



Newsletter 1 – July 2006

The *ESSWE Newsletter* is published twice a year to provide information on developments in the study of Western esotericism in general and on the activities of the Society in particular. For regularly updated news, conferences, publications, links, and other useful resources see the ESSWE homepage at www.esswe.org.

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The Story of ESSWE

By WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF, President of ESSWE

The foundation in 2005 of the *European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism* must be seen as part of a development in academic research that has its origins in the decades after the Second World War, and has been gathering momentum since the early 1990s. Since the 1960s, due to the works of Frances A. Yates and other members of the Warburg school, the study of what was referred to as the “Hermetic Tradition” of the Renaissance had become part of the agenda of academic research; and quite independently, in 1965 the first chair for the study of Western esotericism was founded at the *École Pratiques des Hautes Études* (Sorbonne) in Paris. But in spite of these promising beginnings, for several decades the development of research in this domain depended on the dedication of scholars working in relative isolation, without the support of academic organisations or university positions. Attempts at gaining recognition for the study of Western esotericism as a field of research were often frustrated by the fact that scholars were unable to reach agreement about basic issues of methodology. In particular, the incompatibility between “religionist” and “traditionalist” approaches, on the one hand, and historical/empirical perspectives, on the other, haunted the sessions on Western esotericism organized since 1980 in the context of the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), and finally led to an internal split (in 1988) followed by a discontinuation of the sessions in 1990 (it must be noted here that thanks to the efforts of James Santucci, various sessions related to Western esotericism, though under another name, were organised in the period between 1990 and the acceptance in 2005 of Western esotericism as a research group with protected status).

Things began to change in the early 1990s, with a series of new attempts at organizing the study of Western esotericism, but now deliberately on historical/empirical foundations. A landmark event in that respect was the organization of a series of sessions on Western esotericism at the 17th international congress of the International Association for the History of

Religion (IAHR), Mexico City 1995, followed by large and successful programs in the same field at the 18th and 19th congress (Durban 2000, Tokyo 2005). Whereas the division between religionist/perennialist and historical/empirical approaches still played a role in 1995, it had become a non-issue in 2000 and 2005; and along with this development, the academic legitimacy of Western esotericism as a field of research—still quite controversial in the early 1990s—has now become uncontroversial as well. This change of climate is also reflected in the fact that, after decades of ultimately unsuccessful attempts, the AAR finally accepted Western esotericism as a “group” with protected status in 2005 (see Cathy Gutierrez’ contribution to this newsletter).

The foundation of a second academic chair, at the University of Amsterdam in 1999, was another landmark. Along with the chair, two positions of Assistant Professor were created, and this made it possible to provide the first full-scale academic curriculum in the study of Western esotericism (now consisting of four courses on the Bachelor level, and a full programme in English on the Master level, see www.amsterdamhermetica.com). Very recently a third chair was founded at the University of Exeter, which likewise offers a Master programme, described in more detail further on in this newsletter. There is good reason for optimism that this trend will continue with the foundation of more chairs in the years to come.

Seemingly trivial, but actually quite important, is the fact that as a result of these developments, the very term “Western esotericism” has begun to shed its questionable associations and become accepted as a normal part of academic terminology. The importance of this development lies in the fact that while earlier generations of scholars had to choose between various problematic terminologies (such as “hermeticism”, “the occult”, or even “mysticism”), and notwithstanding an ongoing debate about questions of definition and demarcation, there now exists a widely accepted umbrella term that covers the entire field and thus provides scholars with a legitimate collec-

tive identity. In line with that development, academic journals explicitly devoted to the study of Western esotericism have begun to be published in recent years: the electronic journal *Esoterica* (www.esoteric.msu.edu) began in 1999, and it was followed in 2001 by *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* (published by Brill Academic Publishers).

This brings us, finally, to the creation of ESSWE. Out of the journal *Esoterica* emerged the *Association for the Study of Esotericism* (ASE) that has been organizing successful bi-annual conferences in the United States since 2002. European scholars began to feel the need for a complementary organization focused more on the European context. The first steps towards the creation of a new *European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism* were taken during a three-day meeting in January 2005, hosted by Mrs. Rosalie Basten in her residence in Aups (Southern France). The creation of the chair at the University of Amsterdam in 1999 had been made possible by a financial donation of Mrs. Basten, who strongly agreed with the scholars present at this meeting that the creation of a European organization was a natural next step in the development of the study of Western esotericism as an academic field of research. A few months after this meeting, on 21 April 2005, the ESSWE was officially incorporated under Dutch law. The rest of the year was devoted to creating a professional interactive website, which was put online early in 2006; and from that moment on, it became possible to officially register as a member.

The ESSWE wants to be representative, as much as possible, of the wide spectrum of disciplines and approaches that have come to characterize the field since the 1990s. The present Board reflects that ambition: it includes the pioneer in the study of Western esotericism and holder of the first chair, Antoine Faivre, and his present successor at the same chair, Jean-Pierre Brach; the three members of the Amsterdam centre, Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Kocku von Stuckrad, and Marco Pasi; the holder of the Exeter chair, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke; and three noted scholars working in other disciplines, but known for their contributions to Western esotericism, Andreas Kilcher, Mark Sedgwick, and Michael Stausberg. And

last but not least, the board is fortunate to profit from the relevant professional backgrounds of Rosalie Basten and Henny Homan in their respective functions of Treasurer and Secretary. The Board members' nationalities and present places of residence likewise reflect the ESSWE's ambition of representing the variety of European scholars of Western esotericism: they come from England, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, and are presently working in those countries as well as in Egypt and Norway. And the interdisciplinary nature of the study of Western esotericism is reflected in the constitution of the Board as well: the members have backgrounds in German studies, history, philosophy, the study of literature, and the study of religions. For the future, it is hoped that the national and disciplinary spectrum can be further enriched, notably with scholars from Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and countries like Spain and Portugal, and with disciplines such as art history, musicology, and the social sciences.

