



FACULTEIT DER GEESTESWETENSCHAPPEN
Afdeling Geschiedenis, Europese Studies & Religiestudies

**HISTORY OF HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY
AND RELATED CURRENTS**

REPORT 2015



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1. Introduction

This has been a normal year in terms of teaching and research, but there is some concern about the rather sudden decline in student numbers. Having enjoyed a very strong group of international students over several years in succession, the number of students in the Master program dropped quite dramatically and unexpectedly for the academic year 2015-2016. The reasons are unclear: in response to an email inquiry, students who had been accepted but finally did not register for the program reported personal and contingent reasons that show no perceptible structural pattern. Publicity has been normal, and the website functions well. One could speculate that the decline in student numbers might have something to do with the widely publicized financial, organizational, and managerial problems of the Faculty of Humanities and the University of Amsterdam that were at the heart of the revolt of students and academic staff in the spring of 2015. Other possible factors are the steady increase of financial costs for students in combination with a decline of career prospects in the Humanities; while these are a general phenomenon in higher learning, it is possible that choosing a “vocational” field such as History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents is getting more risky. Then again, this year's drop in students numbers might be merely accidental, and the present number of new applications does seem to suggest we may be getting back to normal in the academic year 2016-2017. In any case, we will keep monitoring these developments closely.

Another new development in 2015 was the organizational move of HHP from the Department of Art, Religion & Cultural Studies (KRC) to the new Department of History, European Studies & Religious studies (GER). In combination with a tightening of the Religious Studies program, which is forced to cut expenses, this move may have considerable implications for the future collaboration between HHP and Religious Studies (as well as, potentially, History and/or European Studies). In sum, it seems clear that not just the Faculty of Humanities but the very field of Humanities is going through a process of transition, with outcomes that are impossible to predict but will certainly have implications for HHP.



2. Personnel

There have been no personnel changes in 2015.

3. Teaching: Program and Levels of Participation

1st semester 2014-2015, block 3

Master

Western Esotericism and Its Scholars (W.J. Hanegraaff), 11 students

2nd semester 2014-2015, block 1-2

Bachelor

Western Esotericism from the 18th to the 20th Century (M. Pasi). 8 students

Master

Occult Trajectories I: Magic and Modernity (M. Pasi), 15 students

1st semester 2015-2016, block 1-2

Bachelor

Westerse Esoterie en Religieus Pluralisme (W.J. Hanegraaff). 34 students

Western Esotericism in the Early Modern Period (P.J.Forshaw). 12 students

Master

Contested Knowledge II: Cosmotheism and Disenchantment (W.J. Hanegraaff). 5 students

Renaissance Esotericism II: Occult Philosophies (P.J.Forshaw). 7 students

Other teaching

Master



Core Module Polemics and Politics of Religious Identity (P.J.Forshaw, G.A. Wiegers).
11 students.

4. Research

4.1. Research Program

No new projects were started this year (for the current projects, see description in previous Annual Reports).

4.2. Research Output

Peter J. Forshaw

“Morbo spirituali medicina spiritualis convenit’: Paracelsus, Madness, and Spirits”, in: Steffen Schneider (ed.), *Aesthetics of the Spirits: Spirits in Early Modern Science, Religion, Literature and Music*, Göttingen: V&R Press 2015, 287-305.

“Magical Material & Material Survivals: Amulets, Talismans, and Mirrors in Early Modern Europe”, in: Dietrich Boschung & Jan N. Bremmer (eds.), *The Materiality of Magic*, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink 2015, 357-381.

“The Occult Middle Ages,” in: Christopher Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, London: Routledge 2015, 34-48.

“Kabbalah,” in: Christopher Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, London: Routledge 2015, 541-551.

J. Christian Greer

“Hakim Bey,” in: Christopher Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, London: Routledge 2015, 424-426.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

“How Hermetic was Renaissance Hermetism?”, *Aries* 15:2 (2015), 179-209.

“The Globalization of Esotericism”, *Correspondences* 3 (2015), 55-91.

“Freeing the Ancient Wisdom from Catholic Crusts: Stefan George and Incognito Paganism”, in: Wolfgang Braungart (ed.), *Stefan George und die Religion*, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin / Boston 2015, 113-125.



