

## Welcome from the President of the ESSWE

*Wouter J. Hanegraaff*



It has been some time since the previous *ESSWE Newsletter*, and much has happened in the meantime. From a newcomer on the scene, the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism has developed into an increasingly professional organization, now affiliated with the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) and well on its way towards its third international conference in Szeged, Hungary, this summer. Scholarly activity focused on Western esotericism is flourishing, in the form of publications, conferences, and the emergence of new regional networks. It would be pointless to repeat or summarize here the information that you will find elsewhere in this *Newsletter*, but certainly it represents only the tip of a much larger iceberg. As for the ESSWE specifically, I would just like to mention some new initiatives, including a biannual Thesis Workshop, a bursary travel scheme, the biannual Thesis Prize, and the Henny Homan Essay Prize.

The occasion for the latter was a very sad one. Henny Homan, who served as secretary of the ESSWE since its foundation in 2005, died of cancer in 2010. On behalf of the Board, I want to express our gratitude for her commitment to

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our organization and all the work she did during the first phase of its existence. We will miss her positive presence but she will not be forgotten.

In the wake of Henny's death, the membership administration presently finds itself in a somewhat difficult situation, because of a whole series of time-consuming technical and administrative changes that are necessary to effectuate a correct transition of the accounts and the Paypal system to the new officers in charge. Related to this, the ESSWE website will be thoroughly revised and updated as well. Everything is being done to resolve these problems as quickly and efficiently as possible, but in the meantime we have to ask our members to have some patience and understanding for the situation. We hope and expect to be back to normal soon.

For the rest, I hope that you will enjoy this *Newsletter*, and look forward to meeting many of you at the upcoming ESSWE conference in Szeged! ♦

## Scholar interviews

### *Per Faxneld*

*This is a new section in the Newsletter, where one junior and one senior scholar of Western esotericism will be interviewed in every issue. They will be asked the same questions, and we will be able to partake of both their personal perspectives and the different vantage points determined by their up-and-coming or nestorial position in the field respectively*

**Tessel Bauduin,**  
Ph.D. Candidate, The Center for History of  
Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents,  
University of Amsterdam



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

During my BA in Art History of the Middle Ages we were of course expected to know the Bible – at least well enough to be able to be iconographically correct when reading images. I became interested in Western religions more generally, and felt drawn to heterodox currents rather than the “same old” orthodox stuff. I decided to follow a so-called “minor” in Western Esotericism: three courses, aptly named Hermetica I, II and III. Incidentally, I think this was the second year this minor was available to students in Amsterdam. My teachers were, besides Wouter Hanegraaff, Jean-Pierre Brach and Olav Hammer. I enjoyed the originality and fresh perspective of this new discipline, as well as the enthusiasm of the aforementioned three. This inspired me to continue my studies in this field, taking MA-courses in Western Esotericism in addition to my Art History and Cultural Studies MA-courses. One of my MA-theses was on a Western esoteric topic, with Hanegraaff as one of my supervisors.

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

It is high time for History of Western esotericism to become integrated into the wider and also relatively new field of Cultural History. Western esotericism does not consist of marginal and isolated incidents, but seems to me to be an integral part of developments in Western culture. One

challenge I see, for us scholars of Western esotericism, is moving beyond a traditional historical perspective, integrating a bit of “new historicism”, and moving towards a broader cultural historic view. In line with that, although a relatively young discipline itself, Western esotericism usually interacts more with traditional disciplines (theology, history) than with other new fields or disciplines (media studies, history of the family, post-modern approaches to art, heritage studies, information studies and digitization, etc.). There’s a distinct challenge there, as most scholars are still traditionally trained, but rising to it will, I think, very much benefit the discipline of Western esotericism.

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

During a research stay at the Museum of Witchcraft in Cornwall, UK, I was invited to participate in a Wiccan ceremony to celebrate a birth. To prepare (and to armour myself as a scholar) I read up on paganism and Wicca – all for naught, as the actual ceremony had little to do with anything in books, but was a free and happy thing. It took place in the dead of the night on some local moors, in the middle of winter, and we were all so cold that that we were continually stamping our feet and running in circles just to keep warm. The booze was brought out and we all had a great time. The best thing was that the small child in question, centre of the ceremony, was the warmest of all of us: being asleep bundled in blankets under his father’s coat. While my interests remain on the scholarly side of things, I really enjoyed my time on the “other side of the fence”, so to speak.