With the existence of the ASE and the ESSWE as complementary organizations, there now exists a solid foundation for productive networking, exchange of perspectives and ideas, and the development of new initiatives of all kinds. In this context, the presence of a recognized organization like the ESSWE will hopefully make it easier for scholars or groups of scholars to secure financing for relevant research projects from national and international funding organizations, notably in the context of the European Union. Members who wish to explore such possibilities are invited to contact the ESSWE.

It should be remembered that membership of both the ASE and the ESSWE is open to scholars from all parts of the world—not just to Americans or Europeans respectively—and hence the ESSWE should also develop into a platform that makes it easier for European scholars to become familiar with what is going on in other parts of the world. For example, it is well known that Western esoteric currents and ideas have migrated to other parts of the world—for example French spiritualism to Brazil, Theosophy to India and Sri Lanka, and so on—, but for linguistic and other reasons, an in-depth study of the result-

ing processes of acculturation requires intensive contact and collaboration between scholars in various parts of the world. In this respect, too, the ESSWE hopes to be able to play a significant role.

In closing: the study of Western esotericism is now well on its way, and the possibilities for future development are exciting and

potentially endless. But as for the role of the ESSWE in that development: in the end, our organization can only be what its members make of it. We hope that all of you will feel committed to taking an active role in coming up with ideas and initiatives, and in sharing their visions with the other members.

Membership News

By HENNY HOMAN, ESSWE Secretary

ESSWE has been “on the air” for five months now. During this period 88 people from 20 different countries have joined the Society. Here are a few statistics:

Members by country:

22	The Netherlands
15	United Kingdom
10	USA
8	France
6	Germany
3	Australia
3	Austria
3	Canada
3	Denmark
3	Spain
2	Belgium
2	Portugal
8	Argentina, Egypt, Finland, French Guyana, Italy, Monaco, Norway, Russia (1 each)

Members by continent:

Africa	1
Asia	1
Australia	3
Europe	68
North America	13
Latin America	2

Gender: 53 male and 35 female members

Membership status: 58 full members,
27 student members, including 7 PhD candidates,
3 associate members

Website traffic on www.esswe.org:

	March	April	May	June
Daily hits	3,113	1,500	1,091	1,062
Monthly hits	96,510	45,010	33,833	31,881
Total visits	1,639 from 39 countries	1,069 from 30 countries	966 from 30 countries	1,226 from 33 countries

Other countries where visitors came from: Brazil, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Seychelles, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey, and Uruguay.

Visions of the Field

What do members think about the future of the study of Western esotericism? What are their ideas about topics, issues, and objectives that ESSWE should address and foster? We invited two board members and a student member of ESSWE to share their ideas.

Esotericism and Religious Minorities in Europe

By MARK SEDGWICK, American University in Cairo, Egypt
Board Member of ESSWE

At first sight, esotericism has little to do with what is probably the hottest topic in European religion today: Muslim minorities. In fact, the opposite is the case. One of the best books on al-Qaeda is Marc Sageman's *Understanding Terror Networks*, in which Sageman looks at how people (and especially people in Europe) "join the jihad". Predictably, Sageman draws on network theory; less predictably, he draws on recent scholarship on new religious movements, and incidentally shows what some of us have always suspected: that in many ways a terrorist cell may be little different from a religious sect.

Jihad is one future route for European Muslims to take, but one hopes that it will not be the most frequent route. The obvious major route, very visible at present, is various forms of Islamism and neo-Salafism that have little or nothing to do with European esotericism. Another route, less visible at the moment but even so much discussed, is the development of a distinctively European (and "moderate") Islam. Here again, there is an intersection with our field. One thing that became increasingly clear during a workshop on Islam in Europe between the two world wars that I attended at

the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales* in Paris in 2004 was the extent to which the history of interwar Islam, at least in Britain and France, connected with the recent history of European esotericism. This was especially true of Sufi Islam, and it remains true of Sufi Islam today. The connection between Guénonian Traditionalist Sufis and Western esotericism is clear. Beyond this, educated Muslims in Europe who are looking for alternatives to the dominant Islamist paradigms often turn not only to the writings of these Traditionalists, but also to many of the other writings that are part of the European spiritual search—European Muslims are, after all, Europeans. When this happens, apparently non-denominational esoteric writings will generally be more appealing than overtly Christian ones. At present, very little is known about this phenomenon, as research into contemporary Islam in Europe is often done by people lacking the necessary backgrounds. But it is clearly happening.

One rich area for future research, then, is the way in which European Islam and Europe's own alternative religious history are coming together. There is much scope for in-

vestigation of the historical aspects of this phenomenon, and also simply for watching

what is happening around us, right now.

Western Esotericism and European Culture

By KOCKU VON STUCKRAD, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Board Member of ESSWE

Many scholars have pointed out that the concepts “Western” and “Europe” are either too vague to be applied meaningfully or too heavily charged with cultural, religious, and political assumptions to be used uncritically. To be sure, the narrative of Europe as carrying a “Christian” or “democratic” set of values and traditions is so powerful that it informs contemporary political debates to a large extent—from the quarrel over a European constitution to the question whether Turkey as a Muslim state can join the European Union. We are confronted here with identities that are constructed and rhetorically presented on the basis of assumptions pertaining to the characteristics of European culture.

I have the impression that the study of Western esotericism is closely linked with these contested European identities. Consequently, we should actively collaborate with scholars from various disciplines who carry out research into the dynamics of European identity formation. On the field of religious studies, several attempts have recently been made to establish a network of scholars that discusses the characteristics of European his-

tory of religion in conferences and joint ventures. Particularly fruitful are approaches that take seriously the pluralistic nature of European culture. What we witness in Europe I would describe as a two-fold pluralism: a pluralism of religious traditions and options on the one hand, and a pluralism of forms of knowledge and societal systems on the other (including science, philosophy, art, law, philology, economy, politics, etc.). Between these religious options and societal systems various forms of interdependence and interference, often in a critical or polemical manner, have shaped the modern European cultural landscape.

