

The Newsletter of the  
European Society for  
the Study of Western  
Esotericism

# ESSWE Newsletter

Winter 2017  
Volume 8, Number 2

## Words from the Editor

– *Chris Giudice*



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Welcome to the Winter 2017/18 Newsletter: this issue sees the return of some of the most popular sections, such as scholar interviews, member publications and young scholars' PhD projects. The field of Western esotericism seems to be blooming, not only in regard to conferences and publications, but workshops and summer courses appear to be on the rise, like the ESSWE workshop in Stockholm, and the summer course in Budapest can attest to. This year, two conferences in particular will attract many scholars in our field: the Association for the Study of Esotericism conference to be held at Rice University in Texas and the annual

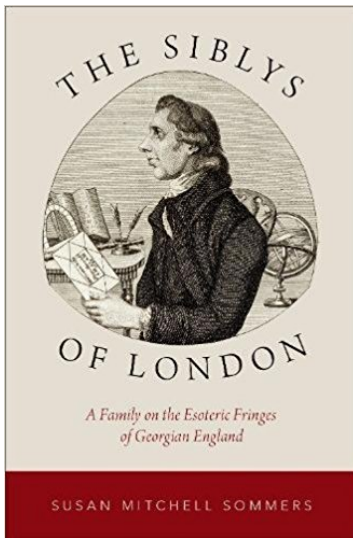
CESNUR conference taking place in China. I would be grateful if any of our members could provide the Newsletter with a brief report of these and other conferences, accompanied, if possible, by pictures related to the events. Member contribution is a vital aspect of the Newsletter, and is highly appreciated for those events that your humble editor will not be able to visit. As always, please do not hesitate to contact me if you think that something should be added to the next issue or if you are organising an event that could be of interest to the membership of ESSWE. The next issue of the newsletter will be sent out in June. ♦

## Two new publications by ESSWE members

**Professor Susanne Mitchell Sommers**

*The Siblys of London: A Family on the Esoteric Fringes of Georgian England*

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2018)



Ebenezer Sibly was a quack doctor, plagiarist, and masonic ritualist in late eighteenth-century London; his brother Manoah was a respectable accountant and a pastor who ministered to his congregation without pay for fifty years. The inventor of Dr. Sibly's Reanimating Solar Tincture, which claimed to restore the newly dead to life, Ebenezer himself died before he turned fifty and stayed that way despite being surrounded by bottles of the stuff. Asked to execute his will, which urged the continued manufacture of Solar

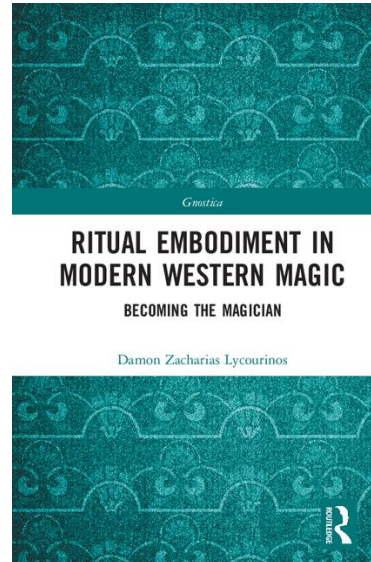
Tincture, and left legacies for multiple and concurrent wives as well as an illegitimate son whose name the deceased could not recall, Manoah found his brother's record of financial and moral indiscretions so upsetting that he immediately resigned his executorship.

Ebenezer's death brought a premature conclusion to a colorfully chaotic life, lived on the fringes of various interwoven esoteric subcultures. Drawing on such sources as ratebooks and pollbooks, personal letters and published sermons, burial registers and horoscopes, Susan Mitchell Sommers has woven together an engaging microhistory that offers useful revisions to scholarly accounts of Ebenezer and Manoah, while placing the entire Sibly family firmly in the esoteric byways of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. *The Siblys of London* provides fascinating insight into the lives of a family who lived just outside our usual historical range of vision. ♦

**Dr. Damon Zacharias Lycourinos**

*Ritual Embodiment in Modern Western Magic: Becoming the Magician*

(London: Routledge, 2018)



In the Western world, magic has often functioned as an umbrella term for various religious beliefs and ritual practices that seek to influence events by harnessing supernatural power. The definition of these myriad occult and esoteric traditions have, however, usually come from those that are opposed to its practice; notably authorities in religious, legal and intellectual spheres. This book seeks to provide a new perspective, directly from the practitioners of modern Western magic, by exploring

how a distinctive mode of embodiment and consciousness can produce a transition from an 'ordinary' to a 'magical' worldview.

