

ESSWE

European Society for the Study
of Western Esotericism

Newsletter

Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen, *Saul and the Witch of Endor*, 1526. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Words from the Editor

Chloë Sugden

Welcome to the Winter 2022/23 ESSWE Newsletter. This issue Dr. Hadi Fakhoury (Harvard Divinity School) and Dr. Matthew Melvin-Koushki (University of South Carolina) provide generous scholar interviews, and Jonas Stähelin (ETH Zürich) and Jessica A. Albrecht (University of Heidelberg) outline their intriguing PhD projects. New member publications are featured for your reading pleasure, and doctoral student Colton Ochsner (University of Missouri) reviews ESSWE8 on Western esotericism and creativity: art, performance and innovation (Cork, July 5-7). I also review “The Eranos Experience: Spirituality and the Arts from a Comparative Perspective” Conference (Venice, November 17-19). Further, several scholars commemorate the remarkable life of Yoshinaga Shin’ichi (1957-2022). In later sections, you will find details on ESSWE9, focused on Western esotericism and practice (Malmö, June 26-28, 2023), the next EASR Conference on religions and technologies (Vilnius, September 4-8, 2023), research projects, the new student representative to the ESSWE Board, the ESSWE PhD Thesis Prize 2022, and calls for proposals.

Please note that the views and opinions expressed in the articles and interviews are those of the authors and interviewees, and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the ESSWE. With this newsletter, we draw the recent exchange of opinions, originating with the interview in issue 12:1, to a close in order to focus on other topics in forthcoming issues.

I’ll sign off with a stanza from a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke. Wishing all ESSWE members a fruitful 2023. See you in Malmö!

- 1 Words from the Editor
- 2 Publications from ESSWE Members
- 5 Scholar Interviews
- 8 PhD Project Features
- 10 Event Reviews
- 14 Obituary
- 16 Research Project
- 16 ESSWE PhD Thesis Prize 2022
- 16 New Student Representative
- 17 Upcoming Events

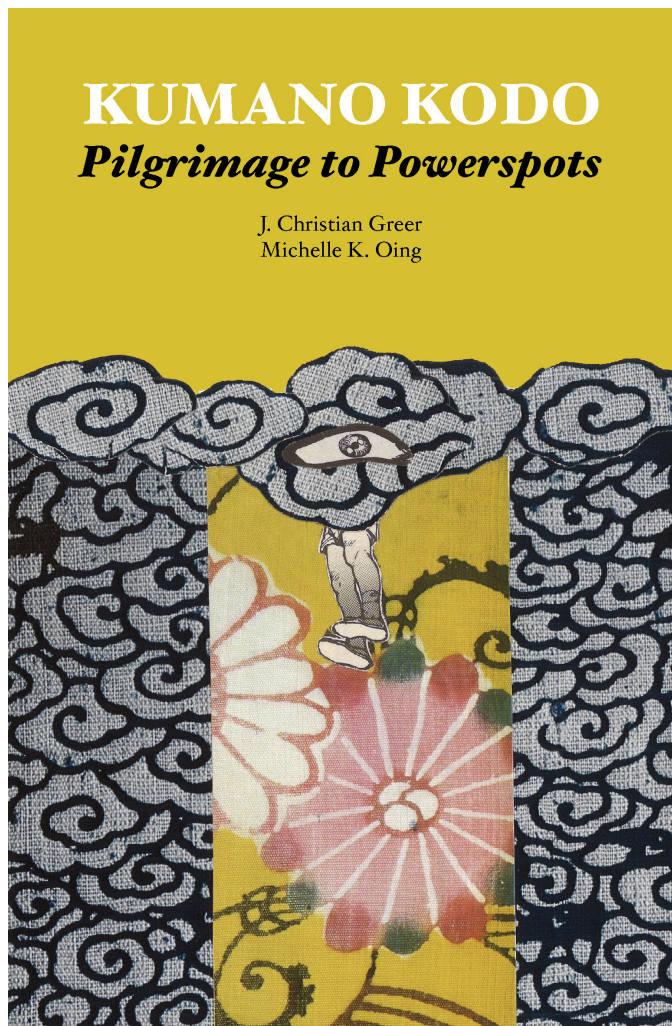
Be ahead of all parting, as if it were
behind you like the winter just passing now.
For among winters there’s one such endless winter,
that, overwintering, your heart for all time overcomes.

(From Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus* 2:13, trans. Christiane Marks)

This Newsletter is edited by Chloë Sugden, PhD candidate,
Chair for Literature and Cultural Studies, ETH Zürich, Switzerland
(csugden@ethz.ch).

New Publications from ESSWE Members

Greer, J. Christian, and Michelle K. Oing
Kumano Kodo: Pilgrimage to Powerspots
San Francisco: OSGH Press, 2022



Kumano Kodo is a journey into the meaning and power of pilgrimage. Part travelogue, part speculative fiction, part scholarly history, this book speaks to the universal human impulse to explore the sacred through travel. By focusing on Japan's oldest pilgrimage route, the Kumano Kodo, the authors offer their readers a transgressive and humorous look at the merry art of pilgrimage. Whether uncovering historical conspiracies, recounting bawdy folklore, or collecting ghost stories, this surrealist investigation establishes a new paradigm for spiritual travel inspired by an impressive breadth of scholarly research, and the authors' many years as pilgrims across the globe. Compiled in Kyoto at the height of the pandemic in 2020, the book is a unique reflection on the unwieldy power of the sacred travel in times of crisis, and contains dozens of original, full-color mandalas by co-author, J. Christian Greer.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J.
Hermetic Spirituality and the Historical Imagination: Altered States of Knowledge in Late Antiquity
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022

In Egypt during the first centuries CE, men and women would meet discreetly in their homes, in temple sanctuaries, or in solitary places to learn a powerful practice of spiritual liberation. They thought of

Hermetic Spirituality and the Historical Imagination

Altered States of Knowledge in Late Antiquity

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

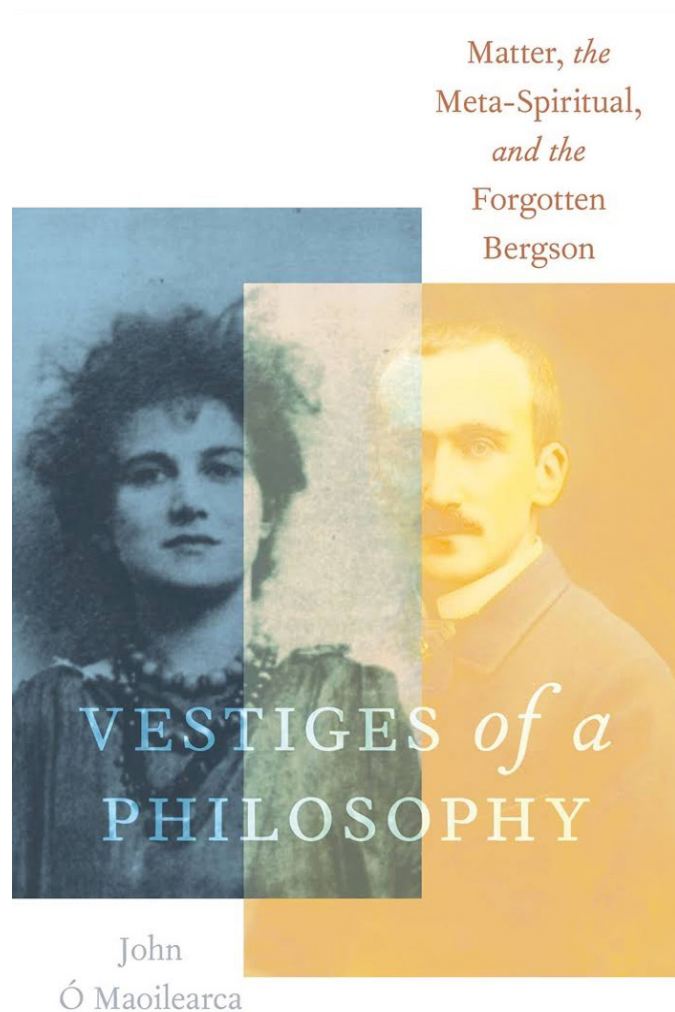


themselves as followers of Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary master of ancient wisdom. While many of their writings are lost, those that survived have been interpreted primarily as philosophical treatises about theological topics. Wouter J. Hanegraaff challenges this dominant narrative by demonstrating that Hermetic literature was concerned with experiential practices intended for healing the soul from mental delusion. The Way of Hermes involved radical alterations of consciousness in which practitioners claimed to perceive the true nature of reality behind the hallucinatory veil of appearances. Hanegraaff explores how practitioners went through a training regime that involved luminous visions, exorcism, spiritual rebirth, cosmic consciousness, and union with the divine beauty of universal goodness and truth to attain the salvational knowledge known as gnôsis.