From this perspective that represents an analytical development “from singularization to pluralization” many currents studied under the term “esotericism” form an integral part of European discourse. It is our challenge to integrate our research into a broader context of cultural studies that addresses the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, as well as competing claims of knowledge, which lie at the bottom of European history of religion.

The Study of Esotericism in a Climate of Suspicion

By SARA MØLDRUP THEJLS, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands/University of Copenhagen, Denmark

MA student and Student Member of ESSWE

As a student of Western esotericism one is often met with wonder, curiosity, and suspicion more than is the case with most other fields of religious studies. For some reason it is hard for people outside our field to imagine that students and scholars of esotericism are not necessarily affiliated with their object of study—that we are not necessarily esotericists

ourselves. This is a problem rarely met in more conventional areas of study. A scholar of Islam is not naturally considered to be a Muslim him/herself. Another variety of this suspicious attitude is that of doubting the relevance of esotericism as worth any attention at all; that esoteric discourses are not ‘proper religion’

and that those who do study it probably just have read too much Dan Brown.

This is not a strange situation for a relatively new academic field, and there are some advantages in it. First of all, the constant need for self-legitimation results in a fruitful reflection of what the notion of Western esotericism implies, and thus helps us in demarcating the field; and second, it requires an awareness of methodology to study a subject still not grounded in a fixed epistemological framework.

Hopefully, the establishment of ESSWE will help enhancing the academic credibility of the study of Western esotericism and draw attention to the fact that esotericism is not only a marginal phenomenon, but lies deep within Western culture. A society like this is not only reinforcing the outward appearance of the academic study of esotericism but is also providing a useful space for communication and exchange of knowledge and ideas for the members of the society.

PhD Projects of ESSWE Members

The study of Western esotericism is a thriving field of academic research. We are glad that many undergraduate and graduate students have joined the Society and are contributing with their creativity and new insights to the development of the field. Here is a selection of PhD projects, reflecting the wide spectrum of topics, approaches, and disciplines involved in the study of Western esotericism. If you want to get into contact with these graduate students, please consult the ESSWE homepage or contact the secretary at secretary@esswe.org.

KATHARINA R. BRANDT, Religious Studies Department, Groningen University, The Netherlands

The Position of Marie Steiner-von Sivers within the Anthroposophical Society

This research project focuses on Marie Steiner-von Sivers (1867–1948), who was the partner and second wife of Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). Educated as an actress and artistic reciter, Marie von Sivers met Rudolf Steiner amongst the members of the Theosophical Society in 1900. Soon she decided to work together with the scholar. Later in her life she pointed out that the reason for this was Steiner's progressive attitude towards sexual politics. She had hoped to enter an equal professional relationship with a man in a leading position. Rudolf Steiner himself took an active interest in the Women's Liberation Movement at the turn of the century. For instance, he intensely corresponded with Rosa Mayreder, the most prominent figure of the Women's Liberation Movement in Austria. When he became the general secretary of the German Section of the Theosophical Society, he entered an environ-

ment in which not only the leadership was female, but crucial questions of the Women's Liberation Movement and a critical way of thinking about the relationship between the sexes were present.

The project offers a new approach to Anthroposophy. Marie Steiner-von Sivers serves as a point of connection with other contemporary discourses. On the one hand, her biography constitutes an example of an emancipated woman. On the other hand, she contributed to the development of an occult movement. This might be a chance to reintegrate the Anthroposophical Movement into a broader context beyond the boundaries of exclusive occult groups.

RICARDO CAMPO PÉREZ, Facultad de Filosofía Universidad de La Laguna (Tenerife, Islas Canarias, Spain)

The New Age, the "Alternative" Culture, and Its Philosophical Influences (provisional title)

My PhD thesis addresses the broad socio-cultural phenomenon of New Age, its philoso-

phical antecedents, UFO apocalypticism, and the cultural and epistemological conflict between science and pseudoscience. It is a panoramic study of these topics and my intention is to present a general overview rather than a detailed and profound study of every topic (which would be an impossible task due to the complexity and breadth of the fields).

The New Age movement in its main features (as conceptualized and discussed in scholarly literature) is the core of the first chapter; the apocalyptic and messianic implications of New Age and the UFO cults are the core of the second, along with an introduction to UFO myth from a sceptical or critical point of view: origins, development, socio-psychological influences, etc.; the philosophical implications and influences from antiquity to postmodernism (Gnosticism, Renaissance philosophy, Theosophy, Occultism and counterculture) are the topics of the third chapter; and the fourth will encompass a general perspective of the science-pseudoscience cultural conflict. My intention is to explore two main topics: cognitive psychology/neuroscience versus transpersonal and holistic psychology; and alternative and deep ecology (Gaia) versus orthodox theories in ecology: the re-enchantment of the world.

ROBERT COLLIS, The University of Turku, Turku, Finland

The Petrine Instauration: Religion, Magic and Science in Peter the Great's Russia

My thesis attempts to radically revise the conventional perception of Peter the Great and his Court. I argue that strong religious beliefs and esoteric interest were an essential driving force in the campaign to reform Russian society. In this sense, it is important to realise that whilst Peter the Great drew inspiration from the West, this did not necessarily constitute a simple embrace of rationalism and secularism. Indeed, as a number of eminent scholars have demonstrated in the past thirty years, the West itself at the turn of the eighteenth century was still awash with millenarianism and many leading scientific figures still embraced a distinctly esoteric worldview.

