

# ESSWE

European Society for the Study  
of Western Esotericism

Image: Detail from Henry Fuseli. *The Night-Hag Visiting Lapland Witches*, 1796. Met Museum Collection, New York.



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## Words from the Editor

Chloe Sugden

Welcome to the Summer 2021 edition of the ESSWE Newsletter; I hope that you all had some pleasant warmer months! With hybrid conferences taking place, many of us were able to come together in person again and it was a delight for all, I'm sure, to be amongst colleagues after the long hiatus.

This edition, in lieu of our regular scholar interviews, Liana Saif is interviewed by Mark Sedgwick on her new position as Assistant Professor in the History of Medieval Esotericism at the Centre for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, Amsterdam. Further, Dylan Burns is interviewed by Earl Fontainelle on his new role as Assistant Professor in the History of Ancient Esotericism at the HHP. The intriguing doctoral projects of Emma Merkling (Courtauld Institute of Art) and José Leitão (University of Coimbra)

are also featured. Exciting new member publications and 2021 event reviews are included, as well as upcoming conferences and calls for proposals. Many thanks to this issue's contributors!

As autumn is well and truly in the air, I'll leave you with some Mallarmé:

... I have loved, strangely and especially, all that can be summed up in the word fall. Thus, during the year my favorite season is the last, languid stretch of summer immediately before autumn, and during the day, the hour when I go for a walk is when the sun rests just before vanishing, with sunbeams of copper yellow on the gray walls and copper red on the panes.

*Poem extract from Mallarmé, Stéphane. 'Autumn Lament.' In *Collected Poems*, trans. Henry Weinfield, 89-90. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994.*

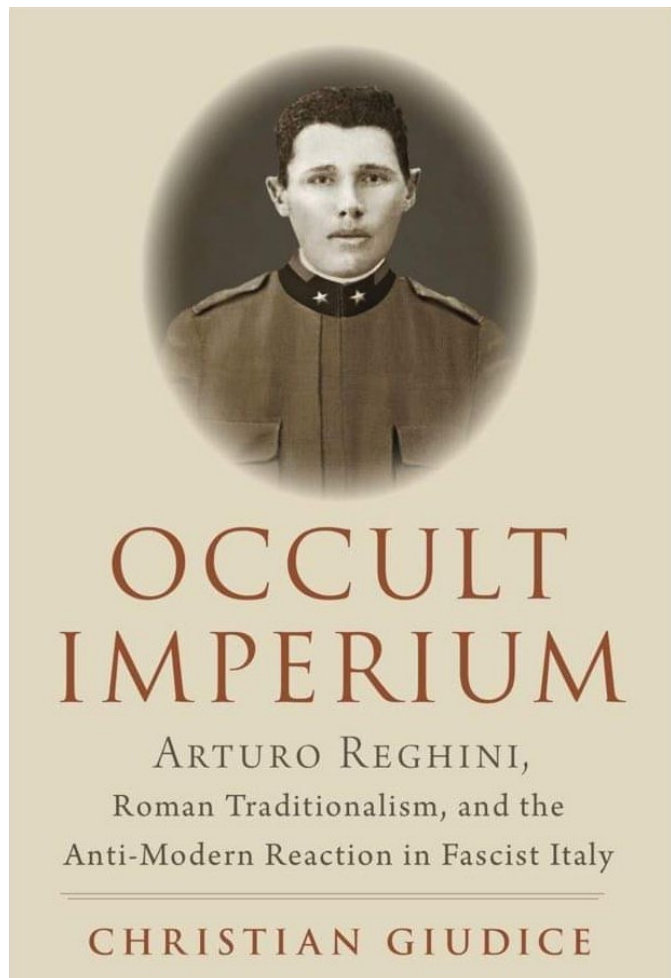
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# New Publications from ESSWE Members

Christian Giudice

*Occult Imperium: Arturo Reghini, Roman Traditionalism, and the Anti-Modern Reaction in Fascist Italy*, Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022



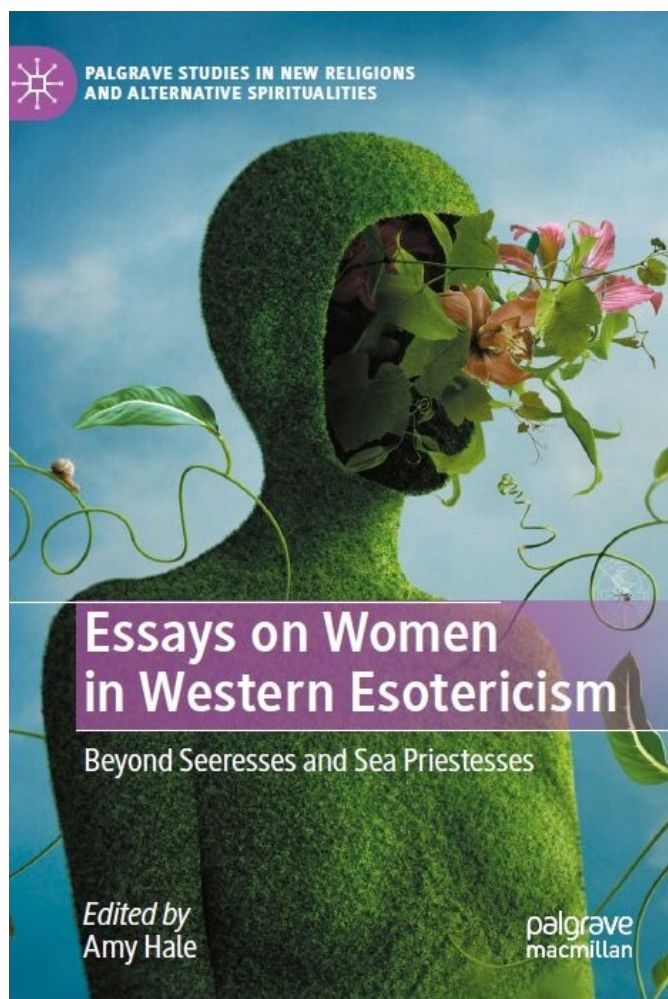
Christian Giudice's *Occult Imperium* explores Italian national forms of Occultism, chiefly analyzing Arturo Reghini (1878-1946), his copious writings, and Roman Traditionalism. Trained as a mathematician at the prestigious University of Pisa, Reghini was one of the three giants of occult and esoteric thought in Italy, alongside his colleagues Julius Evola (1898-1974) and Giulian Kremmerz (1861-1930). Using Reghini's articles, books, and letters as a guide, Giudice explores the interaction between occultism, Traditionalism, and different facets of modernity in early-twentieth-century Italy.

The book takes into consideration many factors particular to the Italian peninsula: the ties with avant-garde movements such as the Florentine *Scapigliatura* and Futurism, the occult vogues typical to Italy, the rise to power of Benito Mussolini and Fascism, and lastly, the power of the Holy See over different expressions of spirituality. *Occult Imperium* explores the convergence of new forms of spirituality in early twentieth-century Italy.

Amy Hale, ed.

*Essays on Women in Western Esotericism: Beyond Seeresses and Sea Priestesses*, Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities

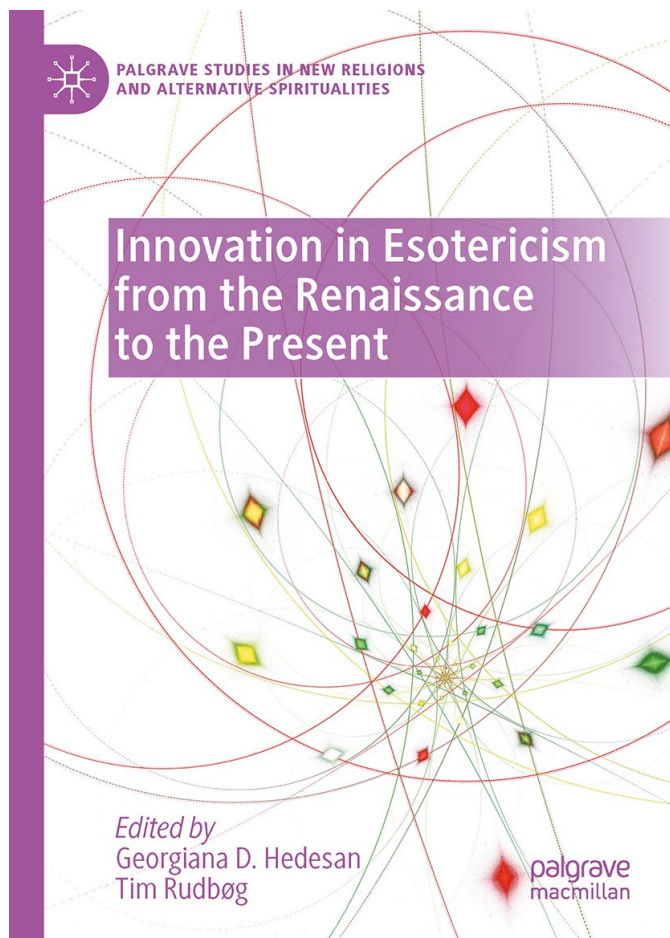
London: Palgrave, 2022



This book is the first collection to feature histories of women in Western esotericism while also highlighting women's scholarship. In addition to providing a critical examination of important and under-researched figures in the history of Western esotericism, these fifteen essays also contribute to current debates in the study of esotericism about the very nature of the field itself. The chapters are divided into four thematic sections that address current topics in the study of esotericism: race and othering, femininity, power and leadership and embodiment. This collection not only adds important voices to the story of Western esotericism, it hopes to change the way the story is told.