- “Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa”, in: Christopher Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, Routledge 2015, 91-98.
- “Jacob Boehme and Christian Theosophy”, in: Christopher Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, Routledge 2015, 119-127.
- “Trance”, in : Robert A. Segal & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, Brill : Leiden / Boston 2015, 511-513.
- “From Imagination to Reality: An Introduction to Esotericism and the Occult”, in: Kurt Almquist & Louise Belfrage (eds.), *Hilma af Klint: The Art of Seeing the Invisible*, Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation: Stockholm 2015, 59-71.
- “Open Access to the Absolute : Some Remarks on the Concept of Religion”, in: Kurt Almquist & Alexander Linklater (eds.), *Religion : Perspectives from the Engelsberg Seminar 2014*, Axel and Margaret Ax :son Johnson Foundation: Stockholm 2015, 89-102.
- “Западный эзотеризм: путеводитель для запутавшихся. Гл. 3: Апологетика и полемика” [Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed Ch. 3. Apologetics and Polemics], *Aliter* 5 (2015), 84-107.

Marco Pasi

- “Esoteric Experiences and Critical Ethnocentrism”, in: Kurt Almquist and Alexander Linklater (eds.), *Religion. Perspectives from the Engelsberg Seminar 2014*, Stockholm, Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation, 2015, pp. 131-142.
- “Hilma af Klint, Western Esotericism and the Problem of Modern Artistic Creativity”, in: Kurt Almquist and Louise Belfrage (eds.), *Hilma af Klint. The Art of Seeing the Invisible*, Stockholm, Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation, 2015, pp. 101-116.
- “Occult/Occultism”, in: Kocku von Stuckrad and Robert Segal (eds.), *Vocabulary for Study of Religion*, Leiden - Boston, Brill, 2015, vol. 2, pp. 555-561.
- “Hermeticism and Initiation in Pessoa”, a review of Fernando Pessoa, *Hermetismo e Iniciação*, ed. by Manuel J. Gandra, 2015, in: *Pessoa Plural. A Journal of Fernando Pessoa Studies*, 8 (Autumn 2015), pp. 649-652.
- “The Persisting Something and the Logic of Irreducibility”, in: Vincent Ceraudo, *Psychic*, ed. by Mara Ambrožič, Marseille, éditions Group, 2015, pp. 74-79.
- Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits*, Monash University Museum of Art / MUMA, Melbourne, 2015, 6 pp. Text of the brochure for the exhibition with the same title. In collaboration with Lars Bang Larsen.



Mike A. Zuber

“Johann Jacob Zimmermann and God’s Two Books: Copernican Cosmology in Lutheran Germany around 1700”, in: David Beck (ed.), *Knowing Nature in Early Modern Europe*, London: Pickering & Chatto 2015, 83–99.

Review of Jacob Boehme, *Aurora (Morgen Röte im auffgang, 1612) and Fundamental Report (Gründlicher Bericht, Mysterium Pansophicum, 1620)*, with a translation, introduction, and commentary by Andrew Weeks, *Ambix* 62: 1 (2015), 99–100.

5. Public Activities

Peter J. Forshaw

Lectures

“Michael Maier, Emblems and Alchemy”, Conference *Interplay: Rethinking Music, Mathematics, and Alchemical Praxis in the Atalanta fugiens (1618)*, Chemical Heritage Foundation, Philadelphia (USA), 14-15 March.

“Alchemy, Music and Myth in Michael Maier’s *Atalanta fugiens (1617)*”, Conference *Alchemical Melodies: The Quest for Musical Quintessence in the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford (UK), 27 May.

“Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*”, Symposium *De Grootshied van de Geest*, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 7 November.

J. Christian Greer

Lectures

“Old White Hipsters in Fezzes: The Ecumenical Heresy of the Moorish Orthodox RadioCrusade”, *Western Esotericism and the East*, 5th Biannual Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), Riga, Latvia, 16-18 April.

Outreach

“Apocalyptic Witchcraft Lecture Series.” Weekly lecture series on witches and witchcraft in 19th and 20th century literature. LAG, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. 5 August – 18 September.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

Lectures



“Carl Gustav Jung en Eranos: Een poging to contextualiseren”, Interdisciplinary Society for Analytical Psychology (IVAP), Driebergen, the Netherlands, 8 February.

“The Great War of the Soul: Carl Gustav Jung’s *Liber Novus*”, Keynote Lecture, Conference *Crisis and Religious Madness: Religious Deviance between Psychopathology and Liberation around 1900*, Institute for the Study of Religions, Leipzig University, 23-25 February.

“Alan Moore’s *Promethea*: Counterculturalism and the End of the World”, Conference *Gnostic Countercultures: Terror and Intrigue*, Rice University, Houston, USA, 26-28 March.

“The Globalization of Esotericism”, Keynote Lecture, *Western Esotericism and the East*, Fifth Biannual Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), Riga, Latvia, 16-18 April.

“The Great War of the Soul: Divine Madness in C.G. Jung’s *Liber Novus*”, Invited Public Lecture, University of Heidelberg, Germany, 22 April.