Maoilearca, John Ó
Vestiges of a Philosophy: Matter, the Meta-Spiritual, and the Forgotten Bergson
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023

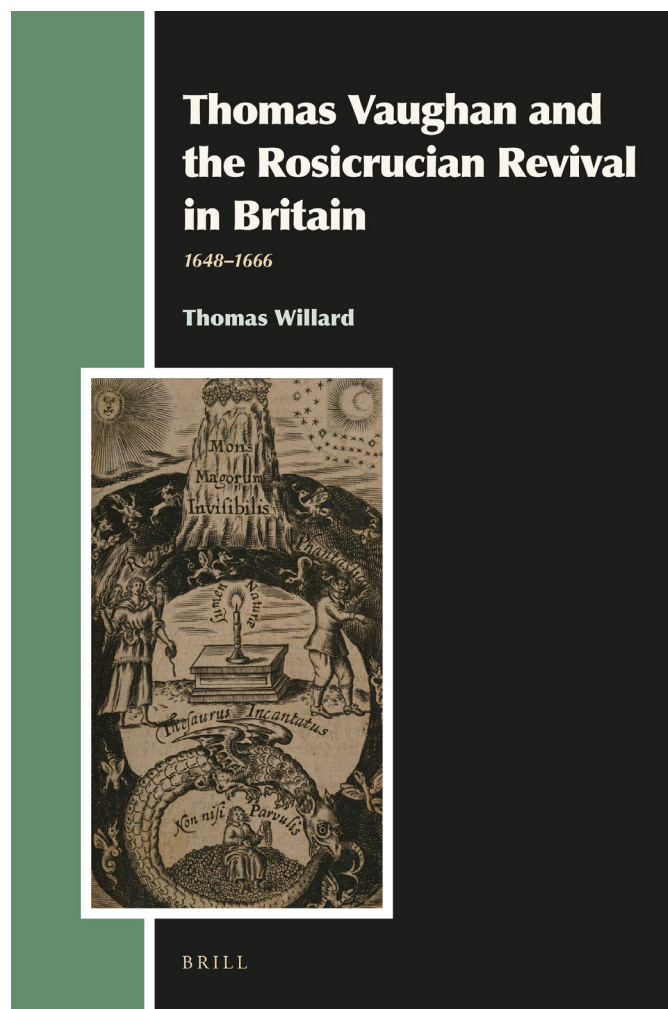
This book is a highly original examination of the writings and practices of mystic and spiritualist Mina Bergson (1865–1925), in the light of her seemingly estranged brother, Henri Bergson's (1859–1941) ultra-realist ideas in the philosophies of time and of mind (the past really survives in memory). Her proposal that "material science" was "spiritualizing itself" just as "occult science" was "materializing itself" converges with her brother's attempt to overcome the duality of spirit and matter through a process metaphysics. Yet her approach comes from the tradition of Western esotericism rather than Western philosophy, a difference that will motivate an analysis of the ontology and methodology of the Bergson siblings. In doing so, it also engages with contemporary ideas in panpsychism, memory studies, the philosophy of

time, as well as the relationship between spirit and matter within contemporary materialist thinking (Catherine Malabou, Karen Barad, and Jane Bennett). This study is then able to conceptualize for the first time the relations between a nonmechanistic view of matter as heterogeneous, nonlocal, and creative, and Mina Bergson's mystical performances of a spiritualized materiality. In this process of cross-fertilization, a number of new concepts emerge involving the meta-spiritual, hetero-continuity, the supernormal, and the hyperbolic while also helping to side-step the duality of an immaterial or paranormal spiritualism on the one side and a reductive materialism on the other.



Willard, Thomas
Thomas Vaughan and the Rosicrucian Revival in Britain
 Leiden: Brill, 2022

The first scholarly book on Thomas Vaughan (1621–1666) draws from recent studies in Western esotericism to place his famously difficult writings in their proper context. It shows that they develop themes from a distinctively Rosicrucian synthesis of alchemy, magic, and Christian cabala. Vaughan introduced Rosicrucian documents to English readers and placed them in older philosophical contexts during the breakdown of censorship that followed the English Revolution against the old order in politics and religion. Willard's book will appeal to students of early modern ideas about religion, science, and society as they were seen by an intelligent and eloquent outsider.



DE GRUYTER
OLDENBOURG

Yves Mühlematter

ACCELERATING HUMAN EVOLUTION BY THEOSOPHICAL INITIATION

ANNIE BESANT'S PEDAGOGY AND THE CREATION
OF BENARES HINDU UNIVERSITY



OKKULTE MODERNE

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Mühlematter, Yves
*Accelerating Human Evolution by Theosophical Initiation:
Annie Besant's Pedagogy and the Creation of Benares Hindu
University*
Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023

The main subjects of analysis in the present book are the stages of initiation in the grand scheme of Theosophical evolution. These initiatory steps are connected to an idea of evolutionary self-development by means of a set of virtues that are relative to the individual's position on the path of evolution. The central thesis is that these stages were translated from the "Hindu" tradition to the "Theosophical" tradition through multifaceted "hybridization processes" in which several Indian members of the Theosophical Society partook. Starting with Annie Besant's early Theosophy, the stages of initiation are traced through Blavatsky's work to Manilal Dvivedi and T. Subba Row, both Indian members of the Theosophical Society, and then on to the *Sanâtana Dharma* Text Books. In 1898, the English Theosophist Annie Besant and the Indian Theosophist Bhagavan Das together founded the Central Hindu College, Benares, which became the nucleus around which the Benares Hindu University was instituted in 1915. In this context the *Sanâtana Dharma* Text Books were published. Mühlematter shows that the stages of initiation were the blueprint for Annie Besant's pedagogy, which she implemented in the Central Hindu College in Benares. In doing so, he succeeds in making intelligible how "esoteric" knowledge was transferred to public institutions and how a broader public could be reached as a result.

The dissertation was awarded the ESSWE PhD Thesis Prize 2022.

Scholar Interviews

Dr. Hadi Fakhoury
Postdoctoral Fellow
Center for the Study of World Religions
Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University

How did you come to be interested in Western esotericism?

Growing up in Lebanon during and in the aftermath of the civil war, I witnessed firsthand the ravages of sectarian violence, which led me to question from a very young age the sacred cows of religion, politics, and culture. The “Satanic panic” was then in full swing, and the first time I heard of Aleister Crowley was as a 12-year-old in a Catholic high school classroom, the teacher sternly warning us about “Satanic music” like Led Zeppelin and Jimmy Hendrix. This for me had the opposite effect of its intended purpose, for I became enamoured with alternative popular music, through which I was unwittingly initiated into the “occulture.”



My first exposure to Western esotericism proper came after I moved to Montreal at the age of 15. There, thanks to public libraries, I discovered Hermann Hesse, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the PBS documentary *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, which contributed to my nascent interest in mythology and Eastern spiritual traditions. I quickly “graduated” to Mircea Eliade, René Guénon, and other related authors, who offered me a literary initiation into alchemy, hermeticism, occultism, mysticism, etc. At 17, I had already exhausted the bibliography of the so-called “Traditionalist School,” yet it did not satisfy my rational and critical mind. My philosophical apprenticeship was about to begin...

After graduating with a double major in Religious Studies and Philosophy from McGill University in 2009, I went on to do a Master’s in Islamic Studies, focusing on Sufism and classical Islamic philosophy. It was in a seminar on the 12th-c. Iranian mystic and philosopher Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi that I discovered the works of Henry Corbin, who has remained with me to this day. My research on Corbin and his sources led me to German romantic and idealist philosophies, notably that of F.W.J. Schelling (1775-1854), on whom I later wrote my doctoral dissertation; his demands for rationality applied to mystical and religious themes appealed to me. At that stage, I read the best that French scholarship in this area had to offer, notably the works of Eugène Susini, Bernard Gorceix, Jean-François Marquet, and, of course, the late Antoine Faivre, whom I was fortunate to meet one time, in 2014, in his small apartment in Meudon. Since then, my research has sought to explore the ways in which non-rational modes of thought and imagination (revelation, theosophy, illumination, gnosis, etc.) are related to philosophy.

After being a lurker for so long, I officially stepped into the academic world of Western esotericism in 2015, by participating in the fifth ESSWE conference in Riga, on the theme of “Western Esotericism and the East.”

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

I think we can all salute the fact that our field has grown considerably in the last decade, becoming more diverse and “weirder” than ever before, and that this trend shows no signs of slowing – or sizing

– down. These are very exciting times to be a researcher in Western esotericism, since there appears to be a wider recognition of its significance in various areas of mainstream culture and academia. The recent public attention to “conspiracy theories,” the growing interest in Indigenous and alternative epistemologies, the ongoing “psychedelic renaissance,” and the adaptation of esoteric discourse within anti-liberal milieus, among other current phenomena, variously illustrate with renewed urgency the importance of our field.

This greater visibility, however, has also accentuated existing anxieties and differences, theoretical and political, as reflected in recent internal debates surrounding the field’s identity. Regardless of one’s position, it is important not to lose sight of our current momentum and the fact that our unity is also our strength. At the same time, we should reflect on what this unity represents: to outside eyes, the field looks like a nebula of topics with little in common other than a vague quality of being obscure or unconventional, a hodgepodge of curiosities, an academic subculture of the Weird. Without needing to abandon its distinctive character, the field stands to gain from increasingly exploring and emphasizing the ways in which esotericism has never really been different or separate from mainstream culture.

What projects are you working on at the moment?

My postdoctoral project at Harvard centres on Henry Corbin, whom I’ve already mentioned. Corbin’s reception has far too long been unjustly confined to the domain of specialists, who have been exclusively concerned with assessing his scholarly contributions to the study of Islam, and who have failed to recognize the value of his ideas as a thinker in his own right. My project at Harvard has sought to re-orient Corbin’s reception by presenting him to a broader academic audience; shedding new light on his intellectual sources; highlighting his unique philosophical contributions; and inviting new, critical approaches to his work. To this end, I co-organized at Harvard in May 2022 a three-day conference, “Adventures in the Imaginal: Henry Corbin in the 21st Century,” which hosted leading scholars of esotericism, such as Wouter Hanegraaff, Elliot Wolfson, and Jeffrey Kripal. I am currently working on two book projects dealing with Corbin: a monograph that contextualizes his intellectual project by examining his overlooked engagement with Orthodox theology; and an edited volume covering a wide range of themes related to Corbin’s life, ideas, and reception.