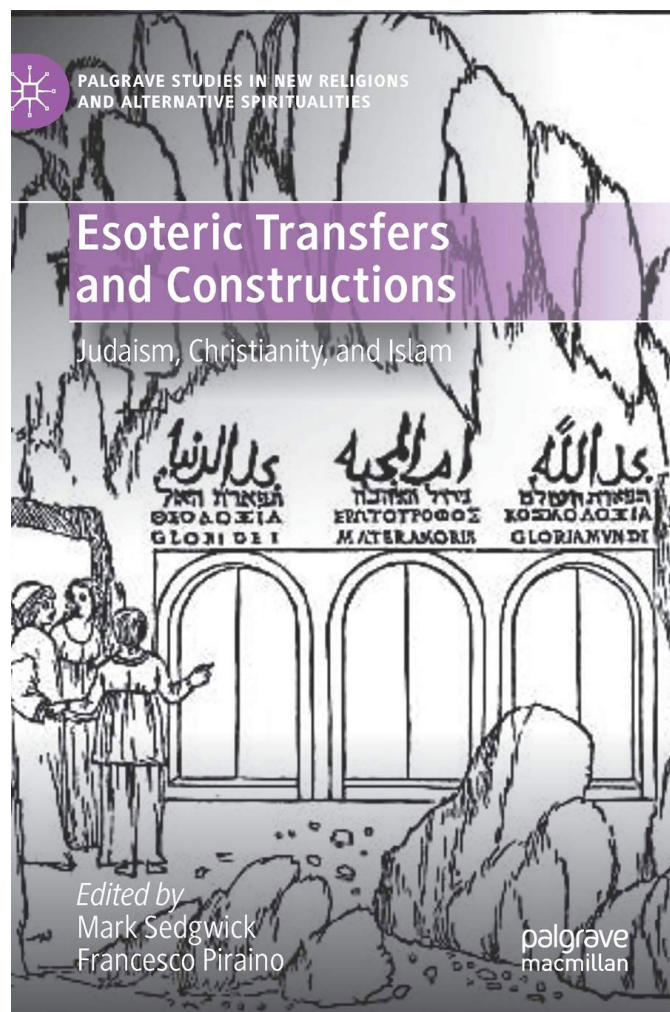


Georgiana D. Hedesan and Tim Rudbøg, eds.  
*Innovation in Esotericism from the Renaissance to the Present*, Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities  
 London: Palgrave, 2021



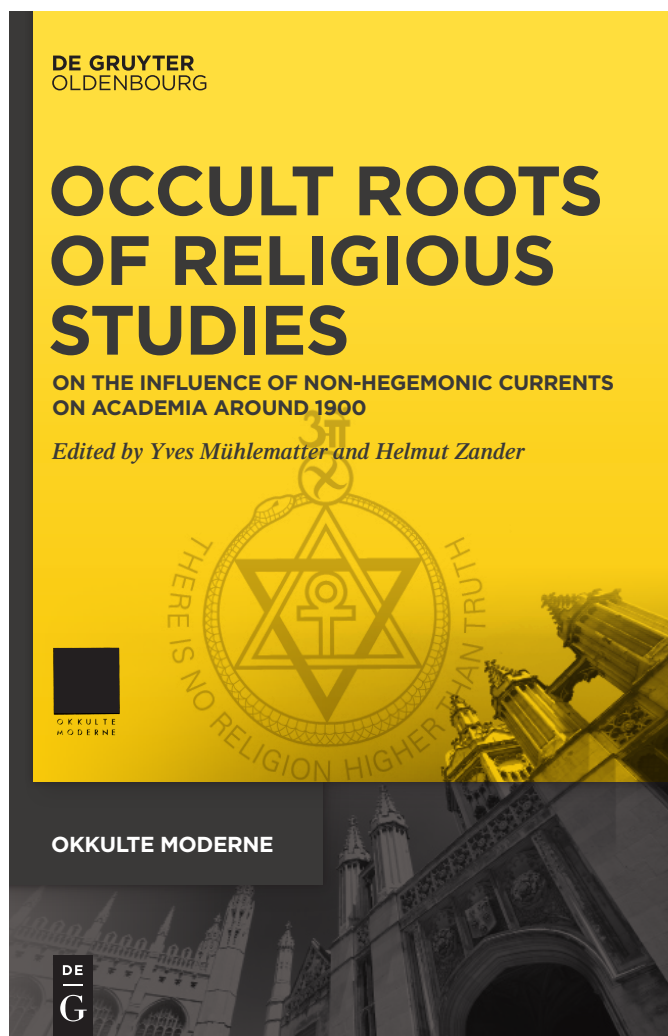
This collection explores the role of innovation in understanding the history of esotericism. It illustrates how innovation is a mechanism of negotiation whereby an idea is either produced against, or adapted from, an older set of concepts in order to respond to a present context. Featuring contributions from distinguished scholars of esotericism, it covers many different fields and themes including magic, alchemy, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, Tarot, apocalypticism and eschatology, Mesmerism, occultism, prophecy, and mysticism.

Mark Sedgwick and Francesco Piraino, eds.  
*Esoteric Transfers and Constructions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities  
 London: Palgrave, 2021



Similarities between esoteric and mystical currents in different religious traditions have long interested scholars. This book takes a new look at the relationship between such currents. It advances a discussion that started with the search for religious essences, archetypes, and universals, from William James to Erano. The universal categories that resulted from that search were later criticized as essentialist constructions, and questioned by deconstructionists. An alternative explanation was advanced by diffusionists: that there were transfers between different traditions. This book presents empirical case studies of such constructions, and of transfers between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the premodern period, and Judaism, Christianity, and Western esotericism in the modern period. It shows that there were indeed transfers that can be clearly documented, and that there were also indeed constructions, often very imaginative. It also shows that there were many cases that were neither transfers nor constructions, but a mixture of the two.

Yves Mühlematter and Helmut Zander, eds.  
*Occult Roots of Religious Studies: On the Influence of  
 Non-Hegemonic Currents on Academia around 1900*  
 Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021

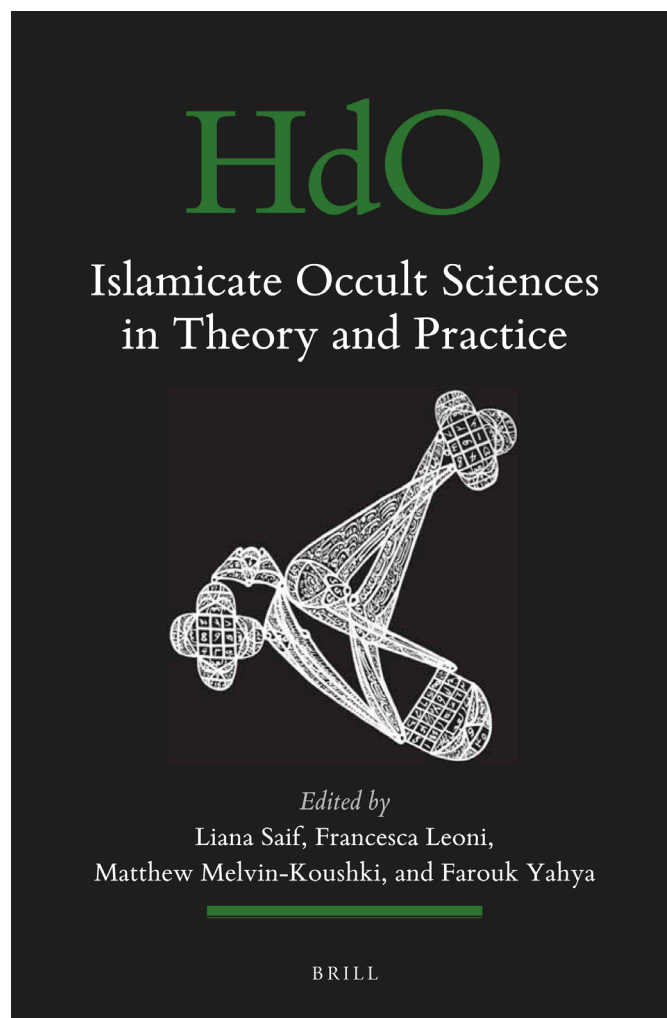


The historiographers of religious studies have written the history of this discipline primarily as a rationalization of ideological, most prominently theological and phenomenological ideas: first through the establishment of comparative, philological and sociological methods and secondly through the demand for intentional neutrality. This interpretation caused important roots in occult-esoteric traditions to be repressed.

This process of “purification” (Latour) is not to be equated with the origin of the academic studies. De facto, the elimination of idealistic theories took time and only happened later. One example concerning the early entanglement is Tibetology, where many researchers and respected chairholders were influenced by theosophical ideas or were even members of the Theosophical Society. Similarly, the emergence of comparatistics cannot be understood without taking into account perennialist ideas of esoteric provenance, which hold that all religions have a common origin.

