-xxviii.

“Power of Magic, Magic of Power”, in: Susanne Witzgall (ed.), *Real Magic*, Zürich: diaphanes 2018, pp. 169-172.



“It’s all about power, of course’: In conversation with Marco Pasi,” Interview with Susanne Witzgall, in: Susanne Witzgall (ed.), *Real Magic*, Zürich: diaphanes, 2018, pp. 173-178.

4.3 Varia

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

“Esotericism and Criticism: A Platonic Response to Arthur Versluis,” *Creative Reading*.
<http://wouterjhanegraaff.blogspot.com>. 16 June 2018.

Mriganka Mukhopadhyay

“Behind every Fascism”: Is Žižek’s appropriation of Walter Benjamin’s thesis applicable in India?, *Asia Dialogue*, August 29, 2018
The Rise of BJP’s “Overseas Friends”, *Asia Dialogue*, June 20, 2018.

5. Public Activities

Peter J. Forshaw

Lectures

“Speaking Pictures and Seeing Words,” *De Bovennatuurlijke kracht van woorden en beelden*, UvA Illustere school, Amsterdam, 12 January 2018.
“Jung and the West: Alchemy and Gnosis,” University of Leiden, Leiden, 15 March 2018.
“Jung and Alchemy,” University College London, London, 30 April 2018.
“Heinrich Khunrath and Full-Spectrum Paracelsianism,” *The Forgotten Reformation 1524-1624*, Salzburg (31 May-2 June), 1 June 2018.
“Jung and Alchemical Imagery: The Emerald Tablet,” Workshop Nederlandse Associatie voor Analytische Psychologie (NAAP), Amsterdam, 6 October.
“Reading Alchemical Images,” Workshop Nederlandse Associatie voor Analytische Psychologie (NAAP), Amsterdam, 17 November.



Wouter J. Hanegraaff

Lecture

Keynote lecture “The Nocturnal Side of Human Nature: German Romantic Mesmerism between Psychiatry and the Occult,” conference *Konjunktoren des Unbewussten: Psychologie und Esoterik in der Literatur und Kultur der Moderne* (Universities of Strasbourg, Haute-Alsace Mulhouse-Colmar, Freiburg, Basel), Karlsruhe, 10-12 May 2018.

John MacMurphy

Lecture

“From Healing to Sexual Mysticism: Embodiment Through Kabbalistic Praxis,” ASE Conference *Eros, Sexuality, and Embodiment in Esoteric Traditions*, Houston, Texas, USA, 24-27 May 2018.

Mriganka Mukhopadhyay

Lectures

“Grammars of Occultism: Studying Modern South Asia in the Context of an Entangled History of Esotericism,” Occult South Asia Workshop, University of Vienna, 23-24 November, 2018.

“Madame Blavatsky, Mohini and Yeats,” Atlantis Bookshop, London, October 2, 2018.

“Theosophy and Bengali Spirituality: Mohini Chatterji’s Works,” South Asia Seminar Series, British Library, London, October 1, 2018.

“Occultism of Bhadrakok: Studying the Theosophical Society in Colonial Bengal,” Bengal Related Studies Conference, Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg, 26-28 October, 2018.

“The Occult Calcutta: Transnational Cultural Dialogue between the West and the East in the Context of Bengal Renaissance,” Cultural Mobilization Conference, SPIN, University of Amsterdam, 19-22 September, 2018.

“Baul in the West: A Transnational Migration of Bengali Folk Music and Indigenous Occultism,” International Congress of Bengal Studies, Jahangirnagar University Dhaka, Bangladesh, 25-28 January, 2018.



Conference Organization

Co-organization (with Karl Baier) "Occult South Asia Workshop" at the University of Vienna, 23-24 November, 2018.

Podcast

"Theosophy and Bengali Spirituality: Mohini Chatterji's Works," The British Library Podcast, SoundCloud. December, 2018. URL: <https://soundcloud.com/the-british-library/theosophy-and-bengali-spirituality-mohini-chatterjis-works>

Manon Hedenborg White

Lectures

"Ockult snusk. Sexualmagins historia" ["The Salacious Occult: The History of Sexual Magic] Kjettersk Kjeller, Oslo, Norway, 30 april, 2018.