“Magic, Trance, and Agnosticism: Jan Platvoet and the Study of Western Esotericism”, Research seminar at the occasion of Jan Platvoet’s 80th birthday, University of Leiden, 9 June.

“Fantastic Religion: Esoteric Fictionality and the Invention of Tradition”, Keynote Lecture, *Dynamics of Religion: Past and Present*, XXIth Quinquennial World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), Erfurt, Germany, 23-29 August.

“Emma Hardinge Britten and the Orientalist Imagination”, Invited lecture at Conference *Theosophy across Boundaries*, University of Heidelberg, 24-26 September.

“The Theosophical Imagination”, Keynote Lecture, “Enchanted Modernities” Conference *Theosophy and the Arts: Texts and Contexts of Modern Enchantment*, Columbia University, USA, 9-10 October.

Conference organization

“Western Esotericism and Cognition”, ESSWE session at the American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, U.S.A., 21-24 November.

Marco Pasi

Invited lecture for the launch of the book *La Società Teosofica: storia, valori, realtà attuale*, published by the Società Teosofica Italiana. Biblioteca Comunale Centrale di Milano, Palazzo Sormani, 7 March 2015.



- “The Starry Sky Above Me, the Sun Within Me: Metaphorical Loci of Light”. Invited lecture for the seminar “Light (04 A Materialisation)”, organized by Gabriel Lester for the Academy of Architecture of the Amsterdam School of the Arts, 13 March 2015.
- “And Never the Twain Shall Meet: An Examination of the Relationship between the Study of Western Esotericism and ‘Orientalism’”. Paper presented at *Western Esotericism and the East: 5th biannual conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE)*, Univesity of Riga, Latvia, 16 April 2015.
- “Early Forms of Abstract Art and Spiritualism: Georgiana Houghton’s Spirit Drawings”. MADA artforum lecture on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition *Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits*, Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA), Melbourne, 22 April 2015.
- “The Study of Western Esotericism: A Short Introduction”. Invited lecture at the Department of Religious Studies, Monash University, Melbourne, 23 April 2015.
- “The Study of Western Esotericism: An Introduction”. Invited lecture for the Hungarian Association for the Study of Religion, Károly Gáspár University, Budapest, 26 May 2015.
- “Messianism, Nationalism and Modern Western Esotericism”. Invited lecture, Central European University, Budapest, 28 May 2015.
- “Western Esotericism, Alternative Spirituality and Roman Catholicism in Modern Italy”. Paper presented at *Dynamics of Religion: Past and Present*, XXIth World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), Erfurt, Germany, 27 August 2015.
- “In search of the origins of Western esotericism”. Invited lecture for the 2nd international Babel colloquium *In search of the origins of religion*, Ghent, 12 September 2015.
- Respondent in the panel “Futurism, Art, and Theosophy” and participation in the final roundtable session of the 2nd Enchanted Modernities conference, *Theosophy and the Arts: Texts and Contexts of Modern Enchantment*, Columbia University, New York, 10 October 2015.
- “Aleister Crowley et l’Islam”. Paper for the 31st Politica Hermetica conference, *La réception de l’Islam et du soufisme dans l’ésotérisme occidental*. Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris), 5 December 2015.
- “Magic and Power”. Invited lecture for the interdisciplinary lecture series of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, Academy of Fine Arts, Munich, 15 December 2015.

Interviews

Interview, *ESSWE Newsletter* 6:1 (Spring 2015), 13-15.



Interview with Mariano Villalba, “Entrevista a Dr. Marco Pasi, Universidad de Amsterdam”, *Newsletter del Centro de Estudios sobre el Esoterismo Occidental de la UNASUR*, 2:2 (March 2015), 13-14.

Mike A. Zuber

“Alchemy and Religion: Some Problems with ‘Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy’,” paper presented at *Huizinga Instituut Promovendisymposium*, De Hoorneboeg, Hilversum, 31 March–1 April 2015.

“Contesting the Legitimacy of Astrology: The Sturm-Hannemann Debate, 1699-1701”, paper presented at *The Marginalization of Astrology in Early Modern Science and Culture*, Descartes Centre, Utrecht, 19–20 March 2015.

“Philosophical Delights: Knowledge-Based Entertainment Performances in Polite Society, 1636–66”, paper presented at *Scientiae 2015: Disciplines of Knowing in the Early Modern World*, University of Toronto, Canada, 27–29 May 2015.

Conference organization.

“Alchemy and Chemistry in Sickness and in Health: 6th SHAC Postgraduate Workshop”, Oxford University, United Kingdom, 30 October 2015 (in collaboration with Judith Mawer).

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

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

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*. Leiden / Boston: Brill.

(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*.