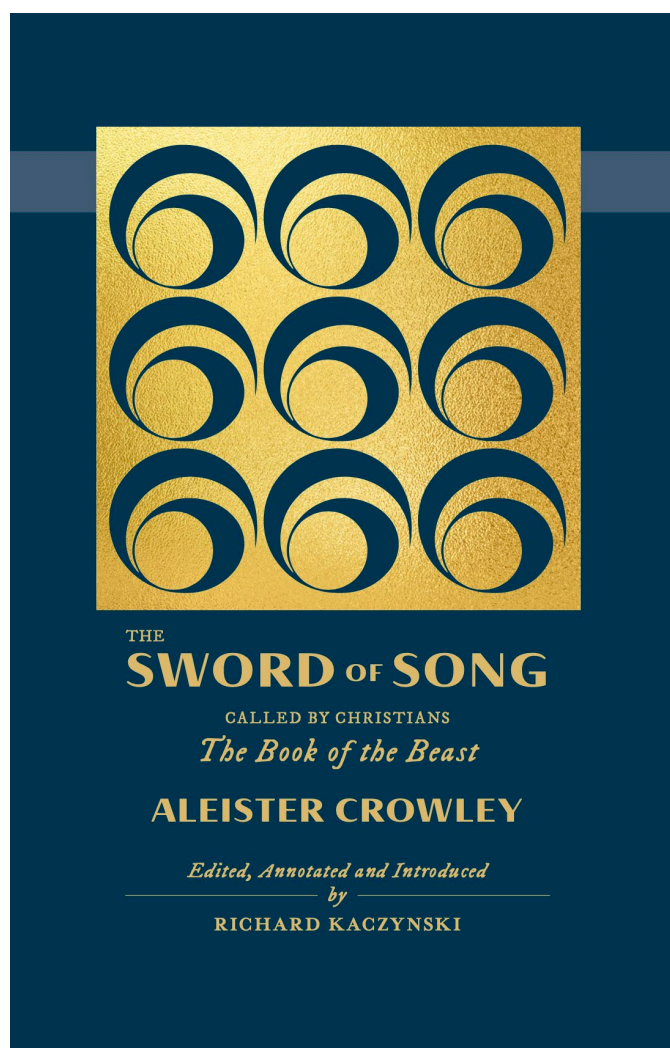
In this perspective, it is not only the history of religious studies which must be revisited, but also the partial shaping of religious studies by these traditions, insofar as it saw itself as a counter-model to occult ideas.

Liana Saif, Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, and Farouk Yahya, eds.  
*Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*  
 Leiden: Brill, 2021



*Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* brings together the latest research on Islamic occult sciences from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, namely intellectual history, manuscript studies and material culture. Its aim is not only to showcase the range of pioneering work that is currently being done in these areas, but also to provide a model for closer interaction amongst the disciplines constituting this burgeoning field of study. Furthermore, the book provides the rare opportunity to bridge the gap on an institutional level by bringing the academic and curatorial spheres into dialogue.

Aleister Crowley  
Richard Kaczynski, ed., annotated and introduced  
*The Sword of Song: Called By Christians 'The Book of the Beast'*  
London: Kamuret Press, 2021



The cover proclaimed its author the Beast. Its contents deconstructed Aleister Crowley's encounters with the Golden Dawn, Buddhism, Agnosticism, and Christianity. Too inflammatory for English publishers, Crowley printed the book in Paris and released it in 1904 under his own imprint. Now, as then, *The Sword of Song's* blend of poetry, allegory, fiction, and essays reveal the mind of one of the twentieth century's most provocative thinkers on the brink of his life-changing reception of *The Book of the Law*.

This overdue reissue presents the author's preferred text, as expanded in his *Collected Works*, while honoring the first edition's artful design. Extras new to this critical edition include unpublished marginal notes from Crowley's personal copies of *The Sword of Song*, along with annotations of changes and deletions made to the original manuscripts and typescripts over multiple revisions. Explanatory notes by Crowley biographer Richard Kaczynski illuminate obscure passages, making this the most accessible version of Crowley's first talismanic book.

## Scholar Interviews

Liana Saif  
Assistant Professor in the History of Medieval Esotericism  
The Centre for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents  
Amsterdam University, The Netherlands

Interviewed by Mark Sedgwick  
Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies  
Department of the Study of Religion, Aarhus University, Denmark

**MS: Congratulations on your appointment as Associate Professor in the History of Medieval Esotericism at the Centre for the Study of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam. What are you most looking forward to in your new job?**



LS: Thank you! It is the teaching. I've already met a number of MA and PhD students and I am very excited about getting to know them and those I haven't yet met and to engage in conversations about medieval esotericism and Islam now that these are cemented within the study of esotericism by my position and the clear interest in the subject. I am thrilled to be designing one-of-a-kind courses on medi-

eval esotericism and Islamic esotericism, while looking forward to seeing the new directions that the students themselves will take us. I do anticipate more students from different disciplines, especially Islamic Studies, to join us in order to participate in this exciting conversation.

**MS: Your PhD became your celebrated book on *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy*. While you were researching this, how different was what you actually found from what you expected to find? What were the greatest surprises along the way?**

LS: I started out my research looking for references to Arabic works and Muslim authors in the early modern period strictly, with the usual suspects: Ficino, Pico, Agrippa, and Dee. I did not expect to find that Islamic works on medicine, magic, and astrology had such a profound influence beyond just occult philosophy. They created an epistemological paradigm shift that rendered the terrestrial and celestial worlds, the divine and the human, knowable and intelligible in Latin Europe. This shift didn't start during the early modern period but much earlier, specifically in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries when European medieval scholars were translating and commenting on Arabic works of astrology, medicine, and magic. So, it became clear to me that, although my main focus is on the early modern period, I needed to include the medieval Latin world. My book ended up being roughly 25% medieval Arabic context, 25% medieval Latin context, and 50% early modern European context.

**MS: You are now working on a critical translation from Arabic into English of the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, the Latin translation of which is famous as the *Picatrix*. Why did you choose this text?**

LS: It was the first Arabic magic handbook that I stumbled upon. Attached to it are lovely memories of spending long days at the Warburg Institute reading it for my MA (that, like my PhD, I also did at Birkbeck – University of London). I remember taking a(n involuntary) nap on



one of the fourth-floor desks and being woken-up by Professor Charles Burnett at closing time, who jokingly and gently said: “I didn’t think the *Picatrix* is that boring!” To save myself from the embarrassment, I made it my mission to show that the *Picatrix* is anything but sleep-inducing!

Joking aside, I like that the magical practices of the *Ghāya* are clearly set within a coherent cosmology and philosophical foundations to such a degree that any creative act becomes talismanic, even pickling and making cheese, as the author Maslama al-Qurtubī himself states. The fact that it has such a colourful career in the Latin West and beyond deepened my investment in understanding what makes this text so attractive. I am not just talking about its translation into Latin in the 13<sup>th</sup> century under the patronage of Alfonso X and consequent reception, but also the modern history of its study. In 1933, the first edition of the Arabic by Hellmut Ritter was published by the Warburg Institute, and the German translation from the Arabic by Martin Plessner and Ritter was published in 1962. In 1971, Plessner asked David Pingree to consider producing an edition of the Latin *Picatrix* which was eventually published in 1986, keeping alive the legacy of Aby Warburg who in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century revealed the Latin *Picatrix* to the scholarly community, followed by Wilhelm Printz’s unveiling of its Arabic original, *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*. Since these landmark studies and editions, we have attained a better understanding of Islamic occult sciences and their place in the production of scientific and philosophical knowledge in the Middle Ages. Therefore, I decided to join this illustrious company and produce a critical translation from Arabic into English, working with more manuscripts than ever and with a substantial up-to-date introduction and appendices. This will complement the recent translation from Latin into English by Dan Attrell and David Porreca (2019).

**MS: Should we still be talking about Western esotericism?**

LS: No... and yes. One of the signs of a young field’s success is generating historical narratives that scholars expand and challenge. The more active the interrogation is, the more established and healthier a field becomes. One of the consequences of this scholarly vitality is the diversification of theoretical approaches and historical perspectives that complicate the narrative and change its features.

The works of Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraaff, the founding of the Centre for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, and the establishment of active scholarly networks – especially ESSWE – cemented a field under the name “Western esotericism”. This analytical tool served a purpose, and it did so very successfully: it generated a field-defining discourse and precious institutional positions, including my own. With more recognition and expansion of its members, it is only natural that from this point attention will be turned towards the biases that hinder the growth demanded by the cultural shifts that directly impact the expanding number of researchers, educators, and students.

The most obvious concepts to be interrogated are the “Western” and the “esotericism”. While the meaning of the latter has been subjected to a decade of debate, confronting the cultural essentialism of the field’s West-centrism has only recently escalated in response to the intensification of voices critical of the patriarchal, colonial, and classist structures of knowledge production. As demonstrated by the publication of the new volume *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism* edited by Egil Asprem and Julian Strube (Leiden: Brill, 2021), it is great to see that our community is thinking about the effects this has on the way we have been producing knowledge on esotericism, including our blind spots and assumptions.

In my contribution to this volume, I maintain that “East” and “West” are ever-shifting constructs, whether reflecting the formation of the modern West and the costs accrued, or any kind of othering collective orientation. To ask what the ramifications are of this positioning on knowledge production, and how it is instrumentalised to enforce or

resist it, is just responsible historicization. It includes reflecting on our own roles in perpetuating its assumptions, as academics in European institutions. That does not mean to dismiss the study of esoteric currents that identified as “Western”, recognising that “Western esotericism” is originally a nineteenth-century (occultist) polemical distinction, as Strube has emphasized, that reacted to the *ésotérisme occidental* of the Theosophical Society. Scholarly narratives set in a specific orientation, even intended to consolidate under a religious or philosophical heritage, are more exclusionary than inclusionary. They reflect the epistemological stances of the scholar rather than a historical reality of peoples and communities whose self-identification and historical imaginary are too complex and entangled to be reduced to a single direction or construct.

**MS: There has been a great expansion in interest in the esoteric and occult among scholars working on Islam, as illustrated by the success of the “Islamic Occult Studies on the Rise” group in the US and the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE) in Europe. Why do you think this is?**

LS: On a very practical level, this boom meant more material on Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman occult sciences and esotericism is now available for a wider readership. Several recent publications have secured a prime place for the study of Islamic esotericism and the occult sciences on the map: The 2017 special double issue of *Arabica*, edited by Matt Melvin-Koushki and Noah Gardiner, titled “Islamicate Occultism: New Perspectives”; *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*, edited by myself, Francesca Leoni, Matt Melvin-Koushki, and Farouk Yayha (2021); a special issue on “Islamic Esotericism” in *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism*, edited by myself (2019), and several other publications. We can add the establishment of the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE) which had two rich and successful conferences that generated multi-faceted conversations about Islamic esotericism and the encounter between European and American esoteric currents and Islam. It turns out that people are thirsty for these perspectives, especially researchers and students to whom little space was offered before to engage in research on these subjects. Moreover, the recent tendency to loosen the domination of “Western” from the study of esotericism has opened more eyes towards new possible venues of investigation in Islamic, Africana, Asian, and South American currents.