What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?

My interests are wide-ranging and interdisciplinary, covering areas such as intellectual history, Islamic Studies, continental philosophy, theology, psychology, political thought, the history and philosophy of science, and critical theory, among others. Alongside my already mentioned Corbin projects, I am preparing for publication a translation and critical edition of a seminal text of Schelling’s later philosophy of religion, his *Lectures on Monotheism*.

What is the best thing about having this as your speciality?

The best things about this field are its multi-disciplinarity, the freedom it affords to explore subjects that do not easily fit into one box, a ceaselessly fascinating stream of research, having inimitable colleagues, and being part of a growing, diverse, active, supportive, and fun network. Western esotericism is without a doubt the best-kept secret of the Humanities.

What is the worst thing about having this as your speciality?

The most unfortunate thing about having this speciality is the suspicion it inevitably attracts from outsiders, including scholars in other disciplines who often also happen to control levers of power and funding, and for whom the words “Western esotericism” almost instinctively evoke unsavoury associations. There is a lot of work yet to be done to shift this perception.

How did you come to be interested in Western esotericism?

Amidst the divine pines of the northwestern foothills of the Rocky Mountains and east of the Cascades, I was raised in a tamed, suburbanized

Jesus-movement brand of evangelical Christianity, whose '70s Californian vintage nevertheless made it highly weird. Little did I know then how deeply *occult* it was too. Antisemitic apocalypse

porn, Neognostic theology of Rapture, spirit possession and prophetic dreaming, demons—mostly Muslim and Jewish—behind every bush and book, all but the Bible fit to burn; even touching a Crowley tome was enough to damn your soul forever. Being a nerd of the Beckett, Joyce and Tolkien-worshipping variety, and addicted to dead and divine languages, such anti-intellectual and demonological fearmongering increasingly rankled, and after several years of ascetic wandering throughout the Arab world and living with Palestinian and Iraqi refugees, I attempted to become an Orthodox monk in the Egyptian desert. Being too American (and all-too-Protestant!), that attempt failed. By a bizarrely and serendipitously random route I somehow wound up in academe instead, that other monkdom, having realized to my shock I could possibly get paid to profess my two chief loves, Arabic and Persian.



Yet my rejection of Protestantism and evangelicalism had blinded me to the occult, so I went to Yale to do my doctorate on Sufism-as-mysticism-only, the only option in Islamic Studies at the time. (My academic great-grandfather is Henry Corbin.) It was just after I finished my dissertation that I had a revelation: my field is not mysticism but occultism, not history of religion but history of science, not the study of Islam as the West's shadowy Other but as the West itself. I've been building on that revelation ever since.

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

With the boom of Western esoteric studies as a field in recent decades, under Amsterdam's solar aegis, so too have its theoretical problems and political anxieties boomed. Exhibit A is the ongoing debate on whether to drop the "Western"—a move I think not only unwarranted but also counterproductive. Indeed, in our fresh hell of heavily armed West vs. East nationalisms, it is actually dangerous. For this position, I have recently been painted by a few ESSWE members as a pusher of "subjective," essentialist scholarship compromised by its overt political agenda, and therefore *essentially* at odds with "objective," apolitical and therefore true approaches to the esoteric and the occult as purely etic, ever-shifting terms. As such, in the associated 2021 volume, *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*, my approach is simply deleted from the conversation altogether, presumably because it is embarrassingly *old*.

I'm heartened to see that last year's debate was resolved in favor of collegiality and mutual flourishing going forward. To make that durable, however, it should be registered that the original charge strayed more than a little into objectivity vs. subjectivity binary territory, a polemical move that must be permanently retired as truly old-fashioned. It goes without saying that postcolonial and feminist theory and science studies—invoked to style me a subjective, antitheory reactionary—have long since put paid to any such argument: assertions of

transcendent scientific objectivity will never shake their colonialist and supremacist genealogy. Meanwhile, deconstruction unchecked, factionalism and balkanization do indeed ring the death knell of the humanities. We fiddle while Rome burns.

Infinitely more importantly, academic turf-policing and boo-wording aside, we as historians have an ethical responsibility to our actors, past and present, as well as to our students, who need jobs. Islamic occultism in particular is no passive object of scholarly inquiry to be loftily patronized, but the site of deformative mass traumas from the colonial era to the present one, just as violently colonial. As we speak, occult bodies and books are being destroyed at a scale never before seen.

This catastrophe has everything to do with the stories we (have never been) moderns are told and reflexively continue to tell: Islam is the eternally medieval and alien Other; Magic can only ever be Religion, never Science; Modernity as the Final Solution. These have enforced obscene disproportionalities in the study of Islam generally and the Islamic occult specifically, whereby "classical" Arabic texts that happened to be done into Latin (often poorly) are teleologically embraced in their role as source for Christian "proto-science," and so dominate and shape the field; most of the occult texts (Arabic, Persian or otherwise) more influential in the much vaster and much better-read Islamic world have yet to be edited, studied or even mentioned in passing. The overwhelming majority of the massive surviving Islamic occult archive—featuring millions of unstudied manuscripts and artifacts, and outstripping the Christian one by *two orders of magnitude*, despite the depredations of colonialism, reformism, salafism and nationalism over the last two centuries—has thus been safely left to rot, or actively torched.

Like its sister area-studies fields, Islamic Studies is Eurocentric by origin and definition. It will not be decolonized by deconstruction alone, incomprehensible except to initiates, but by rewriting the story of the West itself in a manner compelling and comprehensible—and yes, politically actionable—to nonspecialists too. Any other tactic is exclusionary and doomed to ethical irrelevance. By the same token, to insist on drawing sharp theoretical and terminological boundaries on the basis of the tiny, unrepresentative dataset thus far published in Euro-American venues, based in the main on distorted European collections, is both wildly premature and methodologically unsound, and smacks of dogma. But the solution is a simple one, if strenuous: we must pursue a more proportional philology as an ethical commitment, as a means of changing minds and so possibly saving lives. *Philology as magic*.

To name is to cast a spell. To help ensure that Islamic Occult Studies survives the difficult decades ahead as an antidogmatic, inclusive and interdisciplinary humanities field, to create institutional spaces for philology, I have found other spells to be more effective and constructive: Magic and the Weird, Persian Pythagoreanism and the Occult-Scientific Revolution, Cosmic Philology and the Superhumanities. For my early modern Persianate actors, Islam simply is magic, and the occult is by definition wondrous and weird (*gharib*)—hence a ubiquitous ethical, political, aesthetic, scientific and technological imperative informing virtually every Islamic genre. In fact, I'm increasingly inclined to call what I do Islamic Weird Studies instead, taking Jeff Kripal's inspired inauguration of the Superhumanities as home framework to that end. But the paranormal is perfectly normal too: the study of the occult is the study of Islam, and the study of Islam is the study of the West. By strategic naming I look to the day they can be normalized as such.

What projects are you working on at the moment?

My field didn't exist a decade ago; now it magically does, and is suddenly booming! What a glorious time to be an Islamicist. To help harness this new energy, this *reweirding of Islam*, I co-founded (with Noah Gardiner) and continue to run IOSOTR (islamicoccult.org), which showcases early-career scholars' research through regular

online workshops and published summaries. In the spring we're putting on two targeted symposia, on lettrism+kabbalah and geomancy, among other meetings. To the same but broader end, I'm delighted to announce that just this last month we launched a new, two-year, fully funded History MA in Magic and Occult Science here in my home department at USC, the first of its kind in North America, and its announcement went astonishingly viral—I was flooded with emails and fascinating applications from every corner of the globe. Even more wondrously, a parallel MA in Magic and Esotericism, spearheaded by Emily Selove, was simultaneously launched at Exeter, which has once again become a major hub for our field in the last several years. Emily and I are now in the process of establishing a joint Exeter-USC graduate program as of 2024. Despite its obvious baggage and our own resistance to the term, we decided to lead with Magic rather than Occultism or Esotericism on an intuition born out of our years of teaching, and the zeitgeist seems to agree!

Also on the program-building front, I'm the incoming president of *Societas Magica*, and look forward to organizing regular conferences under its aegis during my term; the three-day hybrid one I put on here at USC just this September, "Magic Un/disciplined," was a lot of fun. I'm also co-PI in an ERC Synergy grant application, which would be ten million euros for the study of Islamic and Eastern Christian occultism in tandem (finally), and provide dozens of jobs—please keep your fingers crossed!

As for my own research, now that I'm tenured I've turned most of my energies back to hardcore philology (I was trained in the German tradition), which counts for very little in American academe. It may seem strange to this readership, given my track record, but I have frequently struggled to get my work published over the last ten years, in the teeth of reviewers and editors hostile to the very *existence* of my Islamic evidence, much less its relevance. Shockingly, some have even openly mocked my early modern Muslim occultists as *superstitious Oriental natives*—the same all-too-classic canceling dehumanization that continues to cause very real human and nonhuman suffering today. It is precisely the ongoing etic and emic amputation of "Islam" from "the West" that allows such nakedly colonialist attitudes to fester across a wide range of modern disciplinary divides with a virulence unthinkable to Europeanists and critical theorists. So yes, we must tell better, less destructive, more constructive and more proportional stories. To open empirical space for these stories in an often hostile or dismissive professional environment, however, philology must lead: Islamicists are at least a century behind Europeanists in this fundamental regard, with a much smaller labor force and a much larger archive. I've therefore embarked on a series of editions and translations of my Persian and Arabic sources on various occult sciences, especially lettrism and geomancy (my faves), while aggressively pursuing funding to empower early-career specialists to do the same.