#### *What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?*

I’m an art historian at heart. My focus now lies on modern art, in particular the art of the avant-gardes, but deep down the art of the Middle Ages is still my first love, and I hope to return to it someday. I love going to art fairs and just quietly admiring carved wooden statues of the 14th and 15th centuries... Besides that, I’ve recently started reading up – just for fun, you know, during the time I have to spare from writing a dissertation – on culinary history, as I really enjoy cooking, and being the historian that I am, just feel driven to know how and why things came about.

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

None that I can really think of.

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

First of all, you meet a lot of very interesting people, scholars as well as those for whom Western esotericism is a lifestyle

choice. The discipline of course makes for an interesting topic of conversation, and I'm constantly surprised at the range of responses one gets when divulging that one is working in our particular discipline. But I would say the best thing about being a scholar of something that is in essence such a trans-cultural phenomenon as Western esotericism, is meeting and working with scholars from such varying disciplines, be it contemporary music, history of 17th century science, or ancient religions. You really learn something new every day.

**Joscelyn Godwin,**  
Professor, Music Department, Colgate University



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

As a boy with a strong Anglican background, I discovered Jung's book on flying saucers and William Judge's *Ocean of Theosophy*, both of which left a permanent mark. On my first day at university, a friend and I decided we could only be atheists, and so I remained through my professional training as a composer and musicologist. While writing my Ph.D. thesis in 1968, my complacency was shattered by meeting Anthony Damiani, a ticket collector and bookseller who was making his own synthesis of Vedanta, Buddhism, Jung, Neo-Platonism, and astrology; his disciples later founded Wisdom's Goldenrod Philosophic Center near Ithaca, New York. He introduced me to his master Paul Brunton, whose philosophy remains my fixed point. Then I read Guénon and the other Traditionalists, and overnight lost my faith in the avant-garde music and art that had been my passion. As a junior academic in the 1970s, I began a systematic exploration of "music, mysticism and magic" in the Western world, discovering figures such as Robert Fludd, Michael Maier, Athanasius Kircher, Fabre d'Olivet, Rudolf Steiner, and Hans Kayser. This led me to an interest in Western esotericism in general, though for personal guidance I prefer the East.

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

The present challenge is to find jobs for those who are acquiring academic qualifications in it. The success our field has had in Academe is gratifying to those who have been working in it for years, but for new graduates there is no clear career path. It may be wiser for younger scholars to become qualified in a standard discipline with which they can earn a living. Their esoteric interests can be grafted onto it later, or else they can pursue them in private. They should be under no illusion that an esoteric specialty will help them in today's job market.

That said, we have an educational mission to demonstrate the presence and vitality of the "third force in Western culture," aside from science and religion, of which most of our colleagues are still ignorant. This ignorance goes along with the opposition, in the common mind, of materialistic science and religious faith with nothing in between. What comes in between and bridges the apparent opposites is precisely our field, and we do well to show how powerfully it has affected Western science, literature, and the arts.

There will always be a tension between the academic study of Western esotericism and personal commitment to its paths and doctrines. A similar situation arose long ago, when Theology diversified into the Study of Religions, and scholars set barriers between their faith (if present) and their academic work. But esoteric studies are inherently different from any other academic discipline, even religion—they are, after all, esoteric. To pretend that they can and must be treated with strict objectivity leads to a kind of policing and exclusion for which I have never felt the need. I hope that our field can keep something of its eccentric and provocative nature, and not become a compliant cog in an increasingly legalistic machine.