**MS: You are a member of the management committee of ENSIE. What do you think ENSIE can do to include more scholars who do not have a background in Islamic Studies?**

LS: The fact that ENSIE emerged from the interdisciplinary context of ESSWE, with a comparative take, means that we started from a diverse launchpad. Historians, sociologists, anthropologists, philologists, manuscript and material culture specialists already make up the majority of our members. I think that a large part of our objective is to have esotericism specialists engage with the Islamic perspective, especially since the post-colonial and critical approaches in Islamic studies can and have shed light on the different ways esotericism is conceptualised and negotiated. We also want scholars of Islam to engage with esotericism studies. Though my ultimate concern is not whence but whereto; in other words, the new directions our members would take the study of esotericism and Islam regardless of their academic background. Things are looking encouraging, especially with the publication of our first conference proceedings *Esoteric Transfers and Constructions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (2021) edited by yourself and Francesco Piraino, two of ENSIE’s management committee, including entries by scholars of Kabbalah, Sufism, Christian mysticism, demonology, and Aleister Crowley.

**MS: You are also a member of the board of ESSWE. How do you think that ESSWE should now develop?**

LS: On an “exoteric” level, one of the most consequential realisations resulting from the pandemic is that our institutions and universities are

equipped for making events more accessible and I think this should be normalised post-Covid19. As part of an inclusive and anti-ableist stance, we should work on establishing routes for remote participation in events for members and participants who need it. On an “esoteric” level, I do believe that as a scholarly society we would benefit a lot from being actively less committed to the W in ESSWE. This must not be understood as an attack on the field or its representatives, but a call from within for expansion and reflection that can only make our field even more exciting, diverse, and cutting edge. The consequence of dropping “Western” from the field’s “banner” should be welcomed in our Society for the diversification of approaches and landscapes of investigations, heralding the study of esotericism into an exciting phase of growth. Should ESSWE become ESSE, so “be” it; our commitment to innovative research and exciting venues of exploration remains unchanged, even strengthened.

Dylan Burns

Assistant Professor in the History of Ancient Esotericism  
The Centre for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents  
Amsterdam University, The Netherlands

Interviewed by Earl Fontainelle

Presenter of the *Secret History of Western Esotericism Podcast* ([www.shwep.net](http://www.shwep.net))

**EF: Dylan, congratulations on your appointment to the new position in Ancient Esotericism at the Centre for the Study of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at Amsterdam! I don’t need to tell you that you are joining one of the coolest academic teams in one of the most hip academic settings in the world, and I know you are delighted (amid the overwork of moving house, preparing modules, and everything else that goes with setting up in a new position). First of all, briefly, what are you looking forward to, personally and professionally, in this new posting? What is getting you excited at this moment?**

DB: It’s been a delight to join the HHP (Centre for the Study of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents) at the Universiteit van Amsterdam. Like you, I studied in the MA program at UvA working on esotericism and antiquity, and I remained involved with trying to develop the conversation about these topics in the many years since—so it’s a real privilege to be able to come back to my old stomping grounds and pursue this project again as a professor at the Centre. And the coolest part of that, to me, is being able to teach students who are interested in esotericism and antiquity. I received your questions at the end of my first day teaching classes on “Platonic Underworlds” and “Ancient Mediterranean Esoteric Traditions,” at the MA and BA levels, respectively, and doing more of just that—engaging students on subjects like Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Hermetism, ancient magic and alchemy, etc.—is what I am really looking forward to right now.



**EF: Now, here is a broader question. What does this new position mean for the field of western esotericism studies? You and I both work on antiquity, and have been working on ancient esoteric thought for years now, but our time-period remains on the fringes of our (already fringe-dwelling) field. Is that changing? What kinds of intellectual horizons open up when you formally bring the ancient and late-ancient worlds into discussions about esoteric thought?**

DB: The ‘ancient profile’ in the study of esotericism has definitely grown in recent years. Ten years ago, I remember giving one of the only—maybe THE only—paper at an ESSWE conference (Szeged, 2011) on antiquity. A few years later at Gothenburg there was an antiquity panel. In 2019 in Amsterdam there were several antiquity sessions, and they were well-attended. More specialists in ancient religion and history are becoming interested in engaging scholarship on esotericism and more scholars of esotericism are reading work by scholars of antiquity. There is plenty of credit to go around: a lot of behind-the-scenes networking has helped foster this. The strong profile of antiquity in the GEM (Gnosticism, Esotericism, and Mysticism) program at Rice University, and its collaboration with antiquity specialists in Groningen, and their increasing presence at the ESSWE has helped too. Last but not least the SHWEP has been hugely influential in making ancient sources and scholars who work on them accessible for people interested in esotericism (very nice). I have tried putting esotericism on the map of scholars interested in reception-history of ancient sources, and to me this seems to be a very promising framework for all parties involved. There simply is no way to work on the reception of ancient magical or Gnostic texts without looking at the Theosophical Society or occultism. It’s as simple as that.

**EF: It’s definitely also worth asking: what challenges do you foresee in pursuing this post (I don’t mean the universal academic things like ‘marking papers until three in the morning’ here; I’m thinking more of challenges specific to the intellectual niche you will be carving out within a larger and established field)?**

DB: The big problem is obviously the academic job market. It’s a privilege to be able to work in the halcyon land that is HHP, but for the most part, there are so very few opportunities for pursuing this research as a professional in the university today—if you focus exclusively on the study of esotericism. I think a lot of opportunities open up if one takes scholarship on esotericism up as one of many useful frameworks for understanding antiquity and the history of research on it—i.e., if one pursues history, or Egyptology, or religious studies, and then engages work on esotericism as an integral part of research and teaching in these more established fields. For various reasons, there has been a strong impulse in the study of esotericism to ghettoize itself, in a way—to look at the study of esotericism exclusively as an end in itself. The field has better chances of surviving (to say nothing of growing) if it establishes itself as a necessary conversation partner for already established disciplines.

Religious studies is also of necessity a ‘weak’ discipline (like economics), defined not by a single methodology, but its object of study. Consequently, great scholars of religion can be found in history departments or classics departments, etc. I don’t see too many departments for the study of esotericism appearing on the horizon. So we had better help students interested in esotericism find ways to pursue their interests in more established fields.

**EF: You recently came out with a delightful book with Brill entitled *Did God Care? Providence, Dualism, and Will in Later Greek and Early Christian Philosophy*. The book is in a way a wonderful microcosm of just how interdisciplinary the study of (ancient) esoteric thought needs to be – it deals with philosophy, it deals with religion, it deals with the exact sciences of the day, but it also deals with ancient currents of thought, like Sethian Gnosticism and Late Platonism, which did not draw these category-divides at all. However, the book isn’t exactly ‘about esotericism’ either, which is maybe something else our field needs to embrace; after all, a lot of recent work in the study of western esotericism is highlighting exactly how mainstream, or even quotidian, these ideas can in fact be.**

I wonder if you have any thoughts on the various forms of boundary-crossing your book embodies, in terms of academic specialism, categories in intellectual history, and perhaps also the ‘esoteric’ vs. ‘whatever the opposite of esoteric is’ boundary.

DB: *Did God Care* is a study of the problem of providence in ancient philosophy, from Plato to Plotinus and the Gnostics. I did it because I found providence popping up in so many of my sources over the years, but there was no single accessible, English-language monograph of the subject—the old-fashioned survey—available. So I thought I’d try to write one. One of the reasons it hadn’t been done yet is that providence requires a totally interdisciplinary approach. Even if you limit the project to mainly philosophical literature—and the Greek word for providence, *pronoia*, and its cognates are most prominent in works indebted to the Greek philosophical tradition—you find yourself having to engage religious literature as well, and scholarship from multiple sectors of ancient philosophy, religious studies, theology, Egyptology, and more. Providence as a concept also encompasses multiple philosophical problems: divine care, theodicy and evil, free will and human responsibility (and yes, astrology and fate!)—so here too you have to take up a lot of different material from different scholarly worlds and bring them together. I did my best.

The book is totally relevant for scholarship on esotericism, because so many esoteric sources deal with the problems of the human relationship to the stars and fate, to the soul’s pre-existence and place in the cosmos, with bad demiurges and immanent deities—all *leitmotiven* in the study of providence. Yet the book does not use the words “esoteric” or “esotericism” once. It doesn’t need to. Frances Yates’s *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* didn’t either.

**EF: With spoiler-warnings in place, I wonder if you might give us a sketch of some planned projects for the next few years, and maybe some thoughts about kinds of projects which don’t even have a plan yet, but which this new position might potentially foster? Feel free to dream and speculate irresponsibly if you are so inclined.**

DB: I certainly am not done with providence and fate yet! In recent years I have become more involved with the study of Manichaeism, which is an unbelievably rich and challenging field. I’ll certainly pursue more of that. And after a breather of a few years, I’d like to return to the work on the reception-history of ancient religion “in the new age and beyond”—in esotericism and occultism, especially—that I pursued in *New Antiquities* (ed. with Almut-Barbara Renger, Equinox, 2019; pb 2021), as well as the reception of ancient Gnostic and Manichaean sources in early Islam, where my colleague Mushegh Asatryan has made so much headway. Finally, while my research on ancient esoteric sources has largely focused on Gnosticism, I am finally turning more of my attention to the study of ancient Hermetism, which has developed in such huge and wonderful ways since I was reading Fowden as a student, thanks to scholars like Christian Bull, David Litwa, and Anna van den Kerchove. Working in Amsterdam now I have unbelievable conversation-partners and potential collaborators for all of these topics with my new colleagues, Liana Saif, Peter Forshaw, Wouter Hanegraaff, and Marco Pasi!