In order to demonstrate the extent to which religion and esotericism figured strongly at the Petrine Court my thesis will be divided into three parts. The first part will focus on studying the religious, scientific and esoteric interests of two secular figures—Jacob Bruce (1669–1735) and Robert Erskine (1677–1718)—who were both of Scottish descent, both Jacobites, and both occupied key positions at the Petrine Court. The second part of my thesis will concentrate on the two principal ecclesiastic figures of the Petrine era—Feofan Prokopovich (1681–1736) and Stefan Iavorskii (1658–1722). The final part will examine the religious and esoteric worldview of Peter the Great. I will demonstrate the ways in which he utilised religious symbolism and encouraged esoteric pursuits. I will also reveal the religious and esoteric beliefs underpinning the foundation of the St. Petersburg *Kunstkamera*.

HELEN FARLEY, School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics, University of Queensland Brisbane, Australia

The Evolution of Tarot Symbolism

This thesis will trace the changes in tarot symbolism from the deck's appearance in the courts of northern Italy in the fifteenth century until the present day. I will demonstrate that such changes reflected the differing cultural perceptions inherent in the wide geographic and temporal distribution of the deck, heterogeneous patterns of use and the shift in the primary purpose of tarot from that of a card game to an esoteric document and fortune-telling device in the late eighteenth century. Further, I will examine whether the symbolism was interpreted in any sense by those who used the deck in its initial incarnation, and compare and contrast this with the situation some 350 years later. I hope to demonstrate that tarot symbolism reflected many streams in Renaissance thought.

It will become apparent that it is more accurate to talk of 'histories of tarot' rather than of a single 'history', which inaccurately implies a linear and continuous development of the deck. Such a study is necessarily multidisciplinary, drawing on art history, cultural history, the history of esotericism, game and

playing card history, psychological studies, anthropology, and literary interpretation. As tarot is viewed in the twenty-first century as an esoteric device, the main contribution of this thesis will be to the academic study of the history of esotericism.

JOHANN HASLER, International Centre for Music Studies, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne (UK)

Towards a Hermetic Music: A Proposal for Systems of Composition Based on the Principles of the Hermetic Tradition, with Musical Demonstrations

The relationship between Hermeticism and the theory and compositional practice of Western art music has been extensively researched by Joscelyn Godwin, Gary Tomlinson, Penelope Gouk and others. In the first part of my thesis I will comment on this research and bring its results together, presenting it through a set of charts and tables which reviews the proposed inclusion of musical parameters such as pitch, rhythm, instrumental colour, metre and tempo in the Hermetic correspondence theory.

There are, though, several inconsistencies, misunderstandings and omissions in the work of historical figures working from Hermeticism into music theory and vice-versa. The second part of my thesis seeks to comment on these, and proposes their clarification whenever possible and desirable, grounded on the perspective of Hermeticism as a living tradition which is currently worked and researched on by practicing Hermeticists such as alchemists, cabalists and magicians. Based on current consensus generally accepted by this living form of contemporary Hermeticism, I propose the filling-in and updating of these lacunae, and put forward musical proposals for the completion of the project of including musical parameters in the Hermetic doctrine of correspondences.

The third part of my thesis is a commented portfolio of original musical compositions in which I have applied the ideas and proposals of some authors which I have reviewed in part I, as well as my own proposals as expressed in part II. This amounts to the practical demonstration of the application of

the proposed musical correspondences and Hermetic principles to sounding pieces of music, and constitutes my contribution to this issue form the artistic and intellectual practice of a composer/theorist.

HANNEKE MINKJAN, Free University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Religious Producers on the Neo-Pagan Market: An Anthropological Research of Individual Religiosity in the Netherlands

This research project—from September 2005 to August 2010—is part of the research programme ‘Between Secularisation and Sacralisation’ of the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam.

The project’s aim is to study the development of neo-pagan phenomena in the Netherlands. The guiding research question is: “What are the motivations of Dutch neo-pagans for practicing neo-paganism?” Other issues that will be studied in relation to this research question are the trends that exist in Dutch neo-paganism, in what sense neo-pagans experience a process of religious ‘conversion,’ questions of identity, and the influence of neo-pagan belief on the daily life of the practitioners.

With regard to the study of conversion and the construction of identity, the project addresses questions of authenticity, especially concerning ‘the Dutch roots’ of neo-pagans, as well as the role of experience. The concept of ‘personal mythology’ (Feinstein and Krippner; Mc Adams) will be used as a tool for the study of identity. Finally, the analysis looks at influences of the media and popular culture on Wicca and branches of neo-paganism.

ROELIE VAN KREIJL, Subdepartment “History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents”, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Early Homeopathy and the Academic Medical Establishment in Germany: A Historical and Social-Scientific Analysis

This research engages the debate in the German-speaking world between academic medicine and homeopathy during the first decades of the latter's existence (1800–1840). That debate has an intriguing context. First, in this period the so-called “exact” natural sciences were polemically distancing themselves from *Naturphilosophie*, from which they had previously been inseparable. Second, university-based medicine found itself in a severe identity crisis. Large parts of academic medicine, lacking fixed foundations or principles, professional organisation, and unity, felt extremely threatened by homeopathy: not only because it was spreading rapidly, but also because it was openly confronting the academic medical tradition, attacking it as unscientific, inefficacious, and as serving only its own interests. In response, the proponents of university-based medicine launched a campaign against homeopathy, defending their income and prestige, and reversing the claim of the homeopaths: academic medicine is true science and trustworthy, whereas the homeopaths are wrong and therefore dangerous. This polemic was won by the academics; homeopathy never made it into the German universities.

The question that this research tries to answer is, how can this outcome be explained? What was really going on in this battle? The goal is to bring to light the dynamics—both academic and social—that formed this debate by means of a discourse analysis, focussing on the rhetorical strategies employed in the construction and legitimization of bodies of knowledge, and on social and discursive processes as a driving force in scientific debate.