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

January 1997 at Palladio's Villa Saraceno, near Vicenza, to which nine men and one woman came from six different countries for a week's house party. It was cold and bleak outside, but we had log fires and good food and wine. Each person spoke to the group about his or her current interests, and we had a visit from an Italian occultist, but most of the

time was spent in conversations between two or three people. Everyone there already had, or later made, a distinguished career in the Western esoteric field. On the last night, Marco Pasi made a magnificent tiramisù (an Italian dessert), then we held a ritual invocation of Jupiter, with incense, candles, the Orphic Hymn, etc. It obviously worked because I crept down in the night and devoured the rest of the mascarpone, thus confirming Jupiter's gift of Richness and his negative aspect of Excess.

*What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?*

Primarily: my family. Intellectually: Forteana and other "rejected knowledge," and watching the Kali Yuga take its course. In practical life, anything creative: playing the harpsichord, recorders, and viola da gamba, composing music, inventing college courses, writing letters to friends, financial planning, renovating and decorating houses, making paths through the woods, collecting some things and trying rid myself of others.

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

Having to listen to papers or read articles and dissertations that accommodate it to current and fashionable academic trends. But this is my problem. If I was academically trained in philosophy, history, or the study of religions, or if I had bothered to read the authors sanctified by those trends, I might feel less bored and excluded.

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

That it is a new field, so that someone who is essentially an amateur can still contribute to it. Imagine trying to work in English Literature, where every stone has been twice turned, or in Biology, where one's research will be superseded within a year or two! We are like Renaissance humanists discovering the Classics, with a similar potential for changing our own worldviews. There is also the element of mystery, a dimension of wisdom found in no other discipline, and although some prefer to ignore it, always the looming presence of the occult. Whatever one learns, if one takes these studies to heart, is something one will take to one's deathbed, and maybe beyond. ♦

## ESSWE Ph.D. Thesis Prize

Nominations are invited for the second biennial ESSWE PhD Thesis prize, awarded by the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism.

**Prize:** The prize will be given for an outstanding PhD thesis completed between 1 January 2009 and 1 March 2011 on any aspect of Western Esotericism. Candidates for the prize must be members of the ESSWE. The thesis must have been approved formally by the nominee's thesis committee, but the degree need not have been formally awarded.

**Notification & Certification:** The prizewinner will be notified in May 2011 and will receive an award of €500 and a certificate, to be presented at the ESSWE conference in Szeged, Hungary, 6-10 July 2011.

**Publication:** The thesis will also be recommended for publication in the ARIES Book Series, though the final decision on publication will be taken by the ARIES Book Series editorial board.

**Nomination:** Nominations must be made by electronic mail to the Chair of the Prize Committee, Andreas Kilcher (ETH, Zürich, [akilcher@ethz.ch](mailto:akilcher@ethz.ch)) by 1 April 2011. The nominator must be a faculty member at the institution that awards the nominee's PhD degree, or a member of the nominee's thesis committee. Each nominator may make only one nomination. The applications should consist of pdf files of the following material:

1. A letter of nomination
2. The nominee's thesis
3. A separate summary of the thesis, written by the nominee, of no more than ten pages (double spaced)
4. A brief biographical sketch of the nominee
5. Documentation to show that the thesis has been approved

Items 1, 3 and 4 must be in English. Item 2 may be in any one of the following languages: English, French, German, Italian, or Spanish. Item 5 may be in any language, so long as a translation into English is provided if it is not in English, French, German, Italian, or Spanish.

**The Prize Committee** consists of:

- Andreas Kilcher, Zürich (Chair)
- Boaz Huss, Beersheva
- Helmut Zander, Berlin



## Conference review: Esotericism at the IAHR in Toronto

*Egil Asprem*

On August 15-21, 2010, the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) held its twentieth quinquennial world congress in Toronto, Canada. It was a significant conference for the advancement of the field of Western esotericism, which had a very notable presence.

Three positive moments should be mentioned. First of all, an esotericism panel was convened by Marco Pasi, Allison Coudert, and Cathy Gutierrez, receiving enough high-quality submissions to fill three whole sessions, all well attended. Secondly, a significant number of papers were given on esoteric topics outside of this ESSWE/ASE dominated panel, including in one of the keynote lectures. Thirdly, organizational ties were forged on this occasion between the IAHR and the ESSWE that will likely be advantageous to the organization in the future.

