

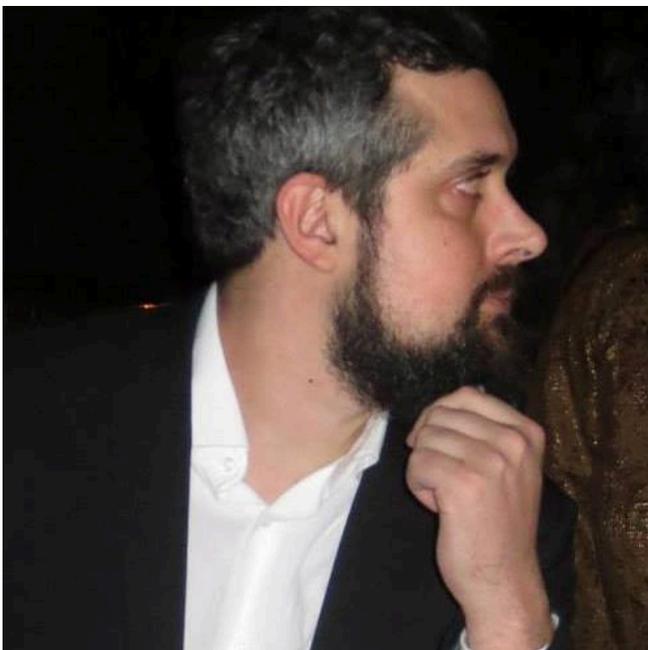
The Newsletter of the
European Society for
the Study of Western
Esotericism

ESSWE Newsletter

Summer 2017
Volume 8, Number 1

Words from the Editor

– *Christian Giudice*



Welcome to the Summer 2017 *Newsletter*. As has been my custom since taking over as editor, the format of the Newsletter has not changed, with the most popular sections, such as scholar interviews and conference reviews, having been left unaltered.

ESSWE6 took place a month ago, with a record in the number of papers presented, and the theme of ‘Western Esotericism and Deviance’ being treated across a span of time stretching from antiquity to the modern era. As per usual, please do not hesitate to contact me if you think that something should be added to the next issue or if you are organising an event that could be of interest to the membership of ESSWE. The next issue of the newsletter will be sent out in December. ♦

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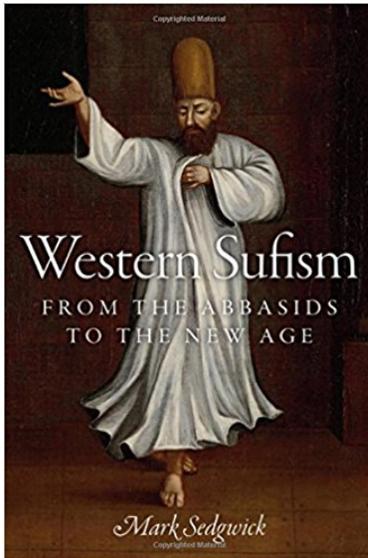
Three new publications by ESSWE members

Professor Mark Sedgwick

Western Sufism:

From the Abbasids to the New Age

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2016)



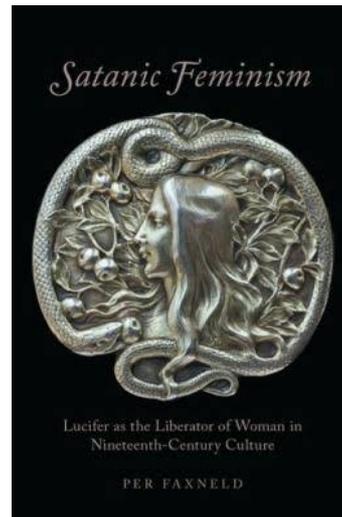
Western Sufism is often thought of in terms of the New Age, but in this book Mark Sedgwick argues that it has deep roots, both in the Muslim world and in the West, and that these roots parallel much of the history of Western esotericism. The book starts with the earliest origins of Sufism in late antique Neoplatonism and early Arab philosophy, and traces the later origins of Western Sufism in repeated intercultural transfers from the Muslim world to the West. It looks at the relationship between Arab philosophy, Sufism, and kabbalah; at Perennialism and Deism; at John Toland's development in 1720 of the esoteric/exoteric pair, and at how this came to be applied to Sufism, making Sufism into esoteric perennialism. Moving towards the present, it looks at Sufism in the Theosophical Society, and then at the development of Western Sufi organizations, at first as a form of Theosophical Sufism, just before the First World War. It then traces the development of actual Western Sufi organizations through to the New Age, and in some cases, beyond it into the age of jihad. The book is in part a sequel and in part a prequel to Sedgwick's *Against the Modern World*, and incorporates material that started off as papers at recent ESSWE conferences. ♦