Starting with an introduction to the study of magic in the Western academy, the book then presents the author's own participant observation of five ethnographic case studies of modern Western magic. The focus of these ethnographic case studies is directed towards ideas and methods the informants employ to self-legitimise and self-represent as 'magicians'. It concludes by discussing the phenomenological implications and issues around embodiment that are inherent to the contemporary practice of magic.

This is a unique insight into the lived experience of practitioners of modern magic. As such, it will be of keen interest to scholars of the Occult and New Religious Movements, as well as Religious Studies academics examining issues around the embodiment and the anthropology of religion. ♦

## Scholar Interviews

- *Chris Giudice*

In every issue of the *Newsletter* one junior and one senior scholar of Western esotericism are interviewed. They are both asked the same questions.

### Professor Christine Ferguson, Division of Literature and Languages, University of Stirling, Stirling, United Kingdom

*How did you come to be interested in Western esotericism?*

I had two routes into this field: one academic and one personal. I am literary scholar who specializes in Victorian literature, a canon awash with esoteric tropes, plots, and devices. When I wrote my doctoral dissertation at Tulane University back in the mists of the early 2000s, it was on a seemingly non-esoteric topic: namely the reception and impact of Victorian language origin theories on the popular fiction of writers like Bram Stoker, H.G. Wells, and Marie Corelli. It didn't take me long, however, to discover that nineteenth-century debates about how language came to be, and what it might become, were deeply connected to occult ideas about telepathy, racial memory, and spiritual evolution. And so many of the era's spiritualists and occultists were interested in universal language projects! That project became my first book; my second focused on the presence of hereditarianism and eugenics in the fiction and séance communications of the Modern Spiritualist movement.

More personally, as a child of nineteen-seventies Britain, I grew up in an occult-saturated popular culture. Occult tropes were everywhere, in t.v. programmes like *Doctor Who* and *Children of the Stones*, in the *Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories* and *Choose Your Own Adventure* series, in prog rock and metal, and in the Hammer Horror films that I watched compulsively even though they scared the hell out of me (Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing were my first crushes). I learned to be a literary critic by watching horror and thinking about the meaning of its conventions and repetitions.

*What do you feel are the major challenges for our field at present and in the future?*

The first two that come to mind are institutional recognition and archival preservation. We are still a young field and need work hard to establish the relevance of our subject to the wide array of traditional disciplines with which it intersects; most importantly, we need to continue to attract, and fund, excellent students, and to fight for posts for the early career scholars who are most vulnerable to misperceptions of the field. The work of ESSWE and Amsterdam's Center for HHP has been invaluable in this respect, but we need to maintain this momentum; all humanities disciplines are increasingly under threat in today's academic climate, and there are no strides we've made that can't be reversed.



Finally, as much of the material we study has not always—or in some cases, ever—been considered academically valuable, much of it has not been carefully or rigorously preserved. Private esoteric organizations and archives, which have the will to do so often, lack the resources, and valuable records are deteriorating before they can be digitized. The IAPSOP initiative has been an absolute game changer in this respect, and my own scholarship would be impossible without it. But it only exists through the efforts of an extraordinarily energetic and generous group of individuals working in their spare time and self-funding their activity. Marc Demarest deserves more recognition for his extraordinary service to the field. future.

*What is your most fun memory so far from your time in the field?*

Forming part of—the second tier of a human pyramid with a group of fellow ESSWE revellers in an Erfurt town square at 3 a.m. last summer. I can only pray that no photographic record of that incident survives.

*What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?*

I live in Glasgow, which has an excellent music scene and provides lots of opportunities to go out to gigs and clubs. I may not be as slick on the dance floor as I used to be, but I still have a few moves.

I bought a bike a few years ago with the intention of taking up cycling. I went out on it once, immediately rode into a parked car, and have never been on it since. It reproaches me balefully from my hall cupboard whenever I pass it.

*What are the worst things about having this as your speciality?*

I will never get back the time I spent trying to get through Thomas Lake Harris's poetry. But seriously, it's difficult for me to see any down sides. I love the field and the way it constantly leads me towards texts, artistic products, and intellectual currents I would not otherwise have encountered. That said, I came to esotericism studies after I had already obtained a permanent academic position within the more established sub-discipline of Victorian literary studies; I think it

can be harder today for early career scholars who have always specialized in esotericism research to argue that they 'fit' posts within traditional academic disciplines. The argument can, of course, be made, but at present it requires some shrewdness.