OSVALD VASICEK, Subdepartment “History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents”, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands
The Beginnings of Christian Kabbalah in Renaissance Germany: Johannes Reuchlin's Synthesis of Cusanian Neoplatonism and Jewish Kabbalah

Generally engaging the genesis of Christian Kabbalah in Renaissance Germany, this project is a historical study of the theological and philosophical writings of Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522), whose work is in more than one regard a crossroads of different discourses—particularly Jewish, Christian, and neoplatonic. In historical literature, Reuchlin is chiefly known for the role he played in the so called ‘battle of the books’ or the ‘Reuchlin affair’. Of no less importance, but as yet less researched, is his interest in the Jewish kabbalistic tradition and his study thereof. Based on his studies, he formulated a personal theology or philosophy in which he combined Jewish and Christian ideas. A crucial role in his thought played the neoplatonic philosophy of Nicolas of Cusa (1401–1464). The core of this PhD-research is therefore Reuchlin's synthesis of the Cusanian neoplatonic philosophy and elements from the Jewish mystical tradition, particularly the Kabbalah.

Crucial for this study is the genesis of the neoplatonic tradition in Germany (particularly the Christian neoplatonic tradition which shaped the thought of Cusanus, Eckhart, or Berthold of Moosburg). A second important issue is the relation between the Sephardic and Ashkenazi traditions within the Jewish literature used by Reuchlin. Because the research focuses mainly on the German lands, the German Jewish mystical tradition (for example the Ashkenazi Hasidim) will be of particular relevance.

Focus on Education: MA in Western Esotericism at Exeter University

By NICHOLAS GOODRICK-CLARKE, Exeter University, UK

Board Member of ESSWE

In October 2005 the University of Exeter admitted its first intake of students for the newly-launched MA in Western Esotericism. This Master's programme is presently unique as it is offered on a part-time, distance-learning basis over two years to students who may reside anywhere while pursuing the course. The programme was designed by Dr Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, who was appointed Professor of Western Esotericism and Director of the Exeter Centre for the Study of Esotericism (EXESES0) in August 2005.

Despite the short lead period to publicise the programme, there was a strong field of applications and eight students have now completed their first year after taking three modules worth a total of 75 credits. A further six students have enrolled as research students in EXESES0 to pursue the MPhil and PhD degrees by dissertation. There has been increased demand for the next academic year. The MA students are all professionally active and range from those in their twenties to others more mature in years. While some are preparing for a career (change) in academe, publishing, arts, or media in the field of esotericism, most have a long-standing interest in esoteric subjects and now wish to benefit from more formal study and writing on the subject with professional guidance.

Part-Time, Distance Learning



How does part-time, distance learning work? Like other UK Master's programmes, the MA in Western Esotericism involves the accumulation of 180 credits, made up by a selection of modules variously worth 45, 30, and 15 credits, and a dissertation worth 60 credits. However, this course is delivered through 'flexible and distributed' learning, without requiring regular attendance in person at seminars. The students receive their module material by post, includ-

ing study guides with bibliographies and associated readings. Each module study guide with bibliographies has been specially written by the course lecturer, offering an impressive 35,000 to 50,000-word series of 'lectures' to guide students through the subject of each module. An associated package of selected readings further supplements this material.

Students are able to make use of the University's library loan system, on-line electronic database and periodicals, while availing themselves of other libraries near their place of residence. The University Library maintains its principal collections in the main library buildings on the Streatham and St Luke's campuses in Exeter, together with a number of specialist collections in certain Schools. The total Library collection comprises over a million volumes and 3,000 current periodical subscriptions. The Library has extensive holdings of works relevant to Western esotericism, such as Christian and Islamic theology (especially the mystical traditions in each) and the history of magic, science, and witchcraft. Non-residential students will be able to access many of these resources electronically, for example the extensive online collections of primary sources pre-1800 contained in EEBO and ECCO and numerous online journals. Through inter-university library schemes students may have access to research libraries and archives outside Exeter.

The taught modules in the MA programme on offer to date comprise a classic grounding in the major historical topics of Western esotericism: (1) The Western Esoteric

Traditions: Historical Survey and Research Methods; (2) Alexandrian Hermetism, Neo-Platonism, and Astrology; (3) The Hermetic Art of Alchemy; (4) Renaissance Kabbalah and Its Influence; (5) Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry; (6) Theosophy and the Globalisation of Esotericism. Full details of each module syllabus can be found on the EXESES0 webpage detailing the full programme specification for the MA programme. One only has to click on www.exeter.ac.uk/huss/postgrad/ma/esotericism.htm for access to general information on the programme. Next click on the phrase [programme specification for the MA in Western Esotericism](#) in the open text. Once the programme specification page appears, one may click on the individual module code numbers, and the module descriptor pops up with a full syllabus for that module.

Besides writing seven essays and a bibliographic diary for the taught modules over the two years, students research and complete a 15-20,000-word dissertation on an agreed subject of their choice during their second year of study. The dissertation is supported by regular formal supervision contact, whether face-to-face or via telephone and email.

EXESES0 Study Conferences

A major highlight of the Master's programme is the option of attendance at the three intensive EXESES0 Study Conferences held in the pleasant campus surroundings of Exeter University each October, January, and April. These Study Conferences run from Saturday morning to Sunday afternoon and involve a busy schedule of lectures, seminars, library tours, film presentation, and tutorials. The course lecturers offer lectures and presentations in support of their modules, there is always avid discussion, and students and staff have ample opportunity to mix, make friends, exchange ideas, information and books over coffee breaks and meals. Students arrange their accommodation in convenient bed and breakfasts and hotels near the campus.