Dr. Per Faxneld

Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2017)

According to the Bible, Eve was the first to heed Satan's advice to eat the forbidden fruit and thus responsible for all of humanity's subsequent miseries. The notion of woman as the Devil's accomplice is prominent throughout Christian history and has been used to legitimize the subordination of wives and daughters. In the nineteenth century, rebellious females performed counter-readings of this misogynist tradition. Lucifer was reconceptualised as a feminist liberator of womankind, and Eve became a heroine. In these reimaginings, Satan is an ally in the struggle against a tyrannical patriarchy supported by God the Father and his male priests.

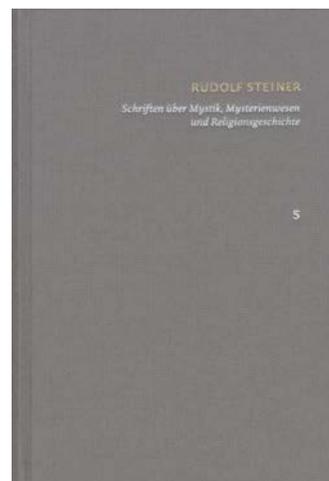


Per Faxneld shows how this Satanic feminism was expressed in a wide variety of nineteenth-century literary texts, autobiographies, pamphlets, newspaper articles, paintings, sculptures, and even artefacts of consumer culture like jewellery. *Satanic Feminism* details how colourful figures like the suffragette Elizabeth Cady Stanton, gender-bending Theosophist H. P. Blavatsky, author Aino Kallas, actress Sarah Bernhardt, anti-clerical witch enthusiast Matilda Joslyn Gage, decadent marchioness Luisa Casati, and the Luciferian lesbian poetess Renée Vivien embraced these reimaginings. By exploring the connections between esotericism, literature, art and the political realm, *Satanic Feminism* sheds new light on neglected aspects of the intellectual history of feminism, Satanism, and revisionary mythmaking. ♦

Professor Christian Clement

Rudolf Steiner: Kritische Ausgabe (SKA)

(Stuttgart: Fromman-Holzboog, 2017)



This critical edition of selected writings by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) features the foundational texts of anthroposophy, one of the most significant esoteric movements of the 20th century. It traces the essential writings of the controversial philosopher and esotericist in their textual development, contextualizes them within the framework of Steiner's intellectual biography and makes them transparent with regard to their references and literary sources. In doing so, the edition sets a new editorial standard for Steiner's writings and provides an indispensable academic tool for critical research in the field of anthroposophy. It can also constitute the first part of a fully-fledged critical edition in the future.

4 Volumes available, 4 Volumes in preparation. ♦

Scholar Interviews

- *Christian Giudice*

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

**John MacMurphy, PhD Candidate,
Department of History of Hermetic
Philosophy and Related Currents,
University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam,
Netherlands**

How did you come to be interested in Western esotericism?