The panel "Esotericism and Its Boundaries: Between Discourses of Identity and Difference" pursued the central but under-explored question of esotericism's cultural and geographical identity: do we need the qualifying term "Western"? Why, or why not? These questions were explored in a total of ten papers. Some were specific case studies dealing with the East-West dynamic in esotericism research. Others were theoretical reflections on the analytical content, usefulness, restrictions, and future of the term "esotericism" and its Western identity. Others yet may best be characterized as historical reflections on the origins and genealogy of esotericism's perceived Western identity.

Steven Wasserstrom opened the panel with the first empirical case study. His paper on Hermeticism between Arabic, Jewish and Christian contexts discussed the networks and interconfessional circles in which medieval and late antique manuscripts identified as "Hermetic" were embedded. Other cases of the east-west dynamic focused on more recent periods. Henrik Bogdan's paper on the obscure 20th century Holy Order of Krishna, based in India, explored how Aleister Crowley's Thelemic doctrine was adopted and adapted through Hindu lenses. John L. Crow analyzed the geographic distribution and spread of the *Ordo Templi Orientis*, at the same time illustrating how a quantitative mapping technique may be helpful for scholarship on modern esoteric organizations. Gordan Djurdjevic looked at how Tantra and yogic practices can be understood under the rubric of esotericism, thereby questioning the Western particularism of the term. This paper sparked a lively debate, which touched the core of the problem: whether the term "esotericism" should be used as an ahistorical analytic construct, or taken to signify specific historical currents.

These questions were discussed in more detail by three theoretical papers. Kennet Granholm gave an overview of the ambiguous meaning of "the West". Focusing on some

implications of Samuel P. Huntington's thesis of the "clash of civilizations", Granholm argued that "the West" is not only imprecise and unanalytical, but also carries connotations which have wider (and perhaps unwanted) political and cultural implications.

The papers by Søren Feldtfof Thomsen and Egil Asprem both focused on the distinction between typological and historical definitions of esotericism. While historical definitions are particularistic and inductive in character, the typological constructs are universalistic and deductive. Hence it is only in the first type that a particular local identity, such as Eastern or Western, is called for. While Feldtfof Thomsen called for a move away from historical-inductive towards deductive typological conceptions, Asprem was more reluctant, calling instead for a methodological pluralism in which historical and typological research programmes may constructively complement each other.

Much interesting work is currently being done on the genealogy of the notion of esotericism. Two papers in particular explored this theme. Wouter Hanegraaff presented a condensed version of his recent thesis that the concept of Western esotericism has its roots first of all in what he calls the "Platonic Orientalism" of the renaissance, connected to notions of *philosophia perennis* and *prisca theologia*, and, secondly, in the Protestant and Enlightenment reactions to the "Platonic-Hermetic Christianity" that emerged from it, which was then being viewed as the hotbed of superstition, heresy, paganism and irrationalism. This thesis has implications not only for the cultural identity of esotericism, linking it intrinsically to cultural and intellectual dynamics of early modern Europe, but for the way we conceptualize and understand the field and its object of study as a whole.

Marco Pasi similarly took a historical approach to the central questions of the panel, but located the idea of the "Western" in "Western esotericism" somewhat later, namely in the internal splits and controversies of (particularly English) occultism during the last quarter of the 19th century. The main protagonists of that story were the dominant, high-profile and eastern-oriented Theosophical Society, and the many "Hermetic" groups that were founded at least partially in reaction to it. In struggles between these institutionalized esoteric groups, "Hermetic" became something of a signifier for an explicitly Western identity, as contrasted from the "Eastern" schools emphasized by Theosophy.

In addition to this large panel on esotericism another healthy sign for the field was the number of esotericism-related papers read elsewhere. A plenary talk may also be listed, namely Meera Nanda's keynote lecture on Theosophy's long-term impact on Hindu nationalist discourse in India. Additionally, several other panels featured esoteric themes. A panel on the new field of Satanism studies would

have been among these had it not been cancelled (Per Faxneld's paper on the varied reception history of the Lilith figure was integrated into the esotericism panel). Another panel focused on "esoteric interpretations of yoga", in which Karl Baier and Franz Winter discussed the Mesmeric context of the western reception of yoga, and its development in Theosophy, and Marco Pasi spoke about Crowley's views on spiritual practice. Finally, the two-session panel "Seduced by Science: The culture of science and religion in the early 20th century", convened by Egil Asprem and Tessel M. Bauduin included several papers on esoteric topics, including Cecile

Wilson on the AMORC, Gemma Kwantes on Yehuda Ashlag, Orlando Fernandez on David Bohm, and Francisco Santos Silva on Crowley and the unconscious.