What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?

Hiking, shooting hoops, keeping chickens, chick flicks, sci-fi and poker, and generally reveling in the pine-spangled glories of Carolina!

What is the worst thing about having this as your specialty?

The rampant active and passive destruction and frequent inaccessibility of my sources. Islamic Magic has been designated politically sensitive at the major archives in Egypt, Turkey, Iran, India and elsewhere for the last few decades, so manuscripts deemed "magical" are almost impossible to access—hence the need to rely on European and American collections, whose proportions, unsurprisingly, are very different. They are decidedly not in favor of the occult, especially of the non-Arabic and non-medieval variety; Islam is Scripture, Law and Mysticism only. The colonial shape of that archive remains the institutional shape of the field. (Now *that's* essentialism!) As such, to specialize in Islamic occultism is to be forced to stand by and watch as an incalculably rich human and yes, Western archive is erased from history, is to

be frustratingly political.

What is the best thing about having this as your specialty?

Its exceptional sexiness as weapon of decolonization! Islamic Occult Science gets at the guts of the modern capitalist-colonialist constitution in a way few themes can, a premodern-postmodern catalyst for the necessary reevaluation of all Euro-American values that will define the twenty-first century. Ethics aside, the occult and the esoteric just attract the coolest, weirdest, most generous, most brilliant scholars ever. I thank my lucky stars for the privilege of being part of this global family. Also, the mad street cred :)

PhD Project Features

Jessica A. Albrecht
Department of Religious Studies
University of Heidelberg, Germany

Sites of Inclusion and Exclusion: Religion in Girls' Schools in Sri Lanka

This PhD thesis is part of the project 'Theosophy and women's education in colonial Ceylon', funded by the German Research Foundation. Even though the title of the thesis does not relate to Theosophy or the history of esotericism explicitly, the project very much does. Even more, the thesis is looking at the influence of the Theosophical Society on girls' education in Sri Lanka from a historical as well as a contemporary perspective and, by doing so, highlights the global interactions of esoteric, religious, and feminist actors.



When H. P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) and Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) arrived in Sri Lanka in 1880, they quickly teamed up with the Buddhist and Tamil reform movements on the island in their efforts to counter the effects of the Christian mission. One essential part of this counter movement was the establishment of various Buddhist-theosophical and Tamil schools around the country. Throughout the 1880s, various schools for boys were opened by the local theosophists and religious reformers. However, it was not until 1889 that the first English medium school for girls was opened, the Sanghamitta School. Founded by the Women's Educational Society, which consisted of wives of locals active in the Buddhist Theosophical Society, the school was to be led by female theosophists coming from the West. This thesis looks at the influence of such female theosophists, namely Marie Musaeus Higgins (1855-1926), Countess Miranda de Souza Canavarro (1849-1933), and Florence Farr (1860-1917), on the establishment of non-Christian girls' education in late-colonial Ceylon, and its influences on the religious and gendered landscapes of contemporary Sri Lanka.

Higgins was a German who had come to the US in the early 1880s where she met her husband-to-be, Anthony Higgins, a theosophist and ardent follower of Blavatsky. After he died, she saw an advertisement in *The Path* in which the Women's Educational Society asked for a European Lady teacher to become the Principal of Sanghamitta School. Higgins replied and, after Olcott approved of her application, she moved to Ceylon to become the third Principal of the school. However, personal discrepancies made her resign from her post and open her own school, Musaeus College in 1894 with the help of her life-long friend, the local Buddhist and theosophist Peter de Abrew (1862-1940). Musaeus College is still one of the most important schools in the country, upholding its theosophical past. The school emblem is the Svastika, and the houses into which students are sorted are named after Higgins, de Abrew, Olcott, and Besant. The latter two were supporters of the schools and friends of Higgins for many years.

After Higgins left Sanghamitta School, the institution lost a great number of students, and it was only in 1897 that the Buddhist reformer and theosophist Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) decided to invest in girls' and women's education. His vision of the school was that it should provide a place for Buddhist women outside of marriage and family. As the order of Buddhist nuns was not yet revived at that time, Sanghamitta Convent, as it was called sometimes, became a place of



Figure 1: "Our Founders: A Legacy Unfolds," Musaeus College: Celebrating 125 Years of Excellence, p. 3

female renunciation. On his tour through the US, Dharmapala met Canavarro who then joined him, seeing him as her spiritual teacher, to become the Principal of the school. She left Ceylon in 1900 and the school lost its importance.

Lastly, the Tamil reformer Ponnambalam Ramanathan (1851-1930) decided to establish a school for Hindu Tamil girls under the example of Musaeus College. When he came to London in the early 1900s, he met Florence Farr, former member of the Order of the Golden Dawn and then theosophist, via Allan Bennett. He persuaded her to join him in Jaffna, northern Ceylon to become the Principal of Ramanathan College. Farr left London in 1912 and the school was officially opened in 1913. However, Farr died in 1917 and her memory was soon lost in the school's narration of its past.

This thesis looks at the lives and influences of these three women in the broader context of the religious history of Sri Lanka, especially in terms of feminist politics and gender conceptions, colonial power relations, and entangled histories of religious actors worldwide. I will analyze how and why the impact and remembrance of these women differs, and how this relates to Theosophy and the anti-/postcolonial political context of Sri Lanka. My project includes historical and ethnographical aspects, including fieldwork, archival research and interviews taken with former students and teachers at the schools. By doing so, the here outlined histories will be thoroughly examined and expanded through contemporary networks, practices, and alliances of religious actors in the country and abroad. Looking at the religious practices in these schools, then and now, the influence of the Theosophical Society—still celebrated in Sri Lanka today—will be examined in regard to girls' education. This is a novel approach in terms of the

global history of esotericism and religion, as well as of the national religious history of Sri Lanka, in which the stories of the Sinhalese and the Tamils continue to be written separately- even though, as my research highlights, their effort in education for girls was a joint one from the beginning.

Jonas Stähelin
Chair for Literature and Cultural Studies
ETH Zürich, Switzerland

From the Supernatural to the Supersensible: Occult and Scientific Epistemologies of the Invisible in the 19th Century

My research project investigates the scientification of occultism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My main hypothesis is that scientific practice and occultism were productively intertwined in their shared effort to investigate invisible realities and continuously push back the boundaries of perception. Earlier approaches to this subject usually describe the turn of the century through a series of oppositions. Scientific advances during this period thus contributed primarily to rationalization and technical progress, which in turn solidified already dominating mechanistic and materialistic worldviews. This drive towards immanence supposedly stood at the expense of categories such as feeling, wholeness, spirit, the sublime and transcendence. “Disenchantment”, as this story has often been told, stood against the desire for a renewed “enchantment”. United in its critical attitude towards science and technology with movements such as the “Life Reform” or Theosophy, Occultism usually stood on the “enchantment” side of the binary.



My understanding of nineteenth century occultism pushes back against such dualistic approaches. Instead of oppositions, I am interested in processes of adaptation, translation and transformation that cut across the above-mentioned dualisms. In doing so, I expand on the excellent work already done by scholars such as Corinna Treitel, Heather Wolfgram, Alex Owen, Egil Asprem, Richard Noakes, Andreas Sommer, Efram Sera Shriar, and Christine Ferguson. As I argue in my dissertation, science was not just something occultism had to come to terms with, but rather a condition of possibility for the latter’s increased proliferation during this period. To further instate this argument, my project proposes situating occultism within a broader historical process that I have come to call the “scientification of the invisible”. The scientific investigation of the invisible gained strong momentum in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Physics in particular emerged as the central discipline, plunging itself into the invisible world populated by atoms and electrons – a truly wondrous world of ethereal undulations, electrical discharges and magnetic forces. To the human eye, the world, especially as the exact sciences increasingly came to describe it, had literally turned occult.

I have further broken down this historical trajectory into three constituent elements: First, this process implied a multiplication of the invisible; second, it led to a greater awareness of the inadequacy of our senses, and third—to some extent as a consequence of this—technical recording devices interposed themselves between our senses and nature. Occultism’s claim to knowledge was intimately linked with all three of these elements. Accessing the invisible scientifically held the promise that invisible objects, hitherto belonging to a transcendental beyond, could now be naturalized and made visible as “occult

knowledge” with the newly acquired methods and techniques of science. While new visual technologies, such as spectroscopy or x-ray photography, underlined the limits of human vision, they also promised to expand it. Crucially, therefore, this multiplication of the invisible was not perceived as a loss of the world, but understood rather in terms of a pluralization of perspectives.

For occultists, investigating imponderable substances and the “strange” forces associated with them was intertwined with the question of expanding consciousness and perception—an expansion which science seemed to offer. Yet to the dismay of many fellow scientists, they were equally concerned with translating the mechanical technologies used to register these imponderables into a vast spectrum of psychic faculties capable of perceiving them. They regarded mediumistic capabilities such as somnambulism, clairvoyance, astral vision or telepathy quite tangibly as psychic extensions of visual technologies into the realm of the occult. Managing this transition from physical technology to psychic technology was precisely the task many occultists set for themselves.