Owing to the distance involved for many students, the Study Conferences are neither mandatory nor involve any assessment, but those who can attend have the bene-

fit of seventy-five hours of tuition. All three Conferences held in the last academic year were well-attended and it was evident that students greatly enjoyed their stimulating programmes and the chance to meet each other and faculty.

"I learnt a great deal from each and every one of the excellent lectures. The ample opportunities for conversation with both lecturers and like-minded students were also particularly enjoyable and useful. In terms of the content and delivery of the lectures, as well as the overall organisation of the conference, the weekend could not be faulted. While absolutely delighted to be part of the MPhil (and hopefully PhD) course, after having seen the MA course outline along with the extensive and comprehensive handouts I felt a strong desire to taking that course as well! I do hope the MPhil students will be able to attend future sessions" (Tony Fuller, MPhil student).

"Judging by the first EXESES0 Study Conference, this is certain to be an excellent program combining not only the expertise of the best academics in the field, but knowledgeable participation by a variety of scholars with vast insight into a body of lore which has utmost significance to the history and continuity of western culture I have no doubt that this program will be the best experience of my academic career" (George Sieg, first year student).

Faculty Members

Members of the faculty team have a strong background in the subject of their modules. Prof. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke has authored a trilogy of studies on the millenarian-esoteric connection in radical political movements and has written studies on Paracelsus, John Dee, Emanuel Swedenborg, and Helena Blavatsky. He is general editor of the *Western Esoteric Masters* book series (North Atlantic Books). Dr Angela Voss is Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Kent, Canterbury. Her research interests centre on Renaissance music, magic, and astrology; the function of the symbolic imagination in spiritual perception; musical performance practice and the visual arts as vehicles for spiritual knowledge. Her publications have centred on the astrological music therapy of Marsilio Ficino and the nature of symbolism. Clare Goodrick-Clarke is interested in the history, symbolism, and practice of

alchemy, especially in Paracelsian medical alchemy, having studied practical alchemy and spagyrics with Professor Manfred M. Junius (University of Benares). Her publications include studies of G.R.S. Mead, Samuel Hahnemann, and Jan Amos Comenius. Dr Peter Forshaw is a British Academy research fellow who teaches courses on “Renaissance Philosophies” and “Magic, Science, and Religion” at Birkbeck College, University of London. His research interests include the typology of alchemical and magical practice, Paracelsian philosophy, and the interweaving of Hermetic, Neo-Platonic, and kabbalistic strands in the works of influential figures like Ficino, Pico, Reuchlin, Agrippa, and Dee. He has recently published a major study of Heinrich Khunrath. Dr Christopher McIntosh’s research interests and numerous publications include Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry, the modern occult revival in France, the history of magic, esoteric currents in Central and Eastern Europe, esoteric fiction, and the interface between spirituality and na-

ture. Tobias Churton has made several television programmes including the award-winning *Gnostics* series accompanied by the book *The Gnostics* (1987) and further films on Christian doctrine, mysticism, Rosicrucianism, and Freemasonry, including *A Mighty Good Man* (2002), a documentary on Elias Ashmole. He was also founder-editor of the research journal *Freemasonry Today*. His current research interests include Hermetic philosophy and Freemasonry.

Besides offering guidance to their own authored modules, individual faculty members can offer supervision on a wide variety of dissertation topics, and also encourage lines of enquiry for those students wishing to proceed to the MPhil and PhD research degrees. Four EXESES faculty are contributing to the attached New York Open Center Conference “An Esoteric Quest in Central Europe: From Renaissance Bohemia to Goethe’s Weimar” (for details see www.lumen.org/esoteric5.pdf).

Recent Publications in the Field of Western Esotericism

By MARCO PASI, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Book Review editor of *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* and Board Member of ESSWE

Xavier Accart, *Guénon ou le renversement des clartés : Influence d’un métaphysicien sur la vie littéraire et intellectuelle française (1920–1970)*, Paris – Milano: Edidit – Archè, 2005, 1222 p. ISBN: 2-912770-03-3.

Originally a PhD dissertation at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris). A study of the influence of the traditionalist author René Guénon on French literary circles before and after the Second World War.

Charles Burnett, Jill Kraye, and W.F. Ryan (eds.), *Magic and the Classical Tradition*, London – Turin: The Warburg Institute – Nino Aragno Editore, 2006, viii + 229 p. ISBN: 0-85481-131-1.

A collection of essays on the history of magic, ranging from late antiquity to the beginnings of the Renaissance. Originally presented at a conference held at the Warburg Institute in May 2000.

Gian Mario Cazzaniga (ed.), *Storia d’Italia: Annali 21: La Massoneria*, Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2006, xxxii + 849 p. ISBN: 88-06-17031-7.

The most important and comprehensive publication on the history of Italian freemasonry for many years. Articles on different aspects of this history, not all necessarily related to esotericism, have been contributed by the most prominent specialists in the field.

Alexandre de Dánann, *Un Rose-Croix méconnu entre le XVIIe et le XVIIIe siècles: Federico Gualdi ou Auguste Melech Hultazob Prince d’Achem*, Milano: Archè, 2006, 704 p. ISBN: 88-7252-228-5.

A documentary study on a neglected alchemist and Rosicrucian, Francesco Gualdi, who lived between the end of the 17th and the first half of the 18th century. According to the author, he was one of the chiefs of the Golden and Rosy Cross and an important source of inspiration for Cagliostro.

Nicole Edelman, *Histoire de la voyance et du paranormal: Du XVIII^e siècle à nos jours*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2006, 286 p. ISBN: 2-02-055853-X.

An historical essay on the ways in which categories such as “paranormal” and “supernatural” have taken shape in modern Western culture, and their relation with movements such as spiritualism and Blavatskyan theosophy.

Raffaella Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Masonic Circle of N. I. Novikov*, Berlin: Springer, 2005, xiii + 309 p. ISBN: 1402034865.