A final important event of the conference was the ESSWE's successful application for status as an official affiliate of the IAHR. This means that in future conferences of the IAHR, the ESSWE will be entitled to conduct official business meetings and host sessions under its own name. At present, the ESSWE is one of only four associations with such affiliate status. ♦

## Upcoming conferences

### ESSWE 3: Lux in Tenebris

July 6–10, 2011

University of Szeged, Hungary

The European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism in cooperation with the University of Szeged and its Cultural Iconology and Semiography Research Group announces its third international conference on "The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism". Papers are invited in English, focusing on verbal and visual representations of Western esotericism from late Antiquity to the present age.

Invited keynote speakers include:

- Michael J. B. Allen (UCLA)
- Lina Bolzoni (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa)
- Pia Brinzeu (University of the West, Timisoara)
- Moshe Idel (Hebrew University, Jerusalem)

Read more on the conference homepage:

[www.staff.u-szeged.hu/~geszonyi/ESSWE3-2011/ESSWE3-main.htm](http://www.staff.u-szeged.hu/~geszonyi/ESSWE3-2011/ESSWE3-main.htm)

### Satanism in Western culture: International conference on the Devil's disciples

September 25–27, 2011

Stockholm University, Sweden

Satanism is a subject that has always drawn a lot of media attention as well as interest from the general public. Scholarly studies of the subject, however, have more often focused on socially constructed "Satanic Panics" than on Satanism as a religious alternative in itself. Recently, this has begun to change, and anthologies such as *Contemporary Religious Satanism* (Ed. Jesper A Petersen, Ashgate, 2009) have started to fill the gaps in scholarly knowledge concerning Satanism. A further attempt to remedy the situation was made when the first ever international scholarly conference on Satanism was organized in Trondheim, Norway, in 2009. The conference was a great success, and resulted in an anthology that will be published by Oxford University Press later this year. In September 2011, we welcome you to Stockholm, Sweden for the follow-up to 2009's gathering of specialists.

Deadline for abstracts: May 22, 2011. Submit your abstract (of no more than 250 words) to: [per.faxneld@rel.su.se](mailto:per.faxneld@rel.su.se) and [kennet.granhholm@rel.su.se](mailto:kennet.granhholm@rel.su.se) (remember to submit abstracts to both organisers). Please include institutional affiliation.

Papers dealing with most aspects of Satanism are welcome (including Satanism in literature, cinema, etc). However, we discourage papers treating "the Satanic panic", "Satanic ritual abuse", etc, as these themes have received sufficient scholarly attention.

Keynote speaker: Marco Pasi

Conference fee will be announced later.

## Report from the ESSWE board meeting

*Mark Sedgwick, Secretary*

The Board of ESSWE meets every year, whether or not there is an ESSWE conference. In 2010 the Board met in Amsterdam, on June 23, benefiting from the generous hospitality of Rosalie Basten, which (as in previous years) enabled the meeting to take place at minimal expense to the ESSWE's own funds. The report below gives details of decisions taken at that meeting, and of subsequent action taken on those decisions.

### Board membership and duties

The Board meeting started on a sad note, regretting the death of Henny Homan, who had served as the ESSWE's Secretary from the beginning of the ESSWE's existence. A Henny Homan Essay Prize has been established in her memory. Rosalie Basten, who had likewise served the ESSWE from the beginning, as Treasurer, submitted her resignation, and was appointed an Honorary Member of the ESSWE in recognition of her past services.