One figure sharing this sense of hope, for example, was German occultist philosopher Carl du Prel (1839-1899). As he put it in his two-volume *Magie als Naturwissenschaft (Magic As Science; 1899)*, recent advances in sense physiology, as well as the use of novel spectroscopic devices had convinced him that “[i]f there is nothing supernatural, so there is surely something supersensible.” Not only was magic, as a term he closely associated with “occultism”, to become scientific, science too had to become “magical” as it progressed from the visible to the invisible—for the more “refined matter” presented itself, the “stranger the forces” it harbored.

Occultism had its place within this movement from visibility to invisibility, allowing some elements previously associated with the supernatural to transition from a religious to a scientific register. Taking such reflections as a starting point, my dissertation interrogates the various histories of turn-of-the-century occultism, psychic research and parapsychology. I am particularly interested in the connections between science, technology and sensation, both literal and metaphorical. Geographically, I focus on Franco- and Germanophone Europe. In providing more nuanced interpretations of occultism’s location within nineteenth-century scientific culture, I aim to enrich our understanding of the plural and often contradictory formations of knowledge that constituted modernity.

Event Reviews

The 8th Biannual Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism

University College Cork, Ireland, July 5-7, 2022

Colton Ochsner (University of Missouri)

From July 5-7, 2022, the eighth biannual International Conference of the ESSWE took place at University College Cork. Its panels and talks showcased “manifestations of spiritual creativity and the relationship between esoteric symbols, principles and religious frameworks, and the production of artwork.” The conference organizer, Dr. Jenny Butler, organized a rich event with three keynotes, a book launch, an art exhibition, and – above all – a total of five parallel sessions with 119 individual papers. With so many worlds of panels occurring simultaneously, one may take the event as a cabalistic dream.



Image credit: Marleen Thaler.

in Hanegraaff’s talk included the changing narrative of Hermetic thought through the centuries, shifting conceptions of “Occident” and “Orient,” and techniques and practices that change the initiate’s ability to know the cosmos firsthand through a gendered lens.

Papers at the event proved equally diverse, though humanity’s creative rapport with nature and myth held an especially heavy sway over the artistic. Just to mention a few, Dr. Manon Hedemborg White (Malmö University) discussed “psychedelic” artist

Marjorie Cameron, a devotee to Thelema who championed her own enchanted worldview vis-à-vis Crowley and certain scientific thinkers, including Joseph Campbell, who were products of twentieth-century grief, desire, and the hero’s journey. Further, Dr. Justine Bakker (Radboud University Nijmegen) presented on the “unbearable Whiteness of Midsommar,” contextualising Ari Aster’s 2019 film within esoteric studies, critiquing the purported “exceptionality” of the Scandinavian-European race. Another intriguing paper was Richard Mason’s on a relatively unknown A.E. Waite tarot deck, the so-called “Trinick-Pip-pett” cards, through which choreographed images from the Fellowship of the Golden Cross (founded 1915) reflected Christian themes and Arthurian connotations—a clear aesthetic link between Anglo- and Western-esoteric motifs.



From left: Per Faxneld, Robert Shehu-Ansell, and Hedvig Martin-Ahlén.
Image credit: Per Faxneld.

Presentations at the conference ranged far afield. First, Dr. Andreas Kilcher, Professor of Literature and Cultural Studies at ETH Zürich, shared a keynote lecture on art and media’s meaning and production of discursive values, including information, knowledge, and spirit, vis-à-vis the topos of Dr. Faustus. Second, in his keynote, Dr. Marco Pasi, Associate Professor of Hermetic Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam, discussed cogently how occulture, (applied as a tacit discursive lens), remained relevant among such artists as Joseph Beuys, Santiago Borja, Ruchama Noorda, and Goshka Macuga well from the 1960s to the present. Third, Claire Nally, researcher of Neo-Victorian and Irish Studies at Northumbria University, presented her keynote on Ireland’s funerary culture and William Butler Yeats’ poetry and prose—a fitting contribution to the Irish tenor of the event’s proceedings. Each of the three keynotes displayed the exemplary inclusivity indicative of ESSWE’s interdisciplinarity, internationality, and interdiscursivity.

Mention must be made of Professor Dr. Wouter Hanegraaff’s (HHP) latest monograph, featured in the conference book launch: *Hermetic Spirituality and the Historical Imagination: Altered States of Knowledge in Late Antiquity* (2022). Published recently by Cambridge University Press, it discusses four main points: Hermetic spirituality; philosophy, theology, and history; altered states of knowledge (or consciousness); and the experiential praxis, as opposed to a purely theoretical avenue of knowing. Sold at a twenty-percent discount for conference attendees, the book emphasizes “the Word,” or language as the inadequate yet necessary, inevitable, and ambiguous mediator of the Hermetic tradition’s otherworldly gnosis. Other subthemes discussed



From David Tibet’s exhibition *TeaTime With The Channellers*, presented by the Irish Network for the Study of Esotericism and Paganism (INSEP) as part of ESSWE8.
Image credit: Marleen Thaler.



Image credit: Per Faxneld.

World War led to respective conceptions of the golem as either male or female. More Western (and more modern) still, Dr. Christian Greer (Stanford University) examined how funkadelic music in the 1970s USA marks a historic watershed for psychedelic spirituality (and occult-cultural musical subcultures) by innovating, and not regressing, its listeners' identification with the contemporary world.

Yet another common thread in the conference was the confluence of the senses in the arts, synesthesia, and the struggle of media to convey spiritual form. Marleen Thaler (University of Vienna) shared on the alternative religious landscape of Britain as conceived by John Michell. Inspired by millenarian imagery, in recent years Michell elevated Glastonbury to the Holy City of Saint John's Apocalypse, arguing its primacy as the New Jerusalem through research into sacred geometry and numerology. Drawing on Arthur Rimbaud and Seth Whidden, Dr. Simon Magus discussed lyric in the context of rhetorical and poetic device as a performative and legible "alchemy of sense." Enigmatic imagery was the topic of Stewart Clelland's paper on a chapter of écosais Freemasonry called l'Ordre des Chevaliers maçons Élus Coëns de l'Univers, specifically its production of ink drawings devised "in a theurgic fever," each one a portal between terrestrial and transcendent states of being.



Image credit: Per Faxneld.

Almost as prevalent were panels discussing creative innovation in Western esotericism. Léo Benard analyzed the career of the understudied Gaston Demengel, who, around the same period as Charles Richet and Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, investigated dance in France, England, and Germany as a psychic phenomenon, but also as part and parcel of the life reform movement. Dr. Tzahi Weiss (Open University of Israel) discussed the golem mythos and its impressions on two Jewish writers, Gershom Scholem and S.Y. Agnon, whose friendship in the First



From *TeaTime With The Channellers*.
Image credit: Per Faxneld

True to the conference theme, the Irish Free State's centenary added its own mystical-aesthetic quality to ESSWE8, as UCC was abuzz. Esoteric holdings came out at the Boole Library, including medieval tracts on angelology, and handwritten notes by Aleister Crowley. There was also *TeaTime with the Channellers*, an exhibition sponsored by the Irish Network for the Study of Esotericism and Paganism (INSEP), which featured the trippy, at times unsettling collages of British

poet, musician and artist David Tibet (b. 1960). Crónán Ó'Dóibhlin (UCC) gave a talk on modern linguistic conceptions of the "otherworld" and the Druidic goddess Áine. Lastly, culminating the legacy of patriotism, paganism, poetry, and pastoral pride was a provocative performance of dance and lyric poetry by witch, astrologer, Sligo resident, and descendent of the Irish-American diaspora Aepiril Schaile.



Image credit: Marleen Thaler.

Attendees also flocked to a string of destinations both in Cork and further afield. A few choice hotspots included Saint Fin Barre's Cathedral, the Nicolas Cage-themed pub, the monastery of Innisfallen Island, and the mummies of St. Michan's Cathedral at Dublin. Each toasted ESSWE8 with a sláinte poured from the boundless, instinctual wellspring of the Celtic unconscious. Thus is Ireland aptly called "the land of Saints and Scholars."

The Eranos Experience: Spirituality and the Arts from a Comparative Perspective

Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, Fondazione Cini, Venice, Italy, November 17-19, 2022

Chloë Sugden (ETH Zürich)

The "Eranos: Spirituality and the Arts from a Comparative Perspective Conference" took place on L'Isola di San Maggiore, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice from November 17-19, 2022. Against the backdrop of the island's historical San Giorgio Monastery (est. 982) and Palladian basilica (begun in 1566), the conference was organised by Venice's Centro Studi di Civiltà e Spiritualità Comparate, Istituto di Musica, and Istituto Interculturale di Studi Musicali Comparati della Fondazione Giorgio Cini, with the Centre for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, University of Amsterdam.

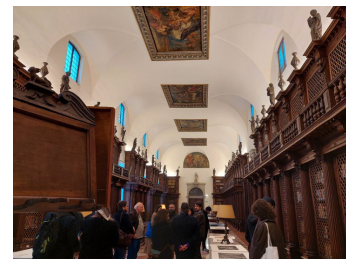


Image credit: Sébastien Mantegari.



Image credit: Sébastien Mantegari.