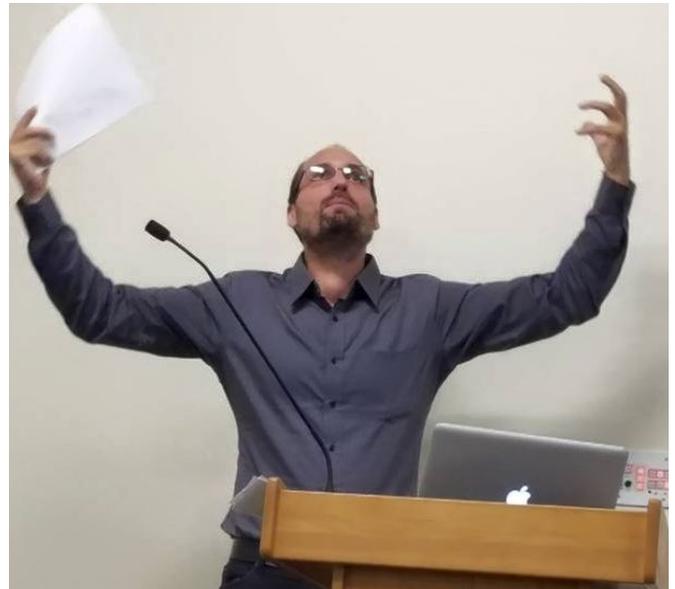
I think I was always interested in esotericism and mysticism in general. However, it was not until I began my research MA at the HHP that I became fully absorbed in the subject. Up until then, I was mainly studying Jewish esotericism and Kabbalah. By the time the program started in Amsterdam, I was already reading Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts and engaging heavily with primary and secondary literature. Pursuing Western esotericism as my primary academic focus was simply an extension of my ongoing studies. I guess you can say I got into the field through one of its many back-doors.

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

Apart from future job security which is something most junior scholars in the humanities face these days, I feel that one of the many oversights by funding institutions is the allocation of resources in support of critical and diplomatic editions of primary text material. While many scholars would love the opportunity to engage in such projects, there is a sentiment in the academy which, in turn, reverberates to the organizations who provide financial backing to academics, that this type of work is mechanical and somehow secondary to argument-based publications. In an effort to raise the profile of this type of scholarship, I decided to produce and edit a new periodical called "The Source" which would include contributions of hitherto unpublished esoteric-based primary texts, transcribed from manuscripts and translated into English. Wouter Hanegraaff once told me that this type of work is the heart of true scholarship. However, time will tell if this journal and other efforts will be successful at changing current attitudes.

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

For me, nothing beats visiting different libraries, especially ones that I have not been to yet. Whether it is the Gershom Scholem library in Jerusalem, or the Octagon, Hans Thomas Hakl's amazing private collection in Graz, there is always something new to discover. One recent funny memory I have is when I visited the Biblioteca de Catalunya in Barcelona. I was trying to get a reader's card to get access to the collection but



the guy at the reception area insisted on explaining to me that it was not a regular library where one can borrow books to take home. After several attempts on his part to provide me directions to the nearest public library, I showed him a list of the manuscripts I came to review—only then the comedy of errors-like dialogue ceased and I gained access to the archives.

What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?

Oh so many...yoga, tantra, meditation, lucid dreaming to name a few. Although, one could argue that these practices fall under or at least, could be related directly or indirectly to Western esotericism. Before I started the program in Amsterdam I lived in Thailand for over a year and a half. During that time I studied and practiced intensely many of these methods. I feel that these interests helped me gain a better appreciation and understanding of some of the figures and concepts that we study under Western esotericism. For example, the yoga and meditation helped me understand better the techniques of Abraham Abulafia, the father of ecstatic Kabbalah. Moreover, in the past I presented two papers relating lucid dreaming to Kabbalah and the mystical experience. And, at the most recent ASE conference at U.C. Davis I presented a paper comparing Jewish kabbalistic sex magic with the tantric practices of the East.

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

Job security. The employment market does seem to favor people with more diluted specialties. I know and hear about people who are struggling with finding post-doc and permanent positions all the time. And, even though I do hear the rare success story of someone landing a good post, I can not imagine what the academic landscape would be like four years from now when I will be facing the same conundrum.