An historical examination of early Russian Freemasonry, and of its specific “Rosicrucian”, i.e. spiritual and utopian, proclivities. The negative political and religious reactions, on the part of the imperial establishment, to the esoteric dimension of Novikov’s activities, are also studied in detail.

Joscelyn Godwin, *The Real Rule of Four: The Unauthorized Guide to The New York Times #1 Bestseller*, New York: Disinformation, 2005, 208 p. ISBN 1-932857-08-7 (paperback).

Aimed at (and reaching) a general readership, this guide to the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* is a scholarly contribution to the *Da Vinci Code* phenomenon, which includes Caldwell and Thomason’s fictional *Rule of Four*. Godwin discusses the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, its origins, and its contents.

Kenneth Granholm, *Embracing the Dark: The Magic Order of the Dragon Rouge—Its Practice in Dark Magic and Meaning Making*, Åbo: Åbo Akademi Förlag, 2005, xv + 347 p. ISBN: 951-765-251-8.

Originally a PhD dissertation presented at the Åbo Akademi University, this is a study of a contemporary Swedish magical group, the Dragon Rouge. The book includes a lengthy methodological discussion.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Ruud M. Bouthoorn, *Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447–1500): The Hermetic Writings and Related Documents*, Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005, xi + 356 p. ISBN: 0-86698-324-4.

A study of Lodovico Lazzarelli, the Italian Hermetist of the late 15th century, contemporary of Marsilio Ficino. The book also contains a complete edition and English translation of his Hermetic writings.

David Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France*, Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005, viii + 267 p. ISBN: 0-87580-344-X.

A study of Martinism, a French occultist movement and offshoot of Freemasonry that flourished from the late eighteenth century to the dawn of the twentieth century. The author focuses particularly on the social and political aspects of this movement.

Jean-Pierre Laurant, *René Guénon: Les enjeux d’une lecture*, Paris: Editions Dervy, 2006, 400 p. ISBN: 2-84454-423-1.

More than thirty years after his first book on Guénon, the most prominent specialist on the French traditionalist thinker delivers a new overview of his personal and intellectual trajectory.

Pierre Mollier, *La Chevalerie Maçonnique: Franc-maçonnerie, imaginaire chevaleresque et légende templière au siècle des Lumières*, Paris: Editions Dervy, 2005, 229 p. ISBN: 2-84454-398-7.

A historical study on the origins and early development of masonic “side degrees” inspired by chivalric traditions.

Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin and Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology*, Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005, viii + 290 p. ISBN: 3-11-01-8545-8.

Essays on the history of astrology, with a focus of the practices and the conceptualisation of the horoscopes; part of the papers were presented at a conference “Horoscopes and History” held at the University of Amsterdam in July 2004.

Jean-Michel Sallmann (ed.), *Dictionnaire historique de la magie & des sciences occultes*, Paris: La Pochothèque - Le Livre de Poche, 2006, 832 p. ISBN: 2-253-13115-6.

A new dictionary, following the recent publication of the Brill *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (2005), which aims at offering information to a wide audience on a wealth of disparate topics related to the undefined categories of “magic” and the “occult sciences”.

Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, translated and with a foreword by Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, London: Equinox Publishing, 2005, 167 p. ISBN: 1-845-53033-0 (paperback); 1-845-53034-9 (hardback).

A new introduction to the study of Western esotericism, including a methodological and theoretical discussion, and an historical overview of the most important currents and authors.

Pierre-André Taguieff, *La Foire aux “Illuminés”: Esotérisme, théorie du complot, extrémisme*, [Paris]: Mille et une nuits, 2005, 612 p. ISBN: 2-842-05925-5.

A massive study of the literature of conspiracy theories, focusing especially on the 20th century and on its relationship to esotericism.

AAR Group “Western Esotericism” a Success

By CATHY GUTIERREZ, Sweet Briar College

Steering Committee of the AAR Western Esotericism Group

The American Academy of Religion (www.aarweb.org) is the largest academic society for the study of religion worldwide. With its ca. 10,000 members, the AAR forms an important network and serves as a platform for new developments in religious studies, both in the United States and abroad. In 2005, the study of Western esotericism was granted group status within the AAR.



In Philadelphia at the annual meeting of the AAR in 2005, the Western Esotericism Group was reconvened for a three-year run. Under the joint leadership of Wouter J. Hanegraaff (University of Amsterdam) and Allison Coudert (University of California at Davis), the session sponsored a panel of five papers on topics spanning angel magic; canonization in the case of Martinus Thomsen; Swedenborg’s influence on American art; Kabbalistic sources for Russian mysticism; and theoretical issues in the study of modern esotericism. The session was well-attended with over forty people in the audience and many people also joined the organizers for a dinner meeting for parties interested in future directions for the group.

This coming year at the annual meeting held in Washington, D.C., in November of 2006, the Western Esotericism Group will be

sponsoring two sessions, one of which will be jointly offered with the Critical Theory and Discourses on Religion Group (see the session overview at www.criticaltheory.org). Panels have been selected for each session and the initial response to the call for papers was excellent. Topics ranging from theurgy to alternate states of consciousness and methodological issues will be addressed. In addition to Coudert and Hanegraaff, the steering committee is composed of Jean-Pierre Brach of the Sorbonne, Antoine Faivre, also of the Sorbonne, Cathy Gutierrez, of Sweet Briar College, Marco Pasi, of the University of Amsterdam, and Arthur Versluis of Michigan State University. The organizers hope to expand sessions for the following year by hosting at least one additional session jointly with another program unit; they have been in contact with the Mysticism Group as well as the Platonism and Neoplatonism Group and hope for one or more collaborative panels for the 2007 conference.