*What are the best things about having this as your speciality?*

I work with amazing colleagues whose research crosses histories, languages, and disciplines, who are forging their way into new intellectual territory without the aid of long-established critical traditions on which to rely. They constantly inspire me. Also, research in this area requires a spirit of internationalism that seems to me now more urgent than ever.

And, of course, esotericism scholars make the best human pyramids. ♦

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## Sólveig Gudmundsdóttir, PhD Student, Department of Philology, University of Munster, Germany

*How did you come to be interested in Western esotericism?*

The occult has held a certain fascination for me since I was young, although it wasn't until my undergraduate studies that I started giving it serious attention. When I began studying literature, I became preoccupied with decadent literature and symbolism. These currents contain countless works that are infused by the discourse of esotericism, which was undeniably one of the reasons for my interest in them. During my graduate studies, Western Esotericism came to be a primal focus of my work. For my master thesis I delved into the writings of Alfred Kubin, analyzing it in the light of spiritual evolution theories and race.

Currently I am writing my thesis on esotericism in the works of the Vienna Actionists, concentrating on the intricate discursive links between esotericism and other discourses such as gender, dissidence and fascism that permeate their work. I seek to investigate their role within the aesthetic project and cultural dissidence of Actionism as well as putting the works in the cultural context of post-war Austria.

Through my studies I have sought to highlight the relationship between the discourse of esotericism and other discourses such as gender and politics, through the analysis

of art or literature, both to deepen the understanding of the work in question and to reflect on the status of Esotericism in society and culture, i.e. in historical context.



*What do you feel are the major challenges for our field at present and in the future?*

There is the ongoing need to increase visibility and further establish the relevance of Western Esotericism. Therefore, the field would certainly benefit from continued integration with other fields, encouraging a more interdisciplinary and critical approach regarding the research of esotericism. For example addressing the pressing issues of gender, sexuality and race within Western Esotericism, topics that haven't received enough attention in the field (although

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this is changing). These developments will offer up various new and exciting research prospects that would serve to display the importance of WE within a wider social and cultural context.

Then there are more practical or material matters, like the lack of funding and positions in the field, which is sadly not likely to see a positive shift at the moment, given the how the financial crisis has affected Universities.

*What is your most fun memory so far from your time in the field?*

I had the pleasure of attending my first ESSWE conference last year in Erfurt, which was overall a great experience. Our group includes some fantastic people I was lucky enough to get to know. There were fruitful discussions pertaining to esoteric research, a great deal of drinking and many hilarious antidotes (that are all inappropriate for this publication). Without a doubt the most fun I have ever had at a conference and I am looking forward to meeting my fellow WE researchers again.

## PhD Scholars' Projects

**Aren Roukema, Department of English and Humanities, Birkbeck, University of London, United Kingdom**

**Legitimation and Enchantment: Science Fiction and Occultism, 1860–1926**



*What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?*

Since my main field of study is not WE but literature and culture, my research interest covers diverse subjects that include the historical and neo-avant-garde, gender studies, porn studies, symbolism and decadence. In my spare time I like to attend art exhibitions, go to concerts, read and enjoy delicious food and wine in good company.

*What are the worst things about having this as your speciality?*

The times when I am not taken seriously as scholar and my research is thought of as insignificant because of its focus on esotericism, just generally when meeting confusion and lack of understanding regarding my chosen subject matter.

*What are the best things about having this as your speciality?*

Western Esotericism is a fertile and exciting field with plenty of research gaps so that it seems to offer endless possibilities for further examination and analysis. ♦