In cases such as this, when there is a vacancy on the Board but no conference (and so not enough members for a proper election), the Board is empowered to select a replacement itself. The Board thus decided to implement the proposal made during the Meeting of Members in Strasbourg in 2009 that there should be junior as well as senior researchers on the Board, and after passing a suitable by-law to allow PhD candidates to choose between student membership (in which case they benefit from reduced fees) and full membership (in which case they may vote and serve on the Board), appointed Egil Asprem (PhD candidate, Hermetic Philosophy, University of Amsterdam) to the Board. To broaden representation further, it was also decided that in future one MA student (or equivalent) should be invited to attend Board meetings as a non-voting representative for renewable one-year periods in response to the proposal of a group of such students, and a suitable bylaw was passed. It is hoped that a representative will be chosen during ESSWE's 2011 conference.

Helmut Zander (Modern History, Humboldt University) was appointed to the Board to fill the other vacancy, Demetrius Waarsenburg (Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam) was appointed as the new Treasurer (and thus a member of the Board *ex officio*), and Mark Sedgwick (Study of Religion, Aarhus University), who was already a member of the Board, was appointed as the new Secretary. The duties of the Secretary were redefined to separate membership issues from other matters, and Egil Asprem was appointed to the newly created post of Membership Secretary. Finally, Peter Forshaw (Hermetic Philosophy, University of Amsterdam) was appointed to the Board's Executive Committee, joining the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer in dealing with the day-to-day running of ESSWE.

One further place on the board is expected to fall vacant during 2011 as the result of the resignation of Antoine Faivre

(École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris). Proposals from members now having been invited and considered, the Board will nominate two candidates for the election that will be held during the 2011 conference: Francesca Crasta (Philosophy, University of Cagliari) and Birgit Menzel (Russian Literature and Culture, Johannes-Gutenberg University Mainz/Germersheim). Further information concerning these two candidates will be circulated in advance of the election.

### Activities

Peter Forshaw is now Editor in Chief of *Aries*, and continues to look for good submissions. Marco Pasi (Hermetic Philosophy, University of Amsterdam) is now Chief Editor of the *Aries* book series. Although no titles were published in 2009, several are now in the pipeline, and three were published towards the end of 2010, including *Constructing Tradition: Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism* (edited by Andreas Kilcher, Literary and Cultural Studies, ETH, Zurich), which contains a selection of papers from the ESSWE's inaugural conference in Tübingen.

Beyond these publications, the single most important thing that the ESSWE does is probably the organization of the international conference that takes place every two years. The Board discussed and accepted the proposal of György Szonyi (English/International Studies, University of Szeged) to organize the 2011 conference in Szeged, Hungary. The Call for Papers has since been circulated to members.

In years in which no ESSWE conference is held, it is important to organize panels at other conferences, including that of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), as has already been done. ESSWE has received affiliate status within the IAHR, a further step towards securing greater recognition of the study of Western Esotericism. A similar step is the establishment of regional networks: the Scandinavian Network for the Study of Western Esotericism (SNASWE) already exists, an Israeli Network (INASWE) is arranging its first conference, and it is hoped that further such networks will also be formed in the future. Any member who is interested in establishing such a network is invited to contact Mark Sedgwick ([mjs@teo.au.dk](mailto:mjs@teo.au.dk)).

After *Aries* and the *Aries* book series and conferences, the ESSWE website, [www.esswe.org](http://www.esswe.org), is—potentially—one of Society's most important contributions to the development of the field and to its members. All agreed that the ESSWE website needed improvement, partly because it does not work well (as many members who have had difficulties logging on will have noticed) and partly because it needs to offer services that it cannot at present offer, for purely technical reasons. It was decided that when the technical problems had been solved, the website should be expanded to provide a variety of useful resources (such as

lists of academic publishers, sources of funding, relevant theses, bibliographies on various topics, and even museums and galleries of relevance to the study of Western esotericism), a facility for mailing lists for individual topics (such as alchemy, magic, and Freemasonry), a database for upcoming papers and abstracts of papers (as suggested at the Strasbourg Meeting of Members), and pdfs of the first series of *Aries*, which—unlike the current series—is not available through normal channels. At the time of writing, however, the technical problems have not yet been solved. Peter Forshaw, the website manager, continues to work on this.