Report of the Second Conference of the ASE

By ARTHUR VERSLUIS, Michigan State University

President of the Association for the Study of Esotericism

The second conference of the Association for the Study of Esotericism took place June 8–11, 2006, hosted by Prof. Allison Couderd on the verdant University of California campus at Davis. The keynote speaker was Prof. Elliot Wolfson, whose topic was “(An) Iconic Representation of Divine Embodiment: The Role of Imagination and Medieval Kabbalistic Esotericism.” The conference as a whole centered on the theme of Art, Imagination, and Esotericism, and featured papers on topics as diverse as esoteric theater (subjects ranged from esoteric dimensions of recent films to Euripides’ *Bacchae*), esoteric poetry (subjects included Vladimir Solovyov and W. B. Yeats), esoteric fiction (subjects ranged from D. H. Lawrence to Gustav Meyrink to the temporarily ubiquitous Dan Brown) and spirit photography. The second conference, like the first, also included a number of papers on esoteric dimensions of various new

ASE

religious movements or contemporary or recent figures, among them Mikhaël Aïvanhov and J. J. Hurtak. Prof. Joscelyn Godwin introduced and discussed the highly unusual book *L’Architecture Naturelle* by Petrus Talemarianus. And the conference included presentations of new research on the circle around Jacob Böhme as well as on esotericism during the reign of Peter the Great in Russia. The conference concluded with a provocative discussion concerning methodologies that was moderated by Dr. Claire Fanger, followed by a lively and brief business meeting. The third ASE conference will be held in June, 2008, at the College of Charleston in South Carolina, and the central theme will be the divine feminine.

For more information on ASE, please visit the website at www.aseweb.org.

Inaugural Conference of ESSWE in Tübingen (Germany), 20–22 July 2007: Call for Papers

Constructing Tradition: Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism



Many forms of early modern and modern esoteric knowledge claim to represent or restore an ancient, primordial or lost wisdom tradition as a “secret doctrine”. The conceptualisation and realisation of such claims places a major emphasis on ideas of tradition and its transmission, either through oral traditions or the discovery and dissemination of sacred and mythic books. The questions of heritage and tradition, of origin and genealogy, are crucial to the foundation of any esoteric knowledge, whether in alchemy, astrology, magic, Kabbalah, or Theosophy. Such knowledge legitimates itself through its origins, its ancestry, and its transmission, and may

even seek to invent and construct its own tradition. It is this aspect of esoteric discourse that the inaugural conference of the *European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE)* intends to engage.

The title, “Means and Myths of Transmission”, refers to the more technical, material aspect of tradition, on the one hand, and to its mythical or philosophical aspects, on the other. Against this background, the conference will bring together various methodological approaches and perspectives that compare the traditions of esoteric knowledge with corresponding concepts and practices in religion, literature, or science. This will offer fruitful perspectives in the analysis of Western esotericism and its complex role between various cultures of knowledge.

Theory, myth, and history may serve to illustrate the different accesses to this topic. The constitution and construction of esoteric knowledge and its transmission may be examined as theoretical concepts or as myths within the literature of the tradition itself, or in the actual historical practice of how esoteric groups bequeath their knowledge to posterity. Accordingly, one can distinguish a) theoretical concepts, b) myths, and c) the historical practices, strategies, and procedures of transmission.

1. Theoretical and interpretational frameworks (concepts and ideas of tradition)

The many varied concepts of tradition in modern esotericism imply a theory of esoteric communication and information, involving the construction and conception of genealogies and the transmission of such primordial and secret knowledge. These theories may be investigated from various points of view (which may find their place also within non-esoteric concepts of knowledge), through the philosophy and/or theology of history, but also through media theory and information theory. Consequently, the following aspects may be taken into consideration:

- Philosophy of History
 - o Concepts of tradition and transmission
- Theology of History

- o Soteriological and messianic expectations of restoration (hidden or lost traditions)
- Media-concepts
 - o Oral transmission and communication
 - o Literary transmission and communication
 - o Imagery and symbolism
 - o Visual communication and “iconic action”

2. Mythical and literary approaches (myths and imagined tradition)

A second field may be distinguished by mythical and literary, i.e. less conceptual, much more imaginative framings of tradition and transmission in Western esotericism. Eventually quite distinct from actual historical reality, transmission can be the object of mythical construction as well as literary narration. Moreover: sometimes esoteric models of transmission might be viewed as generators of literary and mythical narration. The following aspects may be considered:

- Mythical agents and bearers of esoteric tradition (Abraham, Adam, Moses, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus)
- Literary narratives of esoteric tradition and transmission
- The rhetorical and poetical functionality of esoteric tradition and transmission
- Myths of
 - o Origin
 - o Genealogy
 - o Transmission (written or oral)

3. Historical approaches (actual practices and procedures of transmission)

The actual historical practice of transmission can widely differ from the theoretical construction and the imaginative plane of mythical invention. Sociology, communication and media studies, history, and related disciplines

have developed instruments of analysis that are fruitful in exploring practices of transmission. For understanding processes of group formation, projects in translation and criticism or the function of oral, literary, and visual traditions, the following aspects seem worth considering:

- Sociology: groups, circles, (secret) societies
- Politics: religious and confessional strategies
- Doctrine: master-disciple relationships vs. direct inspiration
- Media: oral, literary, image, symbolism
- Philology: projects in translation, criticism, editions
- Library and museum: books, collections

Participants may choose to present a paper within one or other of these three fields of research, but a combined approach is perfectly welcome.

In addition to the thematic focus outlined in this Call for Papers, proposals that address other relevant issues of Western esotericism are also welcome and will be considered seriously. Furthermore, graduate students are strongly encouraged to submit proposals in which they introduce their research projects. A forum for discussing dissertation projects will be part of the conference.

Organisational Matters

- Conference Languages: English and German
- Deadline for abstracts: 31st of December 2006
- Length of abstracts: approximately 300 words.
- Updates on organisational matters will be published on www.esswe.org (see "agenda").