My PhD research examines the textual interplay and narrative engagement between early science fiction (SF) and the group of innovative theories and practices often grouped in and around the category of 'occultism'. Based at Birkbeck, University of London, and supervised by Roger Luckhurst, I am analysing the developmental roots of SF in tandem with those of magical, Spiritualist and Theosophical currents, in the specific context of Anglo-American culture. From the perspective of a combined historical and literary criticism, I am situating a select sample of representative early SF authors of the period, including Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Emma Hardinge Britten and Marie Corelli, within the intellectual and social networks of occultism. Building from this contextualization, I am identifying structural similarities in the manner in which occultism and SF approached proleptic and pre-paradigmatic knowledges in this ur-period of their developments. Both seized on the liminal spaces between theory and established fact offered by scientific approaches to magical, preternatural and supra-sensory phenomena; both were influenced by, and contributed to, the tropes of genre fiction; both offered authors and readers alike an opportunity to engage with technological and secularizing

processes that accelerated the mechanistic momentum of self, society and culture; both, by deploying scientific discourse and working from the intellectual substrate of scientific discovery, allowed for a complexification of binary relationships between enchantment and disenchantment, natural and supernatural, religious and secular. Science fiction has often been defined as a myth-structure suited to a rational, materialist, post-religious society. This research builds on that of scholars such as Jeffrey Kripal and

Christopher Partridge to show that from the very roots of the genre the magical and supernatural have played a formative role in the development of SF. ♦

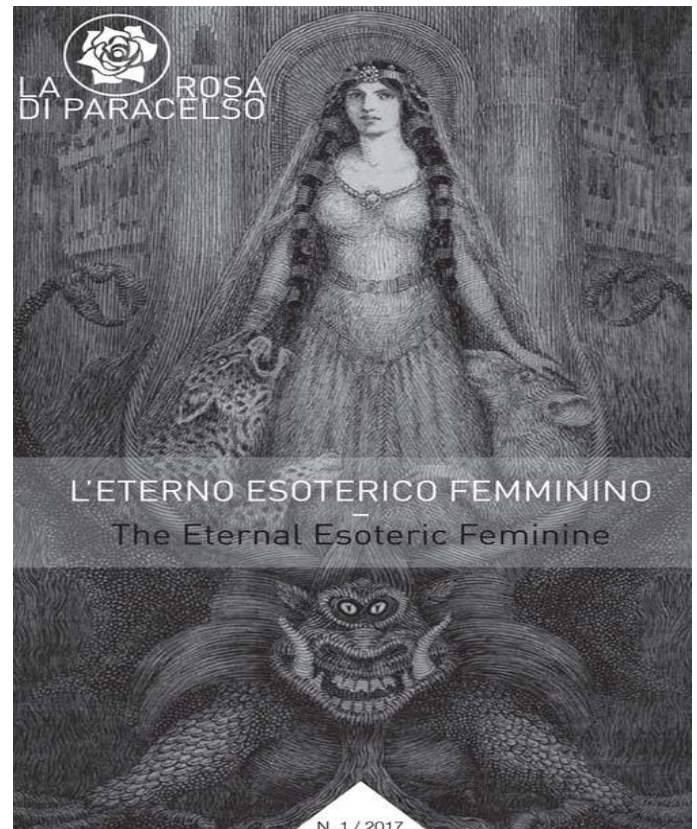
## Georgia van Raalte, University of Surrey, Guilford, United Kingdom

### Black Isis, Liquid Gold and Sacred Sex: The Hidden Influence of Hinduism on the work of Dion Fortune

Dion Fortune (1890-1946) was an English occultist and founder of the Society of the Inner Light, an initiatory organisation still active today. She published a multitude of books and articles on a range of esoteric topics across three decades. Fortune's work has had a considerable influence on contemporary occultism and in particular forms a vital link between the occult revival of the late-Victorian period and the post-war 'New Age'.



Fortune's aim, uniting her disparate corpus, was to help the British public. The First World War and the social developments of the turn-of-the-century had left British society rife with depression and isolation. Fortune believed that the reason for this was disenchantment, which she could cure through the reintegration of magic into the everyday world. She created a magical spirituality for the Englishman because, as she claimed in *Practical Occultism* (1935), different types of spirituality were needed for different races. While this was her explicit view, close study of Fortune's work tells a more nuanced story. This thesis will argue that South Asian, and especially Hindu, ideas had a potent influence on the work of Dion Fortune, but that she chose to disguise this. I will examine the various ways that socio-political developments between Britain and India motivated Fortune to hide her relationship with Indian spirituality. In doing so, this thesis will investigate to what extent the commercialization and eroticization endemic to New Age approaches to Eastern spirituality can be traced to the interplay between politics and occultism as India struggled for independence. ♦





## THE DIGNITY OF MAN IN WESTERN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY, ESOTERICISM, AND ART 24 JUNE – 29 JUNE, 2017, BUDAPEST, HUNGARY



### COURSE DIRECTORS

**Gyorgy Endre Szonyi**, English Department, University of Szeged/Department of History and Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