As well as the website, the *ESSWE Newsletter* is also very important. The attempt to move this online in the form of an interactive blog was evaluated, and it was concluded that this experiment had not worked, and that the blog should be closed and all online content concentrated on the main website. It was decided that the *Newsletter* should instead be revived in its old format—as it now has been, thanks to the efforts of Per Faxneld (History of Religions, Stockholm University).

Finally, the Board decided to establish a fund to provide travel bursaries for helping students and members from disadvantaged countries, to be used either for research trips or for participating in conferences and workshops, including those of the ESSWE.

#### **Financial matters**

The Board decided that there was no need to change the membership fee, and that members from the former Eastern Bloc should in future receive a 1/3 discount on their membership fees.

Because of the break in the management of the ESSWE's bank accounts caused by the illness and death of Henny Homan and because of the consequent lack of access to these accounts, it was not possible to prepare or consider accounts for the previous year as would normally have been done. The Board therefore decided to prepare accounts when possible, and to hold a further Meeting of Members to approve those accounts. It now looks likely that two sets of accounts will be submitted to the Meeting of Members in Szeged ♦

## **Esotericism studies in Israel: The Foundation of the Israeli Network for the Academic Study of Western Esotericism (INASWE)**

*Boaz Huss*

The Israeli Network for the Study of Western Esotericism (INASWE) was founded in September 2010, in order to bring together Israeli scholars who are interested in Western Esotericism and related trends, and to enhance the research and teaching of Western Esotericism in Israeli academia. The network includes scholars from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Haifa University, Tel Aviv University and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The scholars come from different disciplines, including History, Jewish Thought, Hebrew Literature, Sociology, Anthropology and Religious Studies. The network opened a Google group, ESWWE-ISRAEL (<http://groups.google.com/group/esswe-israel>), to enable discussions (in Hebrew) on Western Esotericism, and facilitate communications between the scholars. The group currently has 23 members.

The Inaugural conference of INASWE, organized by Yuval Harari, Chaim (Harvey) Hames, Boaz Huss, and Yossi (Jeffrey) Chajes and funded by the Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought, the Chaim Herzog Center for Middle East Studies & Diplomacy, and Ben-Gurion University, will take place at Ben-Gurion University on May 18th, 2011. The conference will host the president of ESSWE, Wouter Hanegraaff, and its secretary, Mark Sedgwick. Other participants will include, Boaz Huss, Yossi Chajes, Judith Weiss, Yossi Schwartz, Isaac Lubelsky and Julie Chajes.



## The world of esotericism studies: News from the three major centers for the scholarly study of Western Esotericism

### Paris

#### Jean-Pierre Brach

During the current academic year, the chair holder is giving two research seminars. The first concerns the French Christian kabbalist Guillaume Postel (1510-1581; a recurring interest of mine!) and is based on several unpublished ms. texts of his dedicated to the theme of "measure" and of mathematical symbolism as a key to the "Zohar". The second is about the transformation of Animal Magnetism from therapy to "magnetic magic" in post-1850 France (with side glances towards England).

Work is also in progress on the theme of "prayer" among the more important Christian kabbalists of the 16th and 17th centuries, as well as on the treatment, in 19th and 20th century Occultist literature, of Christ's "divine body".

A PhD under my supervision has very recently been defended (summa cum laude, by B. Barret), the first ever study on the French "pre-occultist" L. Lenain (1793-1877) whose works on kabbalah and angelic magic influenced most later occultists, on both sides of the Channel.

Other dissertations and PhDs are in progress, on Pico's magic and kabbalah and their sources, on the French 19th century Pythagorean theologian and philosopher P.F.G. Lacuria, on the concept and vocabulary of "initiation" in 18th century French Masonic literature, etc.

### Amsterdam

#### Wouter J. Hanegraaff

The Center for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents continues to run very well. In the summer of 2009, its 10-year anniversary was celebrated with a one-day conference and an anniversary volume: *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years' Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam*, edited by Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Joyce Pijenburg (Amsterdam University Press 2009). Around the same time, Kocku von Stuckrad left Amsterdam to accept a position as full professor at the University of Groningen. Fortunately, an excellent successor was found in the person of Peter J. Forshaw, who joined the Center in the summer of 2009 as Assistant Professor for Western Esotericism in the Early Modern Period.