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

In a way, having Western esotericism as a specialty has been a process of self-discovery. I feel as though I am getting closer and closer to the core of my passion. As of right now, I have managed to isolate this focus to the concept of Altered States of Consciousness. However, there is little doubt that this focal point will be further refined with time. Until then, the journey continues... ♦

Prof. Olav Hammer, Department of History, University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Denmark

How did you come to be interested in Western esotericism?

As a young adult in the 1970s, signs of what I later came to understand as the cultic milieu were everywhere. Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* was a recent bestseller. In the circles where I moved, Transcendental Meditation was a popular practice to get involved in. Quite a few of my friends dabbled in astrology and the tarot. When I started studying religion at Lund University in the early 1990s, it dawned on me that very few people had studied this milieu as a social phenomenon, and I decided to revisit the religious culture of my own youth, but this time from an academic perspective. That parts of this "alternative spirituality" or cultic milieu had roots in a form of religion that others routinely referred to as esotericism only dawned on me gradually.

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

The field has been dominated by descriptivism. Descriptively mapping a new area of academic interest is a necessary enterprise, but it has its limitations and risks leading to insularity. Many young scholars are finally applying theoretical perspectives, from cognitive studies to gender studies, to this area, and developing a fruitful conversation with such approaches will, I believe, be the main challenge to undertake over the coming years.

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

Although my written output is based on textual sources, my most intense and fun memories tend to be of participant observation: trying past-life regression, rebirthing, various forms of healing, divination and so forth.

What are your main interests aside from Western esotericism?

Obviously, I have interests outside the world of academia, but



if I interpret the question narrowly, as a question about intellectual pursuits, I find languages endlessly fascinating. They fascinate me both as means of communication (I'd love to have enough time to learn more of them), and for the sheer fact that they can be so diverse and exotic. For some reason that is hard to communicate to people without the latter passion for grammatical mirabilia, I'm thrilled by nerdy facts such as finding out that the Pomoan languages of central California can use a series of object, location, and instrument affixes to create a single verb meaning "he rolled a spherical object downhill by pushing it with a stick".

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

The only thing I can remotely think of as "the worst" is the constant humanity-bashing one gets from the neo-liberal state. Of course, this puts scholars of religion (esoteric or otherwise) in the same boat as archaeologists, historians, scholars of literature, and a host of others.

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

In all other areas in life one has to come to grips with the conditions of living in a physical universe, including the decay of the body, and the intransigence of material objects. In the world of religion, the suspension of disbelief is ubiquitous, and it's a common suggestion that people can overcome death, that they can lift themselves off the ground by levitating, and that

spirits can walk through walls. Once these conceptions become accepted by a group of people, doctrines are formulated and fought over, rituals are carried out, material objects are crafted,

and a culturally constructed belief becomes “reality”. This, I believe, says something really deep and interesting, but also troubling, about the human species, and being able to spend my time learning about such processes is a privilege. ♦

ESSWE Board Reports

ESSWE SECRETARY

- *Henrik Bogdan*

The Board of ESSWE met on May 31, 2017 at the Augustinerkloster, Erfurt, Germany, just before the ESSWE6 Conference, and considered the regular business of the society, such as finances and membership; the Aries Book Series and *Aries* journal; website presence and traffic; etc. Members are encouraged to send news about upcoming conferences and new publications to our webmaster Robert Polcz (robert@polcz.hu) for our website and Facebook page.

The Board discussed reports submitted by the regional, thematic and affiliated networks, and it was agreed that we would look into the possibility of creating a German network for the study of esotericism. It was decided that the ESSWE7 conference will be held at the University of Amsterdam, June 24-28, 2019 (the theme of the conference is “Western Esotericism and Consciousness: Visions, Voices, Altered States”), and that the MA Thesis Workshop will be held in Israel in 2018 (the date is yet to be finalized). Also, ESSWE is organizing sessions at the AAR in 2017 and 2018. The ESSWE Thesis Prize for 2017 was awarded to Julian Strube. The deadline for submitting nominations for the next prize is set to February 1, 2019. The deadline for reaching a decision is set to May 1, 2019.