**Carsten Wilke**, Department of History, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

### FACULTY

**Brian Copenhaver**, Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, University of California in Los Angeles, USA

**Moshe Idel**, Jewish Thought, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

**Urszula Szulakowska**, formerly at Leeds University, UK

### BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION

The ambition of humans to elevate themselves beyond their natural means and to acquire transcendental insight and power is as ancient as our cultural history. The goal of this course is to highlight some aspects of this ambition that are related to Western Esotericism, thus to provide a solid picture of some key phenomena of mysticism, magic, and occult trends in intellectual history. Special attention will be paid to the historical period of late Antiquity to the early modern, as well as the post-Romanticism era. The topics of esotericism discussed in the course relate to cultural history, art history, film studies, and religious studies tracing the Judeo-Christian heritage. The learning outcome should be the acquisition of methodological tools in order to approach and assess the highlighted phenomena in a reliable scholarly way: close reading of texts; interpretation of images and films; placing cultural representations in social and historical contexts.

The course is targeted toward individuals (primarily but not exclusively advanced MA students, doctoral students, or young researchers) who have a demonstrated interest and some preliminary scholarly activity in understanding and interpreting Western esotericism related to intellectual history, religious studies, and/or visual culture.

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 14, 2018**

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Central European University's summer school (CEU SUN), established in 1996, is a program in English for graduate students, junior or post-doctoral researchers, teachers and professionals. It offers high-level, research-oriented, interdisciplinary academic courses as well as workshops on policy issues for professional development, taught by internationally renowned scholars and policy experts (including CEU faculty). Application from all over the world is encouraged.

<https://summeruniversity.ceu.edu/dignity-2018>

#### CEU Summer University

✉ P.O. Box: Budapest 5, P.f.: 1082, H-1245

☎ (36 1) 327 381, [f facebook.com/ceu.summer](https://www.facebook.com/ceu.summer)

E-mail: [summeru@ceu.edu](mailto:summeru@ceu.edu)

#### Non-discrimination policy statement

Central European University does not discriminate on the basis of – including, but not limited to – race, color, national and ethnic origin, religion, gender or sexual orientation in administering its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.

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## ESSWE Workshop – Stockholm, Sweden

### Esotericism in Practice: Sources, Methods, Theories

2018 ESSWE Thesis Workshop  
Stockholm University

**Date:** February 20, 2018

**Place:** Stockholm University; Room U29, Geovetenskapens hus

#### *Description:*

Western esotericism is usually encountered in texts and images and studied in its ideational and aesthetic aspects. We know a lot about esoteric ideas, worldviews, and aesthetic conventions; but what were the people engaged in esoteric ideas *doing*? From magic and alchemy to mediumship and channeling, esotericism has an emphatically practical orientation. Accessing and analyzing esoteric practice, however, invites challenges that are rarely addressed in the field.

This year's ESSWE Thesis Workshop will focus on the methodological and theoretical challenges of studying esoteric practice. What kinds of textual and non-textual sources can we use to address practices of the past? Can we access practice through philology? How do we conduct responsible ethnographic work with contemporary esoteric groups? Can we connect historical research with social science methods? What sort of theoretical frameworks might help us grasp esoteric practices, past and present? How does one write a thesis about esoteric practices? The workshop will address these and other questions through a combination of (I) masterclasses with three specialists focusing on different historical periods, and (II) thematic discussion groups where MA students and PhD candidates get the opportunity to talk about their own work with leading scholars in the field. The workshop also includes a career advice session led by a panel of early-career esotericism researchers.

*Workshop organizer:* Egil Aspren (egil.aspren@rel.su.se)

#### SCHEDULE

#### OPENING

**09.00-09.15:** Registration and Coffee

**09.15-09.30:** Welcome by ESSWE President + Workshop organizer

#### PART ONE: ORATORY (Masterclass lectures by invited speakers)

**09.30-10.15:** Masterclass 1: Dr. Emmanouela Grypeou (Stockholm University) *Accessing Esoteric Practice in Late Antiquity*

**10.30-11.15:** Masterclass 2: Dr. Liana Saif (Oxford University; Warburg Institute) *Accessing Esoteric Practice in the Middle Ages*