"From Polarity to Plurality: Shifting Notions of Sex and Gender in Modern Occultism," *European Association for the Study of Religion (EASR) Annual Conference*, University of June 17–21, 2018.

Other

"Negotiating Gender in Contemporary Occultism," *The Religious Studies Project* [Podcast interview]. <https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/negotiating-gender-in-contemporary-occultism/>

Marco Pasi

Lectures

"Afterthought Forms: The Changing Role of Esotericism between Modern and Contemporary Art." Invited lecture for the symposium *Visionary: On Hilma af Klint and the Spirit of Her Time*, organised by the Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 12 October 2017.

"Fernando Pessoa and Aleister Crowley: A Reappraisal of their Relationship." Invited paper for the international conference *Origins and Originality: Cultural And Literary European and American Influences on Fernando Pessoa's Work*, University of Bern, 28 September 2017.



“Giuseppe Mazzini and Adam Mickiewicz in Dialogue: Esoteric Forms of Romantic Nationalism.” Paper presented at the international conference *Cultural Mobilization: Cultural Consciousness-raising and National Movements in Europe and the World*,” organized by the Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms (SPIN), University of Amsterdam, 20 September 2017.

“The Relevance of Ernesto de Martino for the Study of Magic and of Western Esotericism.” Paper presented at the 16th annual conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR), University of Bern, 18 June 2017.

“Aleister Crowley and Islam.” Paper presented at the inaugural conference of the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE) *Common and Comparative Esotericisms: Western, Islamic, And Jewish*, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, 14 June 2017.

“The Art of Esoteric Transgression, the Esoteric Transgression of Art.” Keynote lecture for the conference *Consciously Illicit: Transgression In Western Esotericism*,” Masaryk University, Brno, 6 June 2017.

Invited lecture for the launch of the book by Ioan P. Culianu, *Iocari serio: Scienza e arte nel pensiero del Rinascimento*, Lindau, Turin 2019. Organized by the Romanian Cultural Institute at the Turin International Bookfair, 13 May 2017.

“Giuseppe Mazzini e l’esoterismo: Un dossier aperto.” Invited lecture, Dipartimento di Civiltà e forme del sapere, University of Pisa, 15 January 2017.

Interviews and media appearances

Carlo Silini, “Il paradosso dell’esoterismo? Non esistono più i segreti,” *Corriere del Ticino*, 24 February 2018, pp. 26-27.

Claudio Gallo, “Il nazismo occulto: Maghi e astrologi al servizio di Hitler”, *La Stampa*, 20 February 2018, pp. 32-33.

Pablo Esparza, “Por qué el nuevo gobierno de Italia no acepta masones (y qué tienen que ver una logia clandestina y la mafia en esa decisión)”, *BBC News Mundo*, 24 May 2018 (available [HYPERLINK "https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-44232646?fbclid=IwAR2Z_8aq2M1uZXUdK6HCYE7cGA_ig_MmW_TT2JQRI06TzeyCklHmFQx-Gvo"](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-44232646?fbclid=IwAR2Z_8aq2M1uZXUdK6HCYE7cGA_ig_MmW_TT2JQRI06TzeyCklHmFQx-Gvo)).



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

(editorial board) *História Revista*

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

(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

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/>

(editorial board) *Metamorphoses: International Journal of Rudolf Steiner Studies*, frommann-holzboog.

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

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

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

(advisory board) "Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism". Oxford University Press.



(advisory board) *Aegyptiaca: Journal of the History of Reception of Ancient Egypt.*

www.aegyptiaca.org

(member research council) *Scripta Classica*

Marco Pasi

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

(editor) *Axolotl: Studi di Storia delle Religioni.* Milan: Mimesis.

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

(editorial board) *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi.*

(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.*