Board issues: Andreas Kilcher, Boaz Huss, Wouter Hanegraaff, and Henrik Bogdan were re-elected as Board Members, while Bernd-Christian Otto was elected as Board Member. Nominations for election to the Board in 2017 to replace Peter J. Forshaw, Jean-Pierre Brach, and Gyorgy E. Szonyi, were discussed. It was emphasized that we need to have a balance in terms of gender, academic positions, and areas of expertise. The President thanked Pete, Jean-Pierre, and Gyorgy for having served as Board Members. It was decided that Manon Hedenborg White should handle the election of a new student representative, and that a Facebook group for the network should be created.

The next Board Meeting will be held in connection with the workshop in Israel. ♦

ESSWE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

- *Manon Hedenborg-White*



The student membership of ESSWE forms the basis of the future generation of Western esotericism scholars. To further student participation in the activities of ESSWE, the society provides a number of resources for its student members. The ESSWE Student Network aims to facilitate the organisation of activities for student members such as the biennial thesis workshop, in addition to connecting student members and creating opportunities for learning, professional development, and networking for students within the field of Western esotericism internationally.

In addition to the Student Network, ESSWE also offers additional resources that facilitate students' involvement in the field of Western esotericism research. This includes travel bursaries for students and members from economically disadvantaged countries. The fund is primarily aimed at enabling participation in the biennial ESSWE conferences, but students and members can also apply for funding to participate in ESSWE workshops and other academic activities congruent with the aims of the society.

Through the ESSWE Sponsorship Programme for Independent Scholarly Initiatives, students and members can also apply for funding for organising small-scale academic initiatives such as workshops, lectures, and publishing outlets that are in line with ESSWE's goals. More information about these resources, application procedure, requirements, and deadlines can be found on the ESSWE website.

If you have questions or suggestions pertaining to the Student Network or the interests of ESSWE's student members, feel free to contact Manon Hedenborg White (Uppsala University), student representative to the ESSWE Board, at manon.hedenborg-white@teol.uu.se.

You can also join the discussion through our Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/esswe.student.network/>. ♦

ESSWE Sponsorship Programme for Independent Scholarly Initiatives 2016

Report from Trans-States Conference, 2016 recipient.

Trans- States: The art of crossing over, was an experimental, transdisciplinary conference hosted by the University of Northampton, that sought to facilitate a valuable confluence of academics, independent scholars, practitioners and artists with shared interests. Specifically, the conference sought to explore representations in contemporary visual culture of boundary crossing, liminality and queerification, produced by artists undergoing alterations in consciousness; in the cross-over between contemporary art and Western esotericism, occultism, mysticism, and other spiritual practices.

This innovative conference was an independent initiative, spearheaded by its primary organiser, Cavan McLaughlin. The conference was largely self-funded, and so, despite having a

strong brand and vision, and the potential of high visibility (due some very high profile keynote speakers attached at an early stage), the support of ESSWE's sponsorship was instrumental to its success by covering travel costs for additional keynote speakers with complementary specialist knowledge.

Trans- States has since been widely acknowledged as a critical success, with immediate calls for future conferences and events within the *Trans- States* brand, and with a number of other independent events and conferences directly influenced by its novel and experimental approach. Cavan McLaughlin, himself a full member of ESSWE, has indicated his desire to maintain an ongoing working relationship between the *Trans- States* initiative and our learned society.