**11.30-12.15:** Masterclass 3: Dr. Kennet Granholm (independent scholar)

*Problems and Challenges with accessing Contemporary Esoteric Groups*

**12.30-13.30** Lunch at the Faculty Club (Manne Sigbahnvillan, Frescativägen 22)

#### PART TWO: LABORATORY (Thematic discussions in expert groups w/board members)

**13.45-15.00:** Group discussions in expert groups. Each student gets to present their research topic and formulate questions to the group. Confirmed participants from the ESSWE board: Andreas Kilcher (ETH, Zurich), Boaz Huss (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev), Egil Aspren (Stockholm University), Henrik Bogdan (Gothenburg University), Wouter J. Hanegraaff (University of Amsterdam), Bernd-Christian Otto (University of Erfurt), Christine Ferguson (Stirling University), Yuri Stoyanov (Warburg Institute), Nemanja Radulovic (University of Belgrade), and Olav Hammer (University of Southern Denmark).

**15.00-15.15:** Plenum Session: Each group summarizes the most important challenges and topics that surfaced during their discussions.

**15.15-15.45** *Coffee break*

#### PART THREE: PhD and Early Career Advice

**15.45-16.30:** Per Faxneld and Manon Hedenborg-White lead a discussion of job/career related issues (application processes, job opportunities, alternative career paths) relevant to early-career scholars.

**16.30-16.45:** Wrapping up and formal end to workshop

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**16.45-17.15:** ESSWE Members' Meeting

**18.00:** Visit and wine reception at the Swedenborg Memorial Church and Swedenborg Research Library (Tegnérslunden 7)

**19.45:** Dinner and drinks at Babajan Bar (Katarina Bangata 75) – *N.B. at own expense!* ♦



## Call for Papers

### The Occult Revival, Myth or Reality?

**29-30 September 2018, London**

The Theosophical Society in England (<http://www.theosoc.org.uk>) is holding a two-day international conference on The Occult Revival at the TSE Headquarters at 50 Gloucester Place, London W1U 8EA on Saturday and Sunday, 29 and 30 September 2018. The Occult Revival is a term used by scholars to refer to the growth of movements, like Theosophy, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries.

Papers may deal with any individual or group associated the Revival, or with methodological issues, such as the scope of the Revival, or indeed its reality. The Joint Chairs of the conference are Dr Muriel Pécastaing-Boissière of the Sorbonne, and Professor Christine Ferguson of Stirling University.

Those who wish to submit a paper on any aspect of the subject should send a summary of not more than 200 words by 1 June 2018 to Mr Leslie Price, secretary of the Programme Committee, at [leslie@theosoc.org.uk](mailto:leslie@theosoc.org.uk). Speakers will normally have 30 minutes including questions.

Conference participants will be responsible for their own travel, meals and accommodation. Those presenting papers will be exempt from registration fees. If you wish to register for the conference, or to be kept informed of the programme, please contact The Theosophical Society in England ([office@theosoc.org.uk](mailto:office@theosoc.org.uk)). ♦

### Common and Comparative Esotericisms - Western, Islamic, and Jewish (12–14 June 2018, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice)

Fondazione Giorgio Cini in collaboration with the Centre d'Études Turques, Ottomanes, Balkaniques et Centrasiatiques (CETOBaC - EHESS) will host the inaugural conference of the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE) to be held on San Giorgio Island, Venice, on 12-14 June 2018.

For further information, please visit: <http://ensie.site/conferences.html?> ♦

### Myths of the Earth and Humankind: Ecology and the End of the World

**01-04 June 2018, Sendai, Japan**

#### CALL FOR PAPERS

We are happy to announce that the 12th Annual Conference of the International Association for Comparative Mythology is to be held at Tohoku University, Sendai, Japan on June 01-04, 2018. All members are warmly invited to give a paper and to participate in the discussions.

This year we have the following topics:

1. Myths of the Earth and Humankind: Ecology and the End of the World (Including eschatological myths; traditional concepts of the end of times; mythology related to climate and natural disaster; humanity and the Earth, etc.);
2. A “free topic”, i.e., any other topic you would like to propose/choose will be considered.

A list of prospective talks will be published on our website.

Please take note of the following:

#### ABSTRACTS

By **February 15, 2018**, please send, if you intend to participate, a short (300 words or less) abstract of your talk to this address: [iacm.admin@gmail.com](mailto:iacm.admin@gmail.com)

The abstracts will be reviewed by a selection committee; the selected abstracts will be published on our website (<http://www.compmyth.org>)

CONFERENCE FEE for the participants from North America, Australia, the EU and EEA countries and Switzerland, and Northeast Asia is \$80, which will cover the conference dinner and reception. Students from the aforementioned countries and participants from other regions can participate for a reduced fee – \$40. For the payment options please see below.

