



# Renaissance Esotericism II: Occult Philosophies



## Part of MA Western Esotericism

The module 'Renaissance Esotericism II: Occult Philosophies' is part of the MA in Spirituality and Religion.

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's *On Occult Philosophy* (1533) is the best-known Renaissance encyclopedia of magic. Its syncretic mixture of material drawn from medieval grimoires, from classical antiquity and from sources new to the Christian West, such as the Jewish tradition of Kabbalah, is an invaluable resource for our understanding of early modern occult philosophy and modern occultism. In this module we shall investigate *Philosophia occulta*, an important current of Western esotericism, considering the various kinds of knowledge and experience that participate in Renaissance ideas of magic. Ranging through the natural, celestial and divine realms we shall examine some of the sciences and philosophies and encounter some of the significant figures that contributed to its development. We shall seek to amplify Agrippa's writings with material drawn from other influential contemporary sources and conclude the module with sessions on subsequent esoteric approaches that display affinities with his occult philosophy.

During each class students will deliver an oral presentation following an introductory lecture from the teacher. After the presentation is delivered the teacher will focus further on the problems in question and these will be discussed; all students are expected to actively participate in this discussion.

## Objectives

By the time they complete this module students will have received advanced knowledge about historical data and theory on the diversity of occult philosophies in the Early Modern Period. From their critical examination of primary and secondary sources, students will have new, in-depth knowledge of this subject area, an understanding of the fundamental characteristics of esotericism for this period, and insight into some of the social, religious and philosophical changes that took place in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance that were conducive to the development of Western esotericism. From their presentations and essays they will have the ability to identify, analyse and synthesise material from original historical texts and to evaluate modern scholarly interpretations, and then frame relevant questions for their presentations and essays in an independent and coherent way.

This course is taught entirely in English.

**Course catalogue:** 153421136Y

### Semester 2

Block 1 (6 EC): Renaissance Esotericism II: Occult Philosophies,  
Seminar, 2 x 2 hours per week

**Lecturer:** Dr. P.J. Forshaw

For most current information about this MA module and its entry requirements, please contact our study adviser at:  
T: 020 525 4484  
E: [studieadviseur-geschiedenis-fgw@uva.nl](mailto:studieadviseur-geschiedenis-fgw@uva.nl)

For general information on the MA in Western Esotericism, please see:  
[www.amsterdamhermetica.nl](http://www.amsterdamhermetica.nl)

## Teaching Schedule

Tuesdays & Wednesdays 11:00-13:00, Semester 2, Block 1, OMHP C0.23

15 February 2022

### 1. Introduction & Of Magic in General

General introduction, discussion of the program's theme, goals and set-up of the course. Students decide who is going to be responsible for presenting each seminar

Richard Kieckhefer, 'The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 3 (June, 1994), 813-836.

Jan N. Bremmer, "The Birth of the Term 'Magic,'" in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 1 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 1–11.

*Optional:* Giordano Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity and Essays on Magic*, edited by Richard J. Blackwell and Robert de Lucca, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 105-142.

16 February 2022

### 2: Occult Sciences 1: *Astronomia Superior* (Astrology)

H. Darrel Rutkin, 'Astrology', in *The Cambridge History of Science*, Vol. 3, *Early Modern Science*, edited by Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 541-561.

William Eamon, 'Astrology and Society', in Brendan Dooley (ed.), *A Companion to Astrology in the Renaissance*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, 141-191.

*Optional:* William Lilly, *The Christian Astrologer*, London, 1647, Sigs. B<sup>r</sup>-B4<sup>v</sup> 'To the Reader', Book 1, Chapter 1, 25-27, 33, 50-61, 119-120.

22 February 2022

### 3: Occult Sciences 2: *Astronomia Inferior* (Alchemy)

Lawrence Principe and William R. Newman, 'Some problems with the Historiography of Alchemy', in William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton (eds.) *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2001, 385-431.

William R. Newman, 'From Alchemy to "Chymistry"', in *The Cambridge History of Science*, Vol. 3, *Early Modern Science*, edited by Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 497-517.

*Optional:* 'Prolegomena' and 'Annotations and Discourses', in Elias Ashmole (ed.), *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, London, Sigs. A2<sup>r</sup>-B4<sup>v</sup>, 443-447..

**23 February 2022**

#### **4. Hermetic & Neoplatonic Magic**

Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1964; reprint 1991, Chapter 3: Hermes Trismegistus and Magic, 44-61.