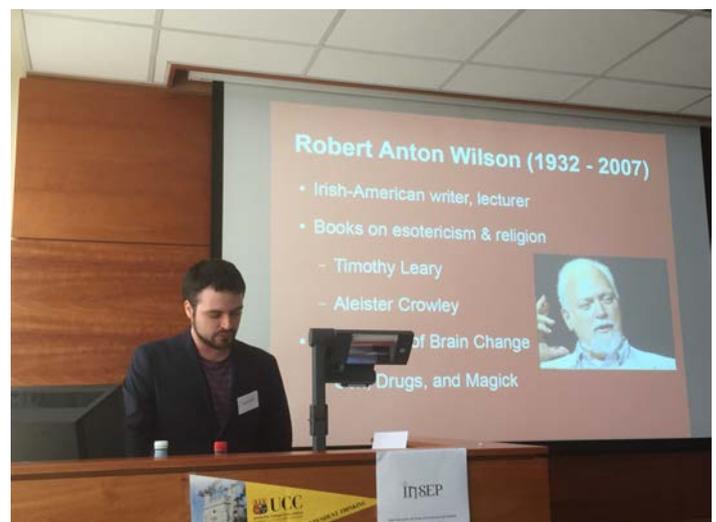
Further reports will be published in the Winter 2017 issue.

Conference Reports

Launch of the Irish Network for the Study of Esotericism and Paganism (INSEP)

-Jenny Butler

The Irish Network for the Study of Esotericism and Paganism was formally launched and held its first workshop on 31st March 2017. The event was held at University College Cork and was kindly supported by the ESSWE Sponsorship Programme for Independent Scholarly Initiatives. Under this programme, €400 was granted in the form of two travel bursaries of €200 each, which were awarded to Dmitry Galtsin (independent scholar, Russia) and to Áine Warren (PhD student, The University of Edinburgh). Thanks are due to the ESSWE for enabling this participation at the workshop and to UCC's Study of Religions Department for generously supporting the event.



The event began with some words of welcome from Jenny Butler, founder of INSEP, and mention was made of plans to progress the study of Western Esotericism in Ireland. A range of topics were covered in the presentations, including the Irish Pagan Community and cultural resources by Jenny Butler (UCC), the Fellowship of

Isis by Vivianne Crowley (Nottingham Trent University), the Irish connections of Robert Anton Wilson and Terence McKenna by Patrick Everitt, Maud Gonne, the Golden Dawn and Irish Nationalism by Christian Giudice (Gothenburg University), Celticity in Russian Paganism by Dmitry Galtsin, the concept of 'Celtic Spirituality' in the Irish context by Nadine Eckmann (UCC), esoteric traces in contemporary psychoanalysis by John Boyle (University of Essex), the Morrigan and social media by Áine Warren (University of Edinburgh) and a discussion of magic and artistic processes by artist Anne Crossey. ♦



ESSWE6, 'Western Esotericism and Deviance', Erfurt, Germany

- Christian Giudice & Michele Olzi



presentations to follow during the day, and even more fascinating discussions to be had over a beer or two, in the evenings. ESSWE6, masterfully organised by Bernd-Christian Otto in Erfurt, on 1-3 June 2017 was no exception: with the conference itself hosted in Erfurt's renowned Augustinerkloster and with the theme of ESSWE6 being 'Western Esotericism and Deviance', expectations were high and they were certainly lived up to.

Day 1 went off to a great start with two panels on Western esotericism in Antiquity: it is refreshing to see Western esotericism researched in earlier periods of time, and the subject matter covered ranged from 'the Canon of Deviance in Pliny the Elder' to 'Ancient Gnostic Sex Magic'. A real treat for those not acquainted with antiquity. The afternoon session continued with four consecutive panels, one of which was dedicated to the topic of Magic: during the panel, Karolina Hess and Malgorzata Dulaska ably spoke about Polish Parapsychologist Jozef Switkowski and the presence of Incubi and Succubi in his oeuvre, while Timothy Jones covered the topic of annotated books and what they may impart to the reader.

ESSWE conferences are always a great chance to catch up with the multifaceted developments within the field of Western esotericism, with an intriguing and ever-increasing number of



Islamic Esotericism constituted the subject of the first panel of day 2, with a captivating presentations by Liana Saif on the subject of 'Batinism as Deviance in Medieval Islam' and by Mark Sedgwick on the topic of 'Sufism and Deviance'. The afternoon saw us attend the panel on 'Women on the Edge', with excellent papers by Christa Shusko on Ida Craddock's Sex Magic and Cathy Gutierrez on the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino. The afternoon was dedicated to keynote lectures and workshops and to the ESSWE PhD prize, which was presented to Julian Strube.