Also, those of you who are not yet official members of IACM, please consider joining the association! The yearly fee is \$40 (it is \$15 for students and members from countries outside North America, Australia, the EU, EEA, Switzerland, and Northeast Asia). ♦

## Upcoming Conferences

### CESNUR Conference

**Weixin College,  
Nantou County, Taiwan  
17-23 June 2018**

CESNUR 2018 will be organized at Weixin College, an accredited university in Taiwan, in cooperation with Taiwan WeiXin World Peace Promotion Association, an organization specialized in hosting academic conferences. The dates have been set to allow participants to attend a significant religious festival in Taiwan, centered on the unveiling of a 25-meters high golden statue of Guiguzi (the largest statue of Guiguzi in the world) by the Taiwanese new religion Weixin Shengjiao, the parent organization of Weixin College. Guiguzi was a Chinese sage who, according to the tradition, during the Warring States period in China operated the first school of military strategy and diplomacy in world history. As happened for other figures in Chinese history, he was divinized after his death and is regarded by Weixin Shengjiao as the embodiment of the Bodhisattva Wang Chan Lao Zu. The cult of Guiguzi is largely spread in both Mainland China and Taiwan, and it is expected that the unveiling of the statue on June 18 will be attended by thousands of members of many different religions, including Christians, who obviously do not regard Guiguzi as a divinity but respect his historical role as a promoter of peace through diplomacy. These different religions will participate, some presenting their own rituals, in what promises to be a truly spectacular event. The fees of local transportation, meal, and accommodation on June 18th will be sponsored by Weixin Shengjiao.

Participants to the conference are expected to arrive in Taipei airport on June 17, from where buses will take them to Taichung. On June 18, they will attend the festival centered on the unveiling of Guiguzi's statue in Nantou County. Conference sessions at Weixin college will be on June 19, 20, and in the morning of 21. A field trip will explore different new religions of Taiwan on June 21 (afternoon), 22, and 23, concluding in Taipei, from where they will be able to fly back home on the late evening of June 23 or on June 24. We will post soon offers and costs for packages including all hotels and meals.

We welcome papers on this year's theme: "Tradition and Innovation in Religious Movements: East Asia, the West and Beyond." More specifically we welcome lectures that examine perceptions and practices related to orthodoxy, tradition, and innovation in religious movements. In addition, we welcome specific examinations of the religious relations between East Asia and the rest of the world, of the inculturation of Western religions and movements in East Asia, and the globalization of movements origination in East Asia. We would also like to discuss the relations between esotericism, orthodoxy, and innovation, and the multiple meanings of "tradition/s."

### Eros, Sexuality, and Embodiment in Esoteric Traditions

**ASE Conference: Rice University, Houston,  
Texas. 24-27 May 2018**

This year's conference will explore the theme "Eros, Sexuality, and Embodiment in Esoteric Traditions." Esoteric writings offer a range of possibilities for investigating both literal and figurative erotic and sexual configurations, from the allegorical couplings of alchemy, to the practices of Valentinian Gnosticism, to descriptions of angelic sex in Ida Craddock. Connectedly, esoteric thinkers have described numerous unusual ways to embodiment, from phenomena of divine possession, to the making of magical children, to golems and animated statues.

The conference will include papers on Western esoteric practices, including theories, representations and methods of practice viewed from cultural, practical, religious and aesthetic fields of inquiry; papers that address the conference theme in terms of diverse types of representation, including arts and literature, as well as methods that reflect specific theories of esotericism, either historically or in a contemporary context; papers on magic, alchemy, astrology, ritual practice, mysticism, spiritualism, occultism, hermeticism, neo-paganism, contemporary esoteric movements and teachers, Asian influences on Western traditions, and other relevant topics. ASE regards esotericism as an interdisciplinary field of research and we invite scholars from all disciplines to share their research and writings in support of a cross-fertilization of perspectives. ♦



UNIVERSITÉ DE FRIBOURG  
UNIVERSITÄT FREIBURG

International conference on

# The Birth of the Science of Religion: **Out of the Spirit of Occultism**

February 14<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
Saal Jäggi, MIS 4112

For further information:  
[www.unifr.ch/screl/de/news](http://www.unifr.ch/screl/de/news)