Papers considered how the legacy of Eranos has impacted the humanities, social sciences, performative and figurative arts. On the first morning, after welcome greetings, Dr. Andreas Kilcher

(ETH Zürich) opened the event with a paper on Gershom Scholem's "Idea of the Golem" and his concept of creation between science, magic, and art. Next, Dr. Wouter J Hanegraaff (University of Amsterdam) argued that the academic study of Eranos has been subjected to a binary logic that incorrectly assumes scholars must choose between a hermeneutics of either faith or suspicion. Hans Thomas Hakl's Eranos, he suggested, demonstrates an intermediary approach: a "hermeneutics of generosity." Dr. Jean-François Chevrier (École des



Image credit: Sébastien Mantegari.



Image credit: Francesco Piraino.



Image credit: Sébastien Mantegari.

beaux-arts de Paris; emeritus) then discussed the work of René Magritte, highlighting an episode in the history of the "raw comparatism" that surrealism has aroused in the late work of the artist.



Image credit: Marco Pasi.

After coffee with delicious sweets delivered by boat, first Dr. Federico Dal Bo (University of Heidelberg) presented on Scholem's admiration of Cubism as a "quintessential Jewish art" due to its detachment from everyday experience, capacity to conjure imagination, and theological potency. He detailed the nexus between Scholem's desire for a "true religious experience,"

and his interest in art as a medium for religious imagination. Second, Lieven De Maeyer (Titus Brandsma Institute/Radboud University Nijmegen) considered the metaphysics of surrealism's turn to magic, and its shift from the subversion of the modern subject to "a full-on rejection of it," with an emphasis on the work of André Breton.

Winding through the sculpture-lined corridors of the Fondazione Cini at lunch, I was delighted to find our meal served next-door to a copy of Paolo Veronese's *Wedding at Cana* (1562), the enchanting, open-air banquet scene commissioned to decorate the back wall of the Benedictine refectory at the Palladian complex.

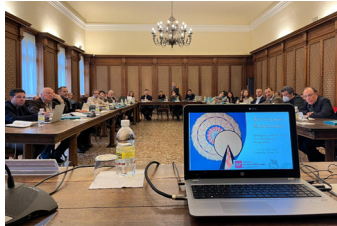


Image credit: Francesco Piraino.

Though the original painting was tragically sent to the Louvre, (and sliced in half!), during the Napoleonic looting of Venice, experiencing

Veronese's vast, meticulously detailed work in situ via its reproduction was memorable.

After lunch, we toured the impressive Art History Library of 150,000 volumes with its curator, encountering rare materials from the collection, including manuscripts and artworks not normally on display.

Afterwards, Dr. Daphne Tan (University of Toronto) illuminated us on Austrian-American musicologist and philosopher, Victor Zuckerkandl's Eranos experience, and its influence on his writings. His presence as a member of Eranos' inner circle, she noted, challenges narratives that musicians at the Ascona meetings were on the periphery. Next, Agnès Parmentier (Université Versailles St-Quentin-en-Yvelines) highlighted the presence of writers at Eranos, working from the Eranos guestbook, and emphasising Eranos founder Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn's relationship with poets, as well as the importance that she placed on literary matters. Mario Carrozzo (Music Conservatories of Naples) then invited us on a "journey in psychic space" through his exploration of Venetian composer Renata de Grandis' music as an embodiment of Theosophy. Carrozzo considered how the de Grandisian declension of spiritualism makes his musical conception and style historically significant.



Image credit: Francesco Piraino.



Image credit: Francesco Piraino.

In the evening, Dr. Giovanni Sorge (University of Zürich) introduced the silent, black-and-white short film *Eranos 1951*, written by Ximena de Angulo and filmed by Willi Roelli. As the film flickered before us, we travelled back to the famed symposia on Lago Maggiore,



Image credit: Francesco Piraino.

wine at Ristorante al Vagon.

On Friday, we woke on the island to a stunning view of the Basilica di San Marco across the water at sunrise, as the wintry day started with Dr. Aaron W. Hughes' (University of Rochester) paper on the importance of comparison - of Henry Corbin and Scholem, and as a method of analysis - for thinking about human creativity through myths and symbols in a way that does not entirely eschew history. Philipp Kuster (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München) then foregrounded the presence of natural scientists at Eranos in the postwar years, examining how they lectured on the natural sciences to an audience of predominantly humanities scholars at Ascona.



Image credit: Chloe Sugden.

After some much-needed caffeine, Sébastien Mantegari Bertorelli (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne) spoke about the synthesis and survival of religions in the artistic works of Carl Gustav Jung. Using an "anthropology of images," he described the survival of "mythical, ritual and divine representations" traceable in Jung's art, considering how Jung sought an iconographic synthesis in his visual expressions of "universal myths, rites, and divinities" Next, Martina Mazzotta (independent scholar and curator) spoke about the artworks of Luigi Pericle, and the echoes of his practice at Eranos through the lens of Sir Herbert Read. Dr. Ahmad



Sara Petrucci.
Image credit: Chloe Sugden.

Bostani (Kharazmi University of Tehran) then discussed Eranos' legacy in social and political theory, as an esoteric movement influenced by the post-war critique of Western knowledge, and the mystical revival of symbolism, hermeticism, and tradition. He highlighted the influence of Eranos contributor, Henry Corbin's philosophical system on social and political thought.

Following lunch in the refectory, Dr. Hadi Fakhoury (Harvard Divinity School) presented on the work of Henry Corbin. He suggested a novel reading of Corbin, analysing his understanding of modernity in relation to his conception of individual creativity. Dr. Manoël Pénicaud (CNRS – Idemec) then traced French scholar and renowned Catholic Orientalist, Louis Massignon's "annual pilgrimages" to Eranos and his intellectual exchanges in Ascona. To end the day, Chloe Sugden (ETH Zürich) considered Fröbe-Kapteyn's syncretic cosmology, and her creation of the complex occult-symbolological system driving her art. Fröbe-Kapteyn's images, she suggested, lie between image and action, sight and sensation, and the material and the



sacred, encouraging a meditative expansion of the unconscious. She focused on the artist's *Meditation Plates*, situating them within an art historical genre of "occult cosmograms."

After the presentations, we found ourselves gleefully lost in the hedge maze at dusk. We were then treated to a grand concert on the island at Lo Squero Auditorium, where the mdi ensemble performed works by Renato de Grandis, Ernesto Rubin de Cervin, and Giacinto Scelsi. Later, we feasted on Venetian fare at the charming Ristorante Ai 4 Feri Storti, and several of us sought out the famous bellinis at 1930s bar Harry's.

On Saturday morning, Sara Petrucci (University of Neuchâtel) identified Gothic Modernism and "embodied weightlessness" in the artistic research of Fröbe-Kapteyn and Charlotte Bara. She asked to what extent gothic revivals and sensibility were essential to Fröbe-Kapteyn's and Bara's "creative forms of a transcendent self," arguing that Gothic tropes and concepts invigorated their neo-romantic, syncretic, and vibratory worldviews during the chaos of the Interwar period and beyond. Next, Dr. Marco Pasi (University of Amsterdam) presented on enigmatic composer Giacinto Scelsi's musical compositions and literary texts, exposing the enduring influence of modern estoericism and alternative spirituality on his body of work, which captures the underlying spirit of the Eranos meetings.

In the final session of the conference, Dr. Charles Stang (Harvard Divinity School) spoke on Phillip Pullman's trilogy of fantasy novels, *The Book of Dust*. He discussed the influence of Eranos and particularly Corbin on the trilogy, exploring the "imaginal journeys" in its first two volumes, while suggesting that Corbin's interpretation of the *mundus imaginalis* can help us to appreciate Pullman's theory of the imagination and his "imaginal fiction." Dr. Gísli Magnússon (University of Iceland) then lectured on the "reminiscences of Eranos" in Danish author, Naja Marie Aidt's autobiographical book *When Death Takes Something From You Give It Back: Carl's Book*. In Aidt's text, Magnússon identified hidden references to the "nondogmatic, academically and historically informed" spirituality of Eranos, and references to the writings and theories of Jung, Mircea Eliade, Károly Kerényi, and Joseph Campbell. For the last lecture, Riccardo Bernardini (Eranos Foundation) presented on Fröbe-Kapteyn's individuation process through images, suggesting that her artworks expose her "intimate bond between inner reality and the outer world," and between creative practices and psychological processes. Most notably, Bernardini showed artworks by Fröbe-Kapteyn from the Eranos Foundation archive that are yet to be publically exhibited, including precious works from her *Visions* series.

Many thanks to Dr. Francesco Piraino (Director of the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities), Dr. Gianmario Borio (Director of the Institute of Music), Dr. Marco Pasi, Dr. Andreas Kilcher, and all of the participants for three days of fascinating discussions, with new friendships formed amidst the beauty of centuries-old surrounds.

Obituary

Yoshinaga Shin'ichi (1957-2022)

Yoshinaga Shin'ichi, a pioneer in the study of Esotericism in Japan passed away earlier this year, two weeks after his 65th birthday, on 31 March 2022. He leaves behind his life partner, Yukari, their two daughters, and dozens of friends, colleagues and students who will sorely miss his unlimited wit and generosity.