## PhD Project Features

Emma Merklings  
The Courtauld Institute of Art, London

‘Imponderable: Physics, Mathematics, Psychical Research, and Evelyn De Morgan’s Spiritualist Art, 1885–1910’

My recently submitted doctoral thesis, ‘Imponderable: Physics, Mathematics, Psychical Research, and Evelyn De Morgan’s Spiritualist Art, 1885–1910’ (The Courtauld Institute of Art, London), looks at the mature paintings and automatic writings of the English artist Evelyn De Morgan (née Pickering, 1855–1919). It explores her mobilization, in her art, of the ideas, imagery, structures, and even methods of contemporary physics, mathematics, and psychical research to figure her

spiritualist concerns. Close readings of her spirit communications are joined by in-depth visual analyses of key paintings to demonstrate the extent to which her subject matter and visual procedures were engaging with scientific investigations into the imponderable, activated to help her grapple with and reflect the truths of a spiritual reality unknowable in mortal life.

For several decades from their marriage in 1887 onwards, De Morgan and her husband — the potter William, son of the mathematician Augustus and medium Sophia De Morgan — set aside time each night to experiment with automatic writing. One would hold a pencil to a piece of paper, the other would place their hand on their partner’s wrist, and the pencil — apparently of its own accord — would begin to move, filling the page with messages from discarnate spirits beyond the veil. The De Morgans would assemble and anonymously publish these writings as *The Result of an Experiment* in 1909. The scientific tone of *Result of an Experiment* and its preface, which frames the De Morgans’ automatic writing practice as a data-gathering exercise, is no coincidence. As the ever-growing field of science and spiritualism studies has established, many Victorians — including eminent scientists — viewed the psycho-physical phenomena at the heart of spiritualist belief as worthy of legitimate scientific inquiry.



Many discoveries and developments in the last decades of the nineteenth century, from the subatomic to the hyperdimensional, seemed to confirm what spiritualists and occultists had long asserted: that the material, visible, and ponderable did not constitute the most essential realities of the cosmos. In physics and psychical research, attention to ‘spirit’ and attendant phenomena converged with studies of the imponderable ether. Related concerns about space and spatial dimensions at the limits of empirical scrutiny (and indeed representability) were explored by contemporary mathematicians who imagined and popularized *n*-dimensional geometries beyond the three dimensions of human experience, suggesting new understandings of space, form, embodiment, and representation germane to the arts, sciences, and psychical investigations alike. My thesis explores De Morgan’s engagement with these intersecting fields of scientific study and deployment of their imagery and ideas in a number of paintings created at the height of her career. Working across a range of styles, from Aestheticism to late-Pre-Raphaelitism to Symbolism, De Morgan created grand, colourful allegorical paintings. From the mid-1880s, these works were dominated by spiritualist subject matter, imagery, and motifs, from the development of the soul to the dangers of matter and materialism. And these, I argue, were frequently figured through a visual language alluding to key processes and ideas at issue in contemporary physics, mathematics, and psychical research. Her scientifically inflected approach seemed to have been sanctioned by her spirit guides: messages in *Result of an Experiment* suggested that only by interweaving mysticism, science, and art might a seeker come to a faint knowledge of the ultimate reality of spirit.

In addition to ether and *n*-dimensional geometries, the specific frameworks I explore include entropy and heat death; Maxwell’s Demon; the (sub)molecular constituents of matter; statistical methods; algebra and symbolic logic; and new notions of the constitution of the self. In *fin-de-siècle* Britain, these frameworks were united by their investment in questions of imponderability, the limits of human knowledge, and the status of representation — concerns which frequently opened onto





Evelyn De Morgan, *The Undiscovered Country* (1894), oil on canvas, 99.38 x 76.52 cm. Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, South Carolina. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Archie O. Joslin. CMA 1960.15

gion's art, but also understandings of representation — and methods for responding to representational challenges — in Victorian culture more broadly. It contributes to the growing body of scholarship that treats science, alternative science, mysticism, and the arts as interconnected aspects of a shared culture, rather than wholly distinct areas of study, challenging ahistorical assumptions about the rigidity and impermeability of the boundaries between these in Victorian and Edwardian Britain.

José Carlos Vieira Leitão  
Faculty of Humanities, University of Coimbra, Portugal

#### 'Learned Magic in Early Modern Portugal'

The Portuguese Inquisition records stand as a still underexplored database from a peripheral European country of unique characteristics. Mostly focused on the persecution of New Christians and hidden Jews, the main preoccupation of the Portuguese Inquisition was never that of witchcraft or magic. Though relatively rare, looking through the several known magic-related Portuguese Inquisition trials, an initial distinction can still be made between those dealing with what might be called 'folk magic', a set of practices not always easily distinguishable from local forms of folk religion, and those dealing with 'learned magic', most often associated with books and educated elites. While both of these forms of magical practice can often overlap and, strictly speaking, it is impossible to establish a solid border between them, the variability, internal cosmological implications, and associated social nuances which characterize each of them has never been noted by the very few scholars who have dealt with such trial records. Overall, the conceptualization of magic in the Portuguese academic world still implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) treats it as a universal and exclusive form of thought standing in opposition to religion. This is further aided by the preference Portuguese scholars have had for the exploration of the more numerous folk magic trials, which allow for an easier application of outdated essentialist methodological models still in vogue here since the 80s (such as those by Mircea Eliade).



By taking to the other side of the magical spectrum, and exploring Inquisitorial documentation pertaining to the persecution of learned magic (and acknowledging this as a fluid concept), my work aims to, primarily, map out the underworld of educated Portuguese magical

explicitly psychical and metaphysical concerns. I explore ideas circulating broadly in De Morgan's milieu as well as more specific texts with which I argue she was familiar, including titles by Balfour Stewart and P. G. Tait, William Stanley Jevons, Frederic W. H. Myers, and Oliver Lodge. My thesis proposes that De Morgan developed an 'aesthetics of the imponderable' through which to explore her spiritualist concerns and represent the often highly cerebral issues and ultimate questions at the heart of her mature practice.

My research yields new insights into not only De Morgan's

practice and, hopefully, open the door to a more complex understanding of the intellectual and literary culture of modern Portugal. This intention carries with it a dual preoccupation, as this study needs to take into consideration the circulation of both 'imported' and 'autochthonous' magical notions and literature. Such requires an understanding of the production and circulation of illicit magical literature, and the reactions and discourses of both its practitioner/proponents and critics. In particular, while several European medieval and modern grimoires and magical treatises, such as the *Clavicula Salomonis*, the *Ars Notoria*, or the *Picatrix* have been explored in several dedicated studies, these same studies pay perfunctory attention to the geographical space of the Iberian Peninsula, and the several variations these same titles suffer when coming into contact with its local cultures. Equally, local literary productions, such as the *Books of Saint Cyprian*, are notoriously absent from any international studies.

By placing such historical gaps into evidence, one may thus begin to address such questions as: were local Portuguese magical practices and literature rationalized and condemned according to general European polemical patterns emerging from the renaissance and the late middle ages, or was this informed by local culture? Are Portuguese autochthonous magic productions and practices innovative or mimetic, and what are the mechanisms and avenues for the production and transmission of illicit literature and the motivations of those engaging in these practices?

Furthermore, such a study can not only further illuminate the already established Portuguese Inquisition historiography by analyzing how this institution dealt with those involved in learned magical practices, but also evidence how magic was frequently associated with institutional corruption and clientelism among noble, clerical, and inquisitorial elites, all of whom, given the opportunity, were willing to either engage in magical practice, or associate themselves with magical practitioners.

As a particular contemporary academic preoccupation, such a study will also permit the identification and exploration of sources which may be used for the construction of something which might eventually be called 'Portuguese Esotericism'. The narrative of modernity is often a Northern European and Protestant-centric one, which constructs itself by the explicit exclusion of Southern Catholic countries. Western Esotericism, as a contemporary academic discipline, is not excluded from this criticism, and any attempt to uncritically apply its current narrative to the Portuguese case will invariably result in the obfuscation and/or distortion of any locally generated esoteric ideas and conceptualizations. Thus, such studies are necessary to initiate the identification of the institutions, authors, and titles responsible for the delimitations of socially legitimate practices and ideas, and recontextualize and reinsert artificially peripheral countries into the global Esotericism narrative.

For most of the modern period, the Portuguese Inquisition was at the center of local debates on the legitimacy or rejection of knowledge, and besides its precious trial records which contain ample academic discussions on the delimitation of magic and illicit practices, be them between inquisitors and accused or among the inquisitors themselves, it produced a considerable amount of book evaluations, condemnations, and censorship reports which allow for an understanding of what constituted local, rejected knowledge in the modern period, as well as the reasons for such rejection.

# 2021 Event Reviews

Esotericism, Gender, and Sexuality Network (ESOGEN)  
Symposium  
University of Amsterdam (Zoom), April 16

Chloe Sugden

On April 16, 2021, the first Symposium of the Esotericism, Gender, and Sexuality Network took place online. The event was organised by ESOGEN's co-founders, Manon Hedenborg White (Karlstad University) and Christine Ferguson (University of Stirling), with the support of the Center for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents (HHP), University of Amsterdam. An impressive number of lectures were given, traversing diverse topics and methods, with stimulating textual analyses, anthropological and archival work presented throughout the day.