Day 3 started with one of the most gripping panels of the entire conference: 'Esotericism, Deviance and Repression: A Case Study of the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA)'. CESNUR representatives Massimo Introvigne and PierLuigi Zoccatelli delivered two lectures entitled respectively 'Sex Movies and Deviance: the Strange Case of Carmen Enache' and 'Esotericism, Deviance and Repression: the Extradition of Grigorian Bivolaru'. The final panel attended was dedicated to the subject of Yoga, Magic and Healing, with a lecture by Karl Baier on the figure of Carl Kellner, which we feel sure is but a taste of a fundamental wider study that is to come.



The sheer quantity and quality of the papers presented at ESSWE6 and the fantastic job done by Bernd-Christian Otto and his organization team left us looking forward to the ESSWE7 conference, to be held in Amsterdam in 2019. ♦

Upcoming Conferences

EASR, 18-21 September 2017, University of Leuven, Belgium

Communicating Religion

Communication plays a crucial role in religion and religious praxis. Religions claim to be able to create links with the divine and the transcendent, between humans and superhuman agents. But equally important, both for defining religion and for its subsistence, is the communication that takes place between humans. The conference will focus above all on this second aspect and study how a religion is communicated within the own tradition and towards outsiders. The first area deals with how religious traditions have been presented or present themselves to their members. It offers opportunities for studying a wide range of topics, including ways of creating “ideal” types or images of a tradition, handling moments of crisis, establishing and questioning forms of authority and structure, coping with dissidence, or balancing between preservation and renewal, and how all of these are communicated to the faithful. The second area deals with how a religious tradition positions itself towards outsiders. This includes such topics as reflecting on identity, coming to terms with the constant tension between intra- and extravert orientations, or developing modes for reaching out to others.

The EASR Annual Conference 2017 will take place at the University of Leuven, Belgium, from 18-21 September 2017. The conference language is English.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

Jenny Berglund
Södertörn University

Jan N. Bremmer
University of Groningen

Guy Stroumsa
University of Oxford
Hebrew University Jerusalem

Ann Taves
University of California, Santa Barbara. ♦

AAR Meeting, 18-21 November 2017, Boston, USA

The 2017 Annual Meetings in Boston, Massachusetts, November 18–21, hosted by the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature, is the world’s largest gathering of scholars interested in the study of religion. Academic sessions, workshops, meetings, receptions, and tours

... more than 1,000 events take place during the Annual Meetings. The Annual Meetings Employment Center provides job seekers and employers a convenient, private setting for interviews. The Annual Meetings Exhibit Hall, with more than 130 publishers exhibiting, is the best place to review the latest publications within the field. The Annual Meetings offers unparalleled opportunities to engage with leading scholars and scholarship within the field of religion. Register this spring to receive the best attendee rate and hotel selection, and join some 10,000 attendees who are expected to attend the 2017 Annual Meetings!

For questions about the Annual Meeting program or publications, contact Robert Puckett at 1-404-727-1461 or rpuckett@aarweb.org; and for questions about logistics, registration or housing, contact Soraya Shahrak at 1-404-727-7972 or sshahrak@aarweb.org. ♦

BASR Annual Conference, 4-6 September 2017, Chester, UK

Theme: Narratives of religion

‘Narrative’ has emerged as valuable category of analysis in the study of religions. This conference takes narrative as its theme with a view to testing its efficacy and resilience for elucidating constructions of religion.

Keynote (Tuesday 5th September)
‘Narratives of Pagan Religion’
Professor Ronald Hutton

The full Conference programme will be published in due course, and circulated via email.

We’re looking forward to seeing you in Chester in September.

Further information

Further updates and announcements, including the Conference Programme, will appear here and across social media in due course. For any general enquiries, please contact the Conference Organisers Drs Wendy Dossett, Dawn Llewellyn, Alana Vincent & Steve Knowles on basrconference2017@gmail.com. ♦