Yoshinaga was known among the plethora of researchers that he collaborated with, advised or supported (directly and indirectly through his extensive networks), as a powerhouse of new research topics in the study of religion, especially from the nineteenth century to today. He made significant contributions to the study of modern Buddhism and also firmly established the academic study of esotericism and occultism in Japan. He was particularly known for his capacity to make connections between different worlds, to challenge established epistemic categories and to find in matters often neglected by the academic establishment hard data that challenged normative conceptualisations about the role that religion is thought to have played in modern societies. This ability was partly due to his breadth of knowledge and interests, which enabled him to demonstrate linkages, overlaps, and influences between Buddhist and occultist institutions, most notably in his recent monograph, *Shinchigaku to Bukkyō*, on the creative interplay between Theosophy and modern Buddhism. But the intellectual connections that Yoshinaga forged transcend his remarkable scholarly production, including well over 250 publications and presentations recently compiled by Kurita Hidehiko. On top of his research and writing, Yoshinaga had a tremendous aptitude for making connections between people, bringing together scholars from disparate fields, and scholars from around the world, who likely would have never met otherwise, for presentations and conversations that transformed all present. And even though he was not always present at some conferences held in connection to themes dear to him, all the talks, discussions and publications related to the study of occultism, alternative and spiritual therapies, or modern Buddhism in Japan and abroad, and which have happened and will continue to happen among the scholarly networks he forged, will bear deep marks of his legacy of bridging scholarly subfields and revealing the occult connections underlying many seemingly disparate phenomena.

Born in Shizuoka Prefecture in 1957, Yoshinaga spent his teenage years in the early 1970s devouring “unusual” and “new-wave science fiction,” as well as fantasy literature and “weird novels” (*kaiki shōsetsu*) in the lineage of the classic American pulp magazine *Weird Tales*. In the afterword of the Japanese translation of Clark Ashton Smith's *The Empire of the Necromancers*, Yoshinaga found a mention of the Fantasy Literature Research Group (*Gensō Bungaku Kenkyūkai*) at Kyoto University (colloq. *Kyōdai*) and decided it was at this institution that he would continue his studies. Once he matriculated at *Kyōdai* in 1976, he found that many members of the Fantasy Literature Group were also members of the UFO Parapsychology Research Group (*Yūfō chōshinri kenkyūkai*, or *Yūchōken*), and he became involved with this group as well. At that time, leaders of the *Yūchōken* circle were getting involved with various esoteric new religions and started magazines such as *Aquarius* and *Uchū hadō* (*Universe Vibrations*). This led Yoshinaga to found his own group in 1977, the Modern Pyramid Association (*Kindai Piramidō Kyōkai*) with its own magazine, *Friends of the Pyramids* (*Piramiddo no tomo*).

The first issue of the magazine (November 1977) was a lighthearted endeavour, but from its second issue (March 1979), it became a more serious occult history research magazine. Often under pen names, Yoshinaga wrote articles on subjects that would interest him for the rest of his life, including the history of the Theosophical Society, spiritualism, and spiritual healing movements, and published translations of occultist thinkers from Gurdjieff to Robert Anton Wilson. In fact, by



1979 he was already writing about the relationship between Theosophy and the prominent Buddhist educator Hirai Kinza, a subject that it would take Buddhist studies scholars decades to recognize, and an issue to which Yoshinaga dedicates a chapter in his recent monograph. At this point in his life, Yoshinaga had realized he enjoyed these topics too much to continue dealing with them as hobbies, and decided to continue his studies not in the field of biological sciences – the area he originally majored in during his undergraduate years – but in religious studies proper. He then reapplied to the prestigious Department of Religion at Kyoto University, where he would receive his second bachelor's degree, and further continue into graduate school.

After more than a decade of publishing his research in popular books and magazines on occultism and fantasy literature, in 1990 Yoshinaga began publishing research about William James in a more academic setting. In a sense, it is quite fitting that James was the subject of his transition to more academic scholarly pursuits, as James himself famously bridged the worlds of academic psychology and psychical research, teaching at Harvard University while investigating spirit mediums and promoting an “energetic” view of the self that drew on Swedenborgian concepts of the soul. In 1995, Yoshinaga began teaching in the Humanities Department at the National Institute of Technology, Maizuru College (*Maizuru Kōgyō Kōtō Senmon Gakkō*), which gave him an outlet and impetus for scholarly production – in the 20 years from 1976 to 1995, he wrote, translated, or contributed to 85 distinct publications, but in the 20 years from 1996 to 2016, he produced nearly twice that number! These include his original research, co-authored and co-edited volumes, and several anthologies that are invaluable to the various subfields that his work traverses and bridges.

His early major work includes Japanese translations of David Cave's *Mircea Eliade's Vision for a New Humanism* (in 1996), Lawrence Wright's *Remembering Satan: A Tragic Case of Recovered Memory* (in 1999) and Gustav Davidson's *A Dictionary of Angels* (in 2004). In the mid-2000s, he also completed the editing and annotation of a 15-volume set of original texts on *minkan seishin ryōhō* (“folk psychospiritual therapies”), establishing a source of reference for his future work on the study of alternative therapies and occultism in modern Japan, which culminated with the co-edited volume *Modern and contemporary folk psychospiritual therapies: Aspects of occult energy* (*Kingendai Nihon no minkan seishin ryōhō: Fukushina/okaruto enerugii no shosō*) in 2019.

From around the early 2010s, Yoshinaga also became increasingly

involved with the study of modern Buddhism. He was one of the first to describe and consider, in a more systematic way, the impact of Theosophical currents in Meiji (1868 - 1912) Japanese thought. During this time he became a member of the executive committee of the Society for the Study of Modern Japanese Buddhist History (Nihon kindai bukkyōshi kenkyūkai), co-editing *Transformations of the Buddha: Crisscrossing Streams of Modern Buddhism* (Budda no Henbō: Kōsaku suru kindai bukkyō) and *Modern Buddhist Studies* (Kindai Bukkyō Sutadōzu), the latter work being the most accessible introduction to the topic in Japanese. The international conference “Asian Buddhism: Plural Colonialisms and Plural Modernities,” which he organized in December 2014, gathering dozens of scholars from around the world, is a testament not only to the depth of his scholarship but also to the extension of his network, and to his character as a human being. By bringing into the academic mainstream topics that more orthodox Buddhist scholars would have discarded as only marginal, Yoshinaga’s work changed once and for all the way we understand Meiji Buddhism and is now a must-read for any person interested in the area.

Moreover, Yoshinaga was adept at receiving research funding for various projects. This financing has helped fund the meetings of many research groups, conferences, and workshops, which have led to the establishment of permanent networks, (such as the East Asian Network for the Academic Study of Esotericism), and a multitude of other collaborations that continue to this day. A four-volume set (over 2,000 pages), co-edited with Hidehiko Kurita and published last year (2021), offers a new and updated compilation of original texts and explanations dealing with modern Japan’s *minkan seishin ryōhō*. Another four-volume set is in preparation, (with the first volume published in May 2022), on the history of Theosophy in East Asia, while a panel at the 2022 annual conference of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies has already considered the theoretical implications of some of Yoshinaga’s discoveries. Furthermore, at least two collections of English papers authored by his students and frequent collaborators, (one on therapy, spirituality, and East Asian imaginaries and the other on the history of Occultism in Japan), are in preparation and will appear in the next couple of years.

Yoshinaga Shin’ichi has left an indelible mark on the study of religion and modernity. Many knew him only through his prolific Facebook and Twitter posts, often written in a rush after he listened to a conference paper, or discovered a new occult magazine. Yet, if one looks back at the comments on these posts, one will be surprised about how much discussion they led to, with several scholars encouraging him to turn these seemingly mundane thoughts into research papers. Some people, (the authors of this obituary included), often ended up saving these SNS messages, studying them, or even quoting from them during research presentations. And it was not uncommon for people to record his talks to listen back carefully later. One quick email from him could launch the person who received it into a multiple-year project, and there was always more from where those ideas came from. As a boundless source and irreplaceable model of scholarly rigour and generosity, he will be talked about for many years to come.

For a list of Yoshinaga Shin’ichi’s publications, as well as a short video presentation on his life and work by Justin Stein, please visit <https://eanase.com/yoshinaga-shinichi/>.

Ioannis Gaitanidis (Chiba University)

Orion Klautau (Tohoku University)

Hidehiko Kurita (Bukkyo University)

Justin Stein (Kwantlen Polytechnic University)

Research Project Announcement

Traditions of Magic in the Medieval and Early Modern Islamicate World and Europe

With a group of scholars from Japan, we received a grant from the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science and the Ministry of Education for a three-year KAKEN research project that addresses the interactions of various traditions of magic, astrology and alchemy between the Islamicate world and Latin Europe during the medieval and early modern periods. We will explore the texts attributed to Jābir, Ikhwān al-Safā', the work known as *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, and the pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetica. Further, we will study the medieval and early modern reception of such works in translation - *Picatrix*, *Liber vaccae*, *Liber angeumis* - and their impact on Marsilio Ficino, Heinrich Agrippa, or Paracelsus. In addition to reinforcing scholarly networks via series of publications and workshops, we are planning an international conference to commemorate the works of Keiji Yamamoto, world renowned historian of Arabic astrology, to be held in Kyoto 2024.

Members of the team

- Amadeo Murase, Project Leader (Seigakuin University): Paracelsianism, early modern alchemy
- Liana Saif (University of Amsterdam): Arabic and Islamic magic
- Hiroaki Ito (Senshu University): Medieval and Renaissance mysticism
- Junichi Ono (Jichi Medical University): Islamic mysticism
- Yuki Nakanishi (Jichi Medical University/Keio University): Islamic theology and magic
- Hiro Hirai (Jichi Medical University/Columbia University): Renaissance alchemy

ESSWE Thesis Prize Award 2022

Congratulations to Yves Mühlematter (University of Zurich), who was awarded the ESSWE PhD Thesis Prize 2022 for his dissertation, *Accelerating Human Evolution by Theosophical Initiation: Annie Besant's Pedagogy and the Creation of Benares Hindu University*, now published in the *Okkulte Moderne* book series with De Gruyter Oldenbourg(2023).