Lecture by Manon Hedenborg White

The event commenced with a keynote lecture from Professor Ferguson, exploring esoteric forms of reincarnationism as feminist tools to address trauma, embodiment and injustice in late Victorian literature. Ferguson shared little-known works by women authors, including Mabel Collins (1851-1927) and Marie Corelli (1855-1924). Such writers, she argued, use reincarnation as a “retributive mechanism” for gendered violence. She touched on Corelli’s interest in the metaphysical consequences of sexual violence, and her focus on the karmic debt accrued by aggressors, rather than victims. She also noted that Collins uses rebirth to annihilate her femininity and her body. The salient point in Ferguson’s lecture was that women occultists found it easier to envisage relieving themselves of their feminine bodies through reincarnation, than imagine a world of social equality.

For the first panel, ‘Betwixt, Between and Beyond: Fluid, Queer and Trans Identities,’ Stephanie Shea (University of Amsterdam) examined the intersections of gender, popular occulture, esoteric ideas, technology, and “other-than-human” identities through her research into an online subculture, where participants identify as fictional human and non-human entities. Tove Ekholm-Meurling (Stockholm University) then discussed contemporary queer esotericism as a set of spiritual strategies resistant to hetero-cisnormativity, with emphasis on the “re-centring of the spiritual around the queer experience,” and the use of ritual and spell in LGBTQIA+ activism and work. For the final paper in the panel, Brennan Kettelle (University of Amsterdam) proposed a queering of the mythology of Lilith. They noted the historical connections between Lilith and queerness, addressing Lilith’s mythic tropes through contemporary queer theory. As a case study, Kettelle considered lesbian poet, Renée Vivien’s (1877-1909) use of Lilith as a muse for gender transgression.

The second panel of the day, ‘In Search of a Perfect Being: Engineering Esoteric Sexualities,’ opened with a talk by Fie S H Bakker (University

of Amsterdam). Bakker discussed how Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874-1954) combined racist ideas with a “sexist, ableist, homophobic and transphobic sexual moral,” arguing that (neo-)Nazi discourses on the “Aryan truth of sex” have never dissolved, and noting the traces of “Ariosophy” in gender and sexuality discourses in the current context. Next, John MacMurphy (University of Amsterdam) explored how early Kabbalists used sexual representations in Jewish Kabbalistic literature as “blueprints” for their own sexual practices, with the aim of not only procreation, but also, for instance, ecstatic union with the divine. Jessica Albrecht (University of Heidelberg) then presented a paper on Florence Farr and Frances Swiney, examining the connections between Victorian feminist discourses, and the theosophical symbol and image of the goddess Isis. For the last paper, Elena Sperner (Linköping University) presented on “consensual vampyrism” from a sex-positive angle, drawing on philosophical ideas from Western esotericism.

In the third panel, ‘Feminities and Masculinities: Imagining Others and Alternatives,’ Tommy Cowan (University of Amsterdam) focused on William Burroughs’ writing and its little acknowledged relevance to scholars of religion. Cowan urged for a reconsideration of Burroughs from a feminist perspective, and a recontextualization of his misogyny with respect to his engagement with fictional misogynistic violence. Misha Kakabadze (University of Amsterdam) considered post-war German artist and activist, Joseph Beuys’ interaction with the principle of femininity, highlighting this gendered aspect of his work, and arguing that Beuys’ utopian, esoteric conceptions of creativity and social change were centered on ideas of femininity that he developed from the 1950s onwards. Kateryna Zorya (Södertörn University) discussed two gendered esoteric approaches to the dilemma of the “runaway monkey mind,” or the overactive mind: “Vedic femininity,” as popularized in Russia, and American “jock masculinity” in the context of “male erotic hypnosis.” Both approaches, Zorya argued, foreground a discontent with contemporary gender roles. Finally, Jessica De Fauwe (University of Amsterdam) outlined her anthropological research on the appropriation of the traditional Indian Shakti Tantra by contemporary feminists in Amsterdam, focusing on their use of the concept of the Divine Feminine to reevaluate femininity.

For the final panel of the Symposium, ‘Tradition and Transition: Female Agency and Changing Esoteric Movements,’ José Leitão (University of Coimbra) spoke about early twentieth-century Portuguese occult publishing and women’s occult reading. After the publication of various *Book of Saint Cyprian* grimoires in the mid-nineteenth century, St. Cyprian of Antioch was established as the master of Portuguese magical arts. Leitão considered how, alongside the dissemination of Cyprian grimoires, periodicals (e.g. *Almanach da Tia Monica*, 1905) on magic and occultism rose, refiguring the larger Cyprianic books from a lens of female authorship. Issues of women’s literacy and economic emancipation, as well as gender-bending in these periodicals, were explored. Lastly, Philip Deslippe (UC Santa Barbara) presented archival findings on the role of women in the early history of yoga in America. He explained that the vast majority of yoga students during the interwar decades were women, and at this time, beyond postural forms, yoga was an amalgam of esoteric teachings. Deslippe also noted how Spiritualism and New Thought were avenues for attracting a diverse range of women teachers and administrators. Finally, he touched on yoga in popular culture with respect to gender discrimination.

Manon Hedenborg White then presented a keynote lecture on women’s *proximal authority* in Aleister Crowley’s Thelema and across other contexts, examining the various authority patterns that influence women’s participation and power in occult groups. She adopted the term “proximal authority” as a supplementary category to Max Weber’s tripartite typology, defining it as “authority ascribed to or enacted by a person based on their real or perceived relational closeness to a leader.” As part of several cases, the role and shifting status of, for example, Leah Hirsig (1883-1975) as Crowley’s “Scarlet Woman” was discussed. Hedenborg White explored Hirsig’s proximal authority to Crowley during the formative phase of the Thelemic movement, and



her decline in importance and gradual distancing from Thelema after Crowley replaced her with a new Scarlet Woman in the 1920s.

The final event of the Symposium was a lightning session, with L. Faith Pramuk (University of Amsterdam) swiftly discussing the work of Ithell Colquhoun with respect to “transgressive corporeality.” In examining one of Colquhoun’s works, Pramuk considered how the artist reimagined traditional gendered embodiments in relation to the Medusa myth. Richard Mason (University of Amsterdam) then explored A. E. Waite’s notion of “secret tradition.”

The ESOGEN Symposium was an invigorating and uplifting digital event, cultivating lively discussions and a much-needed sense of community between international colleagues.

‘Esotericism and the Varieties of Transformation’  
Embassy of the Free Mind (Ritman Library), Amsterdam, July 26-27

L. Faith Pramuk and Misha Kakabadze

The student conference, ‘Esotericism and the Varieties of *Transformation*,’ was held at the Embassy of the Free Mind (Ritman Library) in Amsterdam on 26-27 July. Organised by two religious studies research Master’s students from the University of Amsterdam – L. Faith Pramuk and Misha Kakabadze – the conference was conceived with the intent of fostering international exchange and community among students within the academic study of esotericism. The theme of ‘transformation’ was chosen to stimulate research and reflection on a notion that is arguably central to esoteric belief systems, histories, and practices.

Held in a hybrid format, more than twenty papers were presented in panels on art and literature, gender and sexuality, psychology and religious experience, technology and innovation, comparative spiritualities, Jewish and Christian esotericisms, and esoteric modernities. Dr. J. Christian Greer (Harvard Divinity School) presented a keynote on the transformative potential of studying esotericism and delved into a case study of the funk music collective, *Parliament-Funkadelic*, to illustrate his argument of psychedelic spirituality as characterised by “innovation” rather than “deviance”. The latter had been the focus of the ESSWE6 conference in Erfurt (2017), and Greer’s keynote thus remained in fruitful dialogue with this past theme.

With generous support from the HHP Foundation, the ESSWE sponsorship program for scholarly initiatives, and the Amsterdam University Fund, it was possible to reimburse travel costs for student presenters, hire technicians to enable a smooth execution of the hybrid format, and provide lunch and refreshments for both days for on-site participants and guests. BA, MA, and PhD presenters as well as a general audience from all over the globe were able to join, with about twenty people on site and fifty online. The Embassy of the Free Mind provided its historical venue, and many a stimulating conversation was held on its lovely premises among alchemical images and garden flowers.

After the organisers’ introduction, day one kicked off with the panel



on gender and sexuality, including intriguing papers on androgyny in Aleister Crowley and Rosaleen Norton (Patricia Sophie Mayer), gender-political discourses on Loki in North American Heathenry (Nuria Singenberger), and lesbianic reworkings of the figure of Jesus in fin-de-siècle French poetry (S. Brennan Kettelle). Following the break, the panel on art, literature and mythology included papers on Andrey Bely’s modernist novel *Petersburg* (Hannah Gadbois), the travelogues of British surrealist and occultist, Ithell Colquhoun (Lily Grainger), and a feminist visual culture study of Colquhoun’s painting, *Gorgon* (L. Faith Pramuk). This was followed by Christian Greer’s online keynote lecture, for which he zoomed in from Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Stimulated by the preceding talks, further food for thought was generated with the panel on psychology and religious experience, with analyses of the works of C.G. Jung and his notions of healing (Ninian Nijhuis), the esoteric and sexual eschatological Hebrew writings of Abraham Mordecai Harizman (Samuel Glauber-Zimra), and the influence of energy physics on William James’ concept of religious conversion (Jonas Stähelin). The evening was crowned with a reception in the *Grote Saal* and the garden of the Embassy of the Free Mind.