Brian P. Copenhaver, 'Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance', in Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus (eds), *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, Washington: Folger Books, 1988, 79-110.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'Better than Magic: Cornelius Agrippa and Lazzarellian Hermetism', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* (Summer 2009), 1-25.

**1 March 2022**

#### **5. Christian Cabala**

Charles Zika, 'Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and The Magic Debate Of The Late Fifteenth Century', in: *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 39 (1976): 104-138.

Johann Reuchlin, *De Arte Cabalistica: On the Art of the Kabbalah*, translated by Martin and Sarah Goodman, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press/ Bison Books, 1993, Book 3, 235-277 [every other page, as it's parallel text]

*Optional:* Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 'Theses According to .... the Hebrew Cabalist Wisemen', 344-363; 'Magical Conclusions', 494-530; 'Magic in the Orphic Hymns', 504-515; 'Cabalistic Conclusions confirming the Christian Religion', 516-553, in *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486)*, Text, Translation and Commentary by Steven A. Farmer, Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998.

**2 March 2022**

#### **6. Occult Philosophy**

Noel L. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe*. New York: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1999, Chapter 4: 'The Occult Vision', 85-156.

*Optional:* Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*. Translated by James Freake and edited by Donald Tyson, St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1993; repr. 1997, li-lx,

3-12

*Optional:* Henric Cornelius Agrippa, *Of the Vanitie and vncertaintie of Artes and Sciences: Englished by Ia. San. Gent*, London, 1569, 'Of Sciences in General', 1<sup>r</sup>-5<sup>r</sup>; 'Of iudiciall astrologie', 44<sup>v</sup>-50<sup>r</sup>; 'Of Magicke in generall', 'Of Natural Magicke', 'Of Mathematicall Magicke', 'Of Witching Magicke', 'Of Geocie and Necromancie', 'Of Cabala', 54<sup>v</sup>-62<sup>v</sup>.

**8 March 2022****7. Natural Magic**

William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, Chapter 6: Natural Magic and the Secrets of Nature, 194-233.

Paola Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, Chapter 1: Continuity in the Definition of Natural Magic from Pico to Della Porta. Astrology and Magic in Italy and North of the Alps, 13-34.

*Optional:* Giovanni-Battista della Porta, *Magiae Naturalis, sive de miraculis rerum naturalium libri IIII* (1558), trans. John Baptista Porta, *Natural Magick ... in Twenty Books*, London, 1658, The Preface to the Reader, Book 1, 1-25.

**9 March 2022****8. Celestial Magic**

Christopher I. Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels: Cornelius Agrippa's Occult Philosophy*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, Chapter 4 extract 'Esotericism, Occultism, and Magic', 159-164; Chapter 3: Sign, Sigil, Text, 98-146.

Nicolas Weill-Parot, 'Astral Magic and Intellectual Changes (Twelfth-Fifteenth Centuries): 'Astrological Images' and the Concept of 'Addressative' Magic', in Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra, *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, Leuven: Peeters, 2002, 167-188.

*Optional:* Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, edited & translated by Carol Kaske and John Clark, Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989, 243-373 (please make sure you read chapters 1-3, 4, 8, 11, 13, 15, 18, 20 and 26. Note: This is a parallel-text translation and you will only be reading every other page).

**15 March 2022****9. Ceremonial Magic**

Stephen Clucas, 'John Dee's Angelic Conversations and the *Ars Notoria*: Renaissance Magic and Mediaeval Theurgy', in Stephen

Clucas (ed.), *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2006, 231-273.

Julien Véronèse, 'Magic, Theurgy, and Spirituality in the Medieval Ritual of the *Ars notoria*', in Claire Fanger (ed.), *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012, 37-78.

*Optional*: Peter de Abano, *Heptameron: or, Magical Elements*, in Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*, translated by Robert Turner, London, 1665, 69-110.

**16 March 2022**

### **10. Paracelsian Philosophy**

Carlos Gilly, '"*Theophrastia Sancta*" - Paracelsianism as a Religion, in Conflict with the Established Churches', in Ole Peter Grell (ed.), *Paracelsus: The Man and his Reputation, his Ideas and their Transformation*, Leiden: Brill, 1998, 151-185.

Owen Hannaway, *The Chemists & The Word: The Didactic Origins of Chemistry*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975, Chapter 2: The Anatomy of the World, 22-57.

*Optional*: Theophrastus Paracelsus, 'Of Occult Philosophy', in *Paracelsus, Of the Supreme Mysteries of Nature*, London, 1656, 33-51, 60-63, 81-90.

*Optional*: Oswald Croll, *Philosophy Reformed & Improved*, London: 1657, 47-75.