Henrik Bogdan
Secretary of the ESSWE

New Student Representative to the Board of ESSWE

Dear members of the ESSWE,

Tom Fischer (tom.fischer@etu.ephe.psl.eu) has been elected the new ESSWE Student Representative for the period 2023-2024. Tom is a PhD candidate at EPHE (École Pratique des Hautes Études), Paris.

On behalf of the ESSWE Board, I would like to thank Mriganka Mukhopadhyay for his excellent work as Student Representative.

With all best wishes for 2023,

Henrik Bogdan
Secretary of the ESSWE

Upcoming Events

The 9th Biennial Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism Western Esotericism and Practice

Malmö University, Malmö, Sweden, June 26–28, 2023

ESSWE9 calls for a comprehensive exploration of the many dimensions of practice in Western esotericism. In recovering and documenting religious and philosophical currents, persons, and groups overlooked in “mainstream” histories, scholars of Western esotericism have developed considerable knowledge and analytical tools for understanding what esoteric practitioners have believed or thought about the world and themselves — while less is known about what esotericists did or do. By promoting interdisciplinary exploration of the important research frontier of esoteric practice, we hope to provide participants with an ideal opportunity to learn and advance our understanding of how esotericism has been embodied, enacted, and materialised. The conference theme is open to broad interpretation, and encompasses studies of specific forms of esoteric practice from antiquity until today and in a variety of geographical and cultural contexts, as well as explorations of conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and ethical issues relevant to the study of esoteric practices.

Keynote speakers

- Professor Sophie Page, Professor of Medieval History, University College London
- Professor Lawrence Principe, Drew Professor of Humanities, Johns Hopkins University
- Professor Linda Woodhead, F.D. Maurice Professor in Moral and Social Theology, King’s College London
- Organising committee: Manon Hedenborg White, Erik Alvstad, Erica Li Lundqvist, Bodil Liljefors Persson (Malmö University), Paulina Gruffman (Lund University).
- The call for papers is closed. Notifications of acceptance/rejection of paper and panel proposals were sent out in January 2023. The conference programme will be published during spring 2023.

Queries about the conference should be directed to esswe9@mau.se.

The 20th Annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) Religions and Technologies

Konstitucijos Av. 20, Vilnius, Lithuania, September 4–8, 2023

The Lithuanian Society for the Study of Religion is pleased to invite scholars interested in all aspects of religion and technology to attend the 2023 Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions.

Conference theme

Throughout most of the history of the study of religion, there has been a latent tendency among scholars to see religion and technology as not just separate phenomena, but sometimes as mutually antagonistic. Nevertheless, in recent decades, scholars have advanced a more nuanced understanding of this relationship, depending on which particular aspects are being considered. For instance, when considering religion as a practice, one discovers that religious institutions and individuals have used a wide range of technologies since ancient times,

including printing and writing to preserve teachings, time-measurement devices and astronomical knowledge to determine the correct ritual time, and, of course, complex ritual actions to attract followers and engage natural and supernatural forces.

These precedents illustrate the complexity of the relationship between religion and technology, a relationship which encompasses not just technology in its material sense, but techniques such as knowledge organization and the specific methods needed to achieve particular ends. In addition to the way in which technology affects religious practices, their spread, and religious dialogue, new technology underlying communications and the social and digital spheres facilitates the systematization of religious data, making religions more accessible to academic study than ever before.

Thus, what we can state about the relationship of religion and technology is not their separation or antagonism but their entanglement, which calls us to take into account how technology and religion have co-evolved in the past, consider which are the critical engagements of religion with technology today, and imagine how they could develop in the future. Considering all of the above, the theme of this year’s EASR conference encourages participants to present and discuss any aspect relating to religion and technology in the broadest sense, e.g.:

1. The concepts and connotations of technology across various religions.
2. Discussing how religions have viewed and treated technology historically and more recently.
3. The relationship between religion as practice and theory, or religion and science, including their interactions, conflicts, or other types of interactions;
4. Investigating esoteric, magical, or other religious practices as techniques.
5. Reflecting the spread and practice of religion via technology. The ways in which religions invent, adopt, and adapt technological innovations, including communication technologies and new media.
6. Understanding religion through the lens of concepts associated with social technologies, technological knowledge, etc.
7. The use of technologies and techniques in religious studies.
Studying religion in the digital age: advances in the digital humanities and beyond. The ways in which existing technologies and their notions influence the study of religion.

Keynote speakers

- Jana Valtrová (Masaryk University, Czechia)
- François Gauthier (University of Fribourg, Switzerland)
- Xenia Zeiler (University of Helsinki, Finland)
- Neil Price (Uppsala University, Sweden)
- Bronislaw Szerszynski (Lancaster University, UK)
- Jana Valtrová (Masaryk University, Czechia)
- Organising committee: Rasa Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson (Chair), Alfredas Buiko, Kristina Garalytė, Aušra Pažėraitė, Tadas Snuviškis, (Vilnius University), Eglė Aleknaitė, and Milda Ališauskienė (Vytautas Magnus University)
- The call for individual papers is now open and closes at 23:59 CET on 31 January 2023.

Visit <https://www.easr2023.org/call-for-papers/>.

- The International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) is offering bursaries towards travel expenses, accommodation, and conference registration for the Conference. There are five bursaries of up to €400 each. We invite applications from conference attendees who are research students or young/junior scholars from Ukraine. The deadline for applications is Sunday, April 30, 2023. Information stating the details of accepted paper/panel, CVs and

recommendation letters should be sent via email to religiousstudieslt@gmail.com. You will be notified of the outcome via email no later than Monday, May 15, 2023.

Further information: <https://www.easr2023.org/bursaries>

- Early bird registration: until May 31, 2023
- Standard registration: until June 30, 2023 (deadline for presenting authors)
- Late registration and onsite (non-presenting participants): from July 1, 2023

Call for Papers: Buddhist, Spiritual, Esoteric and Ecological Movements in the 21st Century Conference

Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, May 22-23, 2023

Organisers: Centre for Contemporary Buddhist Studies and the Copenhagen Centre for the Study of Theosophy and Esotericism

This two-day conference will explore the ways that Buddhist modernism and the spiritual movements of the fin de siècle (as exemplified by the Theosophical Society), both reacting to and enacting the dynamics of colonialism, continue to transform spiritual and ecological movements within and beyond the 21st century.

We invite papers that explore questions such as:

- How are the legacies of Buddhist modernism and esoteric movements still active in modern environmentalist discourse?
- In what ways are the kinds of dualisms or oppositions active within the ideas of the fin de siècle, such as spiritualism/materialism and evolution/reversion, embedded within or resisted by contemporary environmental movements?
- How have Buddhism and spiritual movements been influenced by changing ecological conditions and understandings of the planet? By such phenomena as biodiversity loss, pollution, and the climate crisis?
- Could a critical return to esoteric source materials from the fin de siècle provide fresh understandings or insights into the current ecological crises?

If you are interested in contributing to this conference, please send your abstract (max. 250 words) and author details to ccbs@hum.ku.dk by February 1, 2023.

For more information visit <https://ccrs.ku.dk/research/centres/centre-for-contemporary-buddhist-studies/calendar/call-for-papers-a-dynamic-legacy/>.

Call for Organizing ESSWE10 2025

The ESSWE Board welcomes applications for organizing the Tenth Biennial International ESSWE Conference, to be held in 2025. The application should include a description of the host institution, a preliminary budget, a suggested theme for the conference, and CV of the applicant/s. The application should be sent to the ESSWE Secretary Henrik Bogdan (henrik.bogdan@lir.gu.se) no later than June 1, 2023.

Henrik Bogdan
Secretary of the ESSWE



Call for Papers: From the Vice Royalty to the Twentieth Century

The Institute of Philological Research, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico, September 19-21, 2023

The Institute of Philological Research of the UNAM within the framework of the Project “Esotericism in modern Mexico (1850-1950): subjects, currents,

cultural field” invites interested parties to submit paper proposals for the conference “From the Vice Royalty to the 20th Century,” the first congress in Mexico of studies on Western esotericism in Latin America.

The conference will take place from September 19-21, 2023 at the facilities of the Philological Research Institute (UNAM) in Mexico City and will be in hybrid mode.

The project “Esotericism in modern Mexico (1850-1950)” seeks to publicize the field of studies on Western esotericism to the academic milieu, developed up to now in Europe and the United States, and in the process of consolidation in Latin America. Due to its multidisciplinary scope, esoteric studies are relevant to enrich our analysis and understanding of the development of Latin American culture.

The objective of this congress is to create a space for dialogue for researchers and teachers interested in exploring the theoretical, methodological and topics specific to this field.

Interested parties may submit their proposal until February 15 2023, and an answer will be given a month later. The language of the congress will be Spanish.

Requested information

- Full name and academic degree
- Institutional affiliation
- Email and phone
- Curriculum (200 words)
- Title of the paper
- Summary of the paper (300 words maximum)
- Main theme
- Modality of participation: virtual or face-to-face

For more information (in Spanish) visit <https://www.amsterdamhermetica.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/convocatoriacongresoesoterismo.pdf>