Day two commenced with the panel on esoteric modernities and we heard papers on the crisis of transformation in late capitalism (Guido Nерger), esoteric discourses of socialism in the German Empire (Misha Kakabadze), and a reassessment of Freudian psychoanalysis in light of esotericism-related typologies (Jonathan Shann). This was followed by a panel on Christian and Jewish esotericisms, with papers on messianism and alchemy in the Portuguese 18<sup>th</sup> century (José Vieira Leitão), John Calvin’s polemics against Christian Cabala (Kirsty Pattison), and the esoteric status of Roman Catholic exorcism (Blev Lavoux). Reinvigorated by lunch, we dived into the panel on technology and innovation. Alchemical and nuclear narratives in popular culture (Eric Reeves), and Arthur M. Young’s contributions to aviation and esotericism (Corey Andrews) represented two thought-provoking papers in the afternoon. Following the coffee break, the conference concluded with the panel on spiritual transformations in a global perspective. We heard papers on Ayahuasca-experience narratives from the perspective of Jungian psychology (Ricardo dos Santos), Buddhism and psychedelics (Nathan Keele Springer), and a comparison between Indian Samkya philosophy and the Corpus Hermeticum (Alisa Lozhkina).

The conference was a great success. It brought together students at different academic levels (BA, MA, PhD) and disciplinary backgrounds, and allowed students in their early scholarly stages to gain an impression of the variety of academic cultures, approaches, topics, and more. On a technical level, the execution of the hybrid format worked smoothly – thanks to our wonderful technicians, Safa Kamdideh and Dennis van den Sigtenhorst. Our moderators expertly navigated the hybrid format as well, contributing to its seamless execution.

For those who missed the conference, several presentations are available on the Centre for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents YouTube channel.

‘Resilient Esotericism’ Panel  
18<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR), University of Pisa, August 31

Chloe Sugden

The ‘Resilient Esotericism’ Panel took place at the University of Pisa,

Italy on Tuesday, August 31, 2021, as part of the eighteenth annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) from August 30 to September 3. Organised by Henrik Bogdan (University of Gothenburg) and Marco Pasi (University of Amsterdam), papers touched on the persistence of esotericism across various cultures of knowledge and institutions. An interdisciplinary array of lectures explored diverse topics, from Soviet esotericism, Theosophy and Anthroposophy, Italian spiritism, and Romanian Orthodox occulture, to women's agency, psychedelics, and Zoroastrianism. The unique lens of each paper contributed to an exposé of the continuous adaptation of esotericism to new contexts, in its ever-evolving and myriad forms.

In the first session of the day, Ioannis Gaitanidis (Chiba University) explored the resilience of Cypriot magus, Daskalos' teachings in the Japanese context. Ionut Daniel Bancila (University of Erfurt) then considered the conspiracy narratives of the Romanian Orthodox Church from a historical standpoint, grounding them in their sociopolitical context and outlining an emergent "Orthodox Occulture." Joanna Burdzel (Harvard University) highlighted a historical chronology of the séance in the Polish literary imaginary, foregrounding the aesthetic techniques of the "poet-mystic" and the "poetess-medium," whose roots lie in Polish Romanticism. Finally, Ruslan Khalikov (Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University), addressed late Soviet esotericism as a response to state secularism, arguing that networks of self-identified, Soviet "mystics" and "third culture" members ensured the endurance of spirituality until the Soviet Union's fall.

In session two, Henrik Bogdan looked at the influence of Theosophy on British occultism from the 1880s onwards, taking Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) and his ambivalent approach towards Theosophy as a case study. This ambivalent attitude, Bogdan noted, culminated in Crowley's unsuccessful attempt to assume control of the Theosophical Society in the mid-1920s. Next, Manon Hedenborg White (Karlstad University) examined the issue of women's religious agency, and difficulties involved in extracting historical Western esotericism "as practiced" from textual-archival sources. Hedenborg White presented early-twentieth century case studies of two women esotericists, the disciples of Crowley, Leah Hirsig and Ninette Shumway. She argued that their dedication to a socially peripheral esoteric religion was guided by their resilience to, for example, social stigma, reproductive labour, and other "partially gendered burdens."

The third session of the panel opened with a lecture from Marco Pasi on esoteric resilience in the religious history of Italy, tracing a trajectory from the revival of Platonism, and the "rediscovery" of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in the second half of the fifteenth century at the Medici court. Pasi noted that towards the end of the sixteenth century, however, with the Counter-Reformation, religious and political conditions shifted. In the mid-seventeenth century, heterodox religious and philosophical concepts, especially those of an esoteric essence, were increasingly denounced and forced underground. He explained that between the seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries in Italy, little occurred with respect to esoteric ideas. His paper thus examined this vast historical gap and the idea of esoteric resilience in such a context. Angela Puca (Leeds Trinity University) presented on the Italian spirit medium, Fulvio Rendhell and his group Circolo Spiritico Navona



Image credit : Angela Puca



Image credit : Angela Puca

2000, who attempted to revive spiritism and séances after they vanished from popular discourse post-WWII. Puca then detailed her investigation of the resilience of *neo-spiritismo* in contemporary Italy, questioning how this mode of esotericism was adapted to the current cultural context. Emphasis was placed on the intersections of science and spirit mediumship from the perspective of practitioners. Chloe Sugden (ETH Zürich) then presented a paper on the late Italian artist, Chiara Fumai (1978-2017), to exemplify the permeation—and manipulation—of occult insignia and histories of esotericism in contemporary artistic practices and discourses.

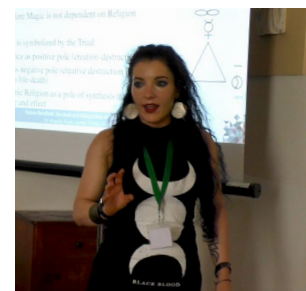


Image credit : Angela Puca

For the final session, Mariano Errichiello (SOAS) opened with a paper examining how the colonial initiative innovated the Zoroastrian religious marketplace of India, giving way to different conceptions of Zoroastrianism that led to a religious pluralism. Further, he argued that esoteric hermeneutics were an instrument of resilience among the Zoroastrians of India during the shift from an Indo-Persian to a "reconstructed ancient Iranian identity." Next, Christian Greer (Harvard University) presented on the resilience of psychedelic spirituality, as a persecuted esoteric tradition for more than half a century, namely due to the US Government's War on Drugs. The status of psychedelic spirituality as "rejected knowledge," he argued, concluded in 2014 with peer-reviewed studies on the deeply healing effects of the psychedelic expansion of consciousness. Greer emphasised that this "medicalisation of psychedelic spirituality" has been forged by Drug War epistemology, which erroneously represents the demographics, histories and beliefs of psychedelic communities. Lastly, Bernd-Christian Otto (University of Erlangen-Nuremberg) gave a detailed, "multifactorial" explanation of the resilience of modern Western *magick*. Unearthing many cases from the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic, he argued that the notion of a general demise of religion over the past century is erroneous. Further, he attempted to track a variety of resilience processes through modern Western magick.



Image credit : Angela Puca

All of the Panel's presentations perceptively touched on aspects of esotericism's resilience from diverse, intriguing vantagepoints. The Panel and the wider, five-day EASR Conference were memorable, thought-provoking events post-lockdown, as we enjoyed countless rich discussions with colleagues amidst beautiful Tuscan surrounds, and wonderfully catered garden lunches each day. Thank you to Marco, Henrik, all of the participants, and finally, to Chiara Tommasi at the University of Pisa for the colossal effort in organising such an event!





Image : Detail from Andries Stock, *Witches Preparing for Sabbath*, ca. 1610. Met Museum Collection, New York.

## Upcoming Events

### Conferences and Calls for Proposals, 2021-22

**Spirituality, Healthcare and Social Movements in East Asia: A Transnational Perspective**  
November 6-27, 2021  
Zoom

The East Asian cultural sphere has figured prominently in recent collections of research on new religious movements (e.g. Pokorny and Winter 2018, Clart, Ownby and Wang 2020), Theosophy (e.g. Rudbog and Sand 2020, Krämer and Strube 2020) and global therapeutic cultures (e.g. Nehring et al. 2020, Harrington 2008), while it continues to attract the attention of scholars working on civil society (e.g. Read and Pekkanen 2009) and self-help movements (e.g. Cliff et al. 2017, Palmer 2007).

But, although we are often aware of the complex entanglements between these seemingly separate areas of interest, we seldom have the opportunity to discuss such entanglements in and beyond East Asia.

At the same time, in the last twenty years, significant scholarship has been published in East Asia on this topic (recent books include Yoshinaga et al. 2019, Ichiyangi 2020, Imura and Hamano 2021 in Japan, Zheng 2018, Zhang 2020 in China and Cheon Myeong-soo 2009, Park Seung-gil et al. 2019 in South Korea).

This conference aims to offer such a chance by inviting academic contributions to reflect on the intertwined relationship between spirituality, healthcare and social movements in East Asia from a trans-national/local/cultural perspective. As a time of unprecedented changes and accelerated global interactions, our focus lies on the period between the nineteenth to the twentieth-first centuries.

For more information please visit:  
<https://eanase.com/1st-eanase-conference/>

**Call for Proposals. PhD Workshop: The Occult in the History of Science, Art and Religion**  
January 20-23, 2022  
Conference and Cultural Center, Monte Verità, Ascona, Switzerland

Organized by:  
ESSWE – European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism

### ZGW – Zentrum für Geschichte des Wissens (ETH / UZH)

We invite applications for a PhD Workshop from January 20–23, 2022 in Ascona, Switzerland. Since the early twentieth century, Ascona has inspired and fostered a variety of alternative cultures of knowledge, art, and living, such as Monte Verità and the Eranos Circle.

This workshop is an interdisciplinary event that brings together graduate students from the fields of history of science and technology, anthropology, history of religions, and art history. The workshop seeks to explore scientific and aesthetic approaches to the occult through manifold lenses, working against familiar disenchantment narratives that scientific reasoning and Enlightenment worldviews alienated modernity from occult practices, the natural world and the divine. For this workshop, the terms “occultism” or “the occult” are viewed in an expanded manner, as an effort to produce and interrogate knowledge of “invisible” realities. Analyses of occultism are thus not restricted to religious traditions, practices and phenomena; they also concern the wider aesthetic and scientific formation and transformation of modernity.