**22 March 2022**

### **11. Rosicrucianism**

Hereward Tilton, 'The Rosicrucian Manifestos and Early Rosicrucianism', in Christopher Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2015, 128-144.

Joscelyn Godwin, 'The Deepest of the Rosicrucians: Michael Maier (1569-1622)', in Ralph White (ed.), *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited*, Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1999, 99-123.

*Optional*: *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz* (1616), in *Rosicrucian Trilogy: Modern Translations of the Three Founding Documents*, translations by Joscelyn Godwin, Christopher McIntosh, and Donata Pahnke McIntosh, Newburyport, MA: Weiser Books, 2016.

**23 March 2022**

### **12. Theosophick Philosophy**

Ariel Hessayon, 'Boehme's Life and Times', in Ariel Hessayon and



Sarah Apetrei (eds), *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, New York: Routledge, 13-37

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'Jacob Böhme and Christian Theosophy', in Christopher Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2015, 119-127.

*Optional: Jacob Boehme, The Clavis: Or an Explanation of some Principal Points and Expressions in his Writings ... translated by William Law, in The Works of Jacob Behmen, The Teutonic Theosopher, 4 vols., London, 1764, Vol. II, 1-25.*

## Course Requirements

There are three requirements for successfully completing the course:

### 1. Presence and active participation

You are required to attend at least 80% of the seminar meetings, which means that a maximum of three meetings can be skipped. Failure to be present at more than three meetings results in the judgement: "insufficient".

### 2. Oral presentations

One or several primary or secondary sources are studied during each seminar meeting. Dependent on the number of participants, you are required to take responsibility for *at least one* seminar presentation (instructions for seminar presentations, see below). If the number of participants is relatively small, you are required to accept more than one presentation. A grade is awarded for each presentation. In case of more than one presentation, the highest grade counts. This grade counts for 40% of the final grade.

Please note: not turning up when you are scheduled for a presentation is taken very seriously, for it means that you are letting down all your fellow students and are in effect sabotaging the entire meeting. Therefore in cases of "no-show", 1.0 will be subtracted from the final grade. Exceptions can be made only if you can demonstrate that the absence was due to force majeure (serious illness, deaths in the family etc.), and if the absence was reported as early as possible (by means of email via Blackboard, or if necessary by telephone).

### 3. Written paper

You are required to write a paper (2000-3000 words + footnotes/bibliography, 1.5 line spacing) on a subject of your choice, relevant to the theme of the course, and selected in consultation with the instructor. Take care! The paper will be evaluated on the basis of its contents, but the grade will be negatively influenced by failure to respect basic style requirements (i.e., rules for use of footnotes, literature references in footnotes, and presentation of the bibliography).

A first version of the paper must be submitted as a Word document (attachment to [p.j.forshaw@uva.nl](mailto:p.j.forshaw@uva.nl)), no later than Friday 27 May 2022). The paper will be returned with critical comments, suggestions, and a provisional grade by Friday 3 June. The student then has the option to either accept the provisional grade or submit a final revised version (no later than Friday

**17 June**). If either the first or the final version of the paper is submitted too late, this results in a subtraction of 0.5 point for each week that it is late. The grade awarded for the paper counts for 60% of the final grade. Please note the following! “First version” does *not* mean merely a first sketch or draft: it should be a complete paper, written according to the instructions.

### **Instructions for Seminar Presentations**

A good presentation takes between 10 to 15 minutes (depending on the number of people presenting in that session) and contains the following elements:

- It provides some background information about the author.
- The presentation makes clear what the text is about (or claims to be about) and why the author seems to have written it.
- It contains a clear and succinct summary – in your own words – of the structure and the contents of the text, presented in such a way that someone who has not read the text would be able to follow it.
- It contains two or three well-chosen quotations that clarify the author’s intentions and his/her argument.
- It contains an element of critical evaluation (for example What to make of the text? How convincing do you find the author? Are there gaps or weaknesses in the argument? Can you find counterarguments against his/her claims? And so on). Don’t be afraid to also indicate your personal opinion: did you like the text, or disliked it, and why?
- You are encouraged to use some form of presentation software, e.g. PowerPoint, Keynote, or Prezi.

While all students following the course are expected to have read the texts under discussion, a good presenter has taken the trouble of looking a bit further. For example, if the required reading consists of only a few sections of a longer chapter, the presenter will have read the entire chapter so as to be able to put the sections in context. He or she will also have taken a look at some additional literature relevant to the text and the themes that are central in it.