Proposals by PhD students are encouraged to investigate the epistemic tensions and uncertainties arising from scientific and aesthetic explorations of such invisible realities. We also welcome extra-European, global perspectives, and approaches that consider occultism in relation to the gendered nature of scientific and artistic practices in previous centuries.

During the workshop, participants will have the chance to discuss these questions with renowned senior scholars. Excursions to Monte Verità and the Eranos Foundation will also be included.

#### Application:

Proposals (approx. 300 words) and a CV must be submitted by October 31, 2021 to: [zgw@ethz.ch](mailto:zgw@ethz.ch). We will accept up to 20 proposals. Accommodation, including breakfast, lunch and coffee breaks will be financed. Participants must fund their own travel expenses to Ascona and dinners (resp. their universities). Please note that there is an option to apply for travel bursaries provided by ESSWE (<https://www.esswe.org/Bursaries>).

#### Keynote speakers:

Professor Christine Ferguson, Chair in English Studies, University of Stirling

Professor Beate Fricke, Chair of Pre-Modern Art History, Institute of Art History, University of Bern

Professor Yossef Schwartz, Professor of Medieval and Early Modern Intellectual History, Tel Aviv University; currently Visiting Professor,

Organisation: Andreas Kilcher, Jonas Stähelin, Chloe Sugden (ETH Zürich)

Call for Papers. Mystical and Esoteric Teachings in Theory and Practice: Esotericism in Philosophy, Literature, and Art  
February 3-5, 2022  
Russian Institute of Theatre Arts - GITIS, Moscow

Esoteric doctrines existed throughout history, but they were especially prominent during the collapse of established and creation of new systems of spiritual values reflecting a desire to reform daily life, social structure, and paradigms of knowledge. Historical periods that were full of creativity were also marked by a turn to mysticism and esotericism.

Art is not limited by logic. It receives inspiration from many sources, including mysticism, magic, sacred rituals. European theater begins with a cult of Dionysus and Eleusinian Mysteries. Poetry is close to ancient hymns and spells. Music, dance, singing were parts of esoteric practices. Drawing developed in part because of a belief that images can affect animals. History of architecture is also full of unsolved mysteries. Literature incorporated sacred knowledge of Gnosticism, hermeticism, and other esoteric currents. Esotericism is present in esthetics of Romanticism, Modernism, and Postmodernism. In the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries cinema, TV, and the Internet became new mediums for esoteric ideas. Intersections between philosophy and esotericism are also deep and worth of exploration.

The goal of the conference is to explicate mystical and esoteric elements in literature and art, to reflect on previously neglected new aspects in the history of the “secret knowledge,” to discuss possible implications of the study of esotericism to art history and literary history, to analyze social and psychological reasons for the popularity of movies, TV-shows, and literature about witches, vampires, magicians, and so on.

We invite art historians, scholars interested in the history of literature, philosophers, historians, culturologists, specialists in religious studies, psychologists, sociologists, and scholars of esotericism.

Conference will take place in dual format (online and offline).

Suggested topics:

- intersections between languages of poetry and magic;
- alchemical and philosophical reflections in literature and art;
- Freemasonry in literature and art;
- esoteric metalanguage and traditions in literature and art;
- mysteries and the origins of theatre arts;
- magical codes of musical harmony;
- Theosophic and Anthroposophical influence in literature and art;
- historical transformations of esoteric art;
- mystical and esoteric images in contemporary art;
- philosophical analysis of esoteric tendencies in literature and art;
- postmodernism and occultism;
- esotericism in cinema and television.

Languages of the conference: Russian and English.

Applications should be sent to [esoterra.ase@gmail.com](mailto:esoterra.ase@gmail.com). Deadline for participants from Russia is December 25, 2021. Deadline for international participants is November 30, 2021. An application should be filled in Russian and English for participants presenting in Russian and in English for participants presenting in English.

- Full name
- Degree

- City and country
- Affiliation
- Position
- E-mail
- Do you need an official invitation?
- Do you need a certificate of participation?
- Do you need a projector?
- Title
- Summary
- Language
- A photo up to 2 Mb in size

An organizing committee will make a decision concerning an application in a week after its submission. The decision will be communicated to an applicant via e-mail. The organizing committee reserves a right to reject an application. Unfortunately, we cannot provide written reviews for applicants whose applications were rejected.

A program of the conference will be prepared and distributed by the beginning of the conference.

We are planning to publish a collection of conference papers. Participants can submit papers up to 25,000 characters before March 5, 2022. Author guidelines will be distributed after the conference among the speakers.

The organizing committee does not provide funding for conference participants.

If you have any questions, please, e-mail to [esoterra.ase@gmail.com](mailto:esoterra.ase@gmail.com).

The conference will take place at Russian Institute of Theatre Arts – GITIS. Address: Moscow, Maly Kislovsky Lane, 6 (map: <https://gitis.net/en/contacts/>).

Organizing committee:

Dr. V. I. Krasikov (Russia, Moscow)

Dr. E. V. Shakhmatova (Russia, Moscow)

Dr. A. L. Yastrebov (Russia, Moscow)

Dr. S. V. Pakhomov (Russia, Saint Petersburg)

Dr. D. D. Galtsin (Russia, Saint Petersburg)

Dr. S. Panin (USA, Houston)

Dr. Prof. B. Menzel (Germany, Karlsruhe – Mainz)

Subtle Energies. Explorations within Holistic Healing and Spirituality  
April 28-30, 2022  
University of Vienna, Austria

This three-day conference aims to explore modern concepts revolving around subtle energies, which are employed by the vast majority of protagonists of the contemporary holistic milieu. Ideas, practices, and experiences involving sublime life forces have circulated for millennia in various parts of the world. Traditions postulating the “flows” of these vital powers or substances through the channels and centers of a subtle body are probably best known from their occurrence in South and East Asian techniques of self-cultivation. Since the 19th century, elements from these traditions have been mingled and supplemented with similar concepts of European origin and disseminated on a worldwide scale. The globalisation and entanglements of these discourses have resulted in a plethora of practices, schools, and currents that still influence today's therapeutic and spiritual field.



The conference focuses on two major themes: On the one hand, practices and interpretations of energy healing, and, on the other hand, concepts of kuṇḍalinī within modern yoga and transpersonal psychology. Furthermore, it features contributions on the role of subtle energies in transnational exchanges, tantric traditions, gender discourses, nationalist movements, life reform, UFO cults, martial arts, and eco-spirituality.

The event is hosted in collaboration with the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), the Austrian Society for the Study of Religions (OEGRW), and the Occult South Asia Network (OSAN).

For further information kindly contact [marleen.thaler@univie.ac.at](mailto:marleen.thaler@univie.ac.at) or visit <https://subtle-energies.univie.ac.at/>

# Call for Proposals

## The Occult in the History of Science, Art, and Religion

### PhD Thesis Workshop

We invite applications for a PhD Workshop in January, 2022, Ascona, Switzerland. Since the early twentieth century, Ascona has inspired and fostered a variety of alternative cultures of knowledge, art, and living, such as Monte Verità and the Eranos Circle.

#### Aim of the Workshop

This workshop is an interdisciplinary event that brings together graduate students from the fields of history of science and technology, anthropology, history of religions, and art history. The workshop seeks to explore scientific and aesthetic approaches to the occult through manifold lenses, working against familiar disenchantment narratives that scientific reasoning and Enlightenment worldviews alienated modernity from occult practices, the natural world and the divine. For this workshop, the terms "occultism" or "the occult" are viewed in an expanded manner, as an effort to produce and interrogate knowledge of "invisible" realities. Analyses of occultism are thus not restricted to religious traditions, practices and phenomena; they also concern the wider aesthetic and scientific formation and transformation of modernity.

Proposals by PhD students are encouraged to investigate the epistemic tensions and uncertainties arising from scientific and aesthetic explorations of such invisible realities. We also welcome extra-European, global perspectives, and approaches that consider occultism in relation to the gendered nature of scientific and artistic practices in previous centuries. During the workshop, participants will have the opportunity to discuss these issues with renowned senior scholars. Ex-

cursions to Monte Verità and the Eranos Foundation will also be included in the workshop.

#### Application

Proposals (approx. 300 words) and a CV must be submitted by October 31, 2021 to: [zgw@ethz.ch](mailto:zgw@ethz.ch).

We will accept up to 20 proposals. Accommodation, including breakfast, lunch and coffee breaks will be financed. Participants must fund their own travel expenses to Ascona and dinners (resp. their universities).

Please note that there is an option to apply for travel bursaries provided by ESSWE (<https://www.esswe.org/Bursaries>).

The following keynote speakers will be present:

**Professor Christine Ferguson**, Chair in English Studies, University of Stirling

**Professor Beate Fricke**, Chair of Pre-Modern Art History, Institute of Art History, University of Bern

**Professor Yossef Schwartz**, Professor of Medieval and Early Modern Intellectual History, Tel Aviv University; currently Visiting Professor, LMU München

The workshop is organized by:

**ESSWE** – The European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism

**ZGW** – Center "History of Knowledge" (ETH / UZH)

**Chair for Literature and Cultural Studies of ETH Zurich** as part of the SNSF project «Scientification and Aestheticization of <Esotericism> in the long 19th century».

**Date:** January 20 – 23, 2022  
**Venue:** Conference and Cultur Center Monte Verità, Ascona, Switzerland  
**Contact:** [zgw@ethz.ch](mailto:zgw@ethz.ch) (ETH Zürich)  
**Organisation:** Andreas Kilcher, Jonas Stähelin and Chloe Sugden