As in previous years, the Center offers a cycle of four courses at the Bachelor level, as part of the program in Religious Studies; and a complete specialization program at the Master level, including the possibility for a 2-year Research Master focused on Western Esotericism. Together

with Islamic Studies, the Western Esotericism trajectory is now the most successful program within Religious Studies at the University of Amsterdam, attracting a good number of Dutch and international students each year. Over the last couple of years, many of them have successfully applied to Ph.D. programs in various countries, including those offered by the Amsterdam Center itself. Alongside the permanent staff members (Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Peter J. Forshaw, Marco Pasi), the classicist/archaeologist Demetrius Waarsenburg, connected to the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, has been teaching Hermetica II (antiquity/middle ages) since 2009. Last but not least, five Ph.D. candidates are presently working in Amsterdam on dissertations in the domain of Western esotericism: Egil Asprem (esotericism and scientific naturalism), Tessel Bauduin (esotericism and surrealism), Gemma Kwantes (contemporary kabbalah), Joyce Pijenburg (Giordano Bruno), and Osvald Vasicek (Johannes Reuchlin).

### Exeter

#### Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke

The Exeter Centre for the Study of Esotericism (EXESES) has now completed its fifth year of operation since its inauguration together with the Chair of Western Esotericism in August 2005. Beginning with eight admissions in 2005, the MA programme in Western Esotericism has admitted more than 90 students to its Master of Arts programme with consistently high results. After four full years of graduations from the two-year course, six have taken Distinctions, 23 Merits, the remainder with creditable Passes. 15 students presently continue into their second year of study.

The Chair has continued to foster research into Western Esotericism and Theosophy at the University. Over the same five-year programme 15 research students enrolled for an advanced degree under the Chair's supervision. Of these 3 EXESES research students have successfully presented their doctoral theses for the PhD degree from November 2008 to July 2010, while a further 12 research students continue in pursuit of the doctorate.

Student applications for the two-year MA programme in Western Esotericism remain competitive, maintaining high academic standards. There are currently 32 MA students, and graduation results in November 2009 have maintained previous standards. Two more research students (one a previous MA graduate) have enrolled in the doctoral research programme. International conference participation of EXESES staff, and increasingly among MA graduates and students, has been high; a strong record of publication is also evident. ♦

## Ph.D. projects of ESSWE members

*In this section, three ESSWE Ph.D. Candidates will give us a short introduction to their dissertation projects. Hopefully this will be a good way for the students to make others within the field aware of their research, and for others to stay up to date with what is going on in our field at the junior level.*

### “Theosophical Biology: The Convergence of Religion, Science, and Occultism Constructing the Human Body”



Photo © Michael Hofmann

John L. Crow,  
Florida State University,  
Department of Religion

While studying Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam, I became interested in the history of the Theosophical Society and its relationship with modern science, occultism, and Eastern religions. After completing my MA degree, I began studying Theosophy within the context of American religious history.

Since starting at Florida State University, I have focused my research on how Theosophy understood the human body and gender during the 19th century. Theosophy constructed understandings of the body by combining medical science, Eastern religions, and Western occult traditions. Building on worldviews emerging from modern Spiritualism, but tracing back to Mesmer and Swedenborg, among others, Theosophy represented humans as a combination of numerous parts and levels. These, in turn, were constructed and represented as having various properties and correspondences. Similarly, the body and internal organs were spiritualized and imbued with attributes that corresponded to varying levels of evolution, both in the individual and the race. Moreover, Victorian notions of gender were essentialized and projected ontologically, being incorporated into a dynamic cosmology that was also microcosmically reflected within individuals.

As I work towards my dissertation, my research will continue to explore various aspects of Theosophical cosmology and its relationship to the human body. Whether it is the complex gender constructions that, while simultaneously proclaiming the genders equal, spiritually favored males and limited female spiritual advancement, or examining how early versions of astral travel were translated into modern notions of the astral in technology, or how the body and emotions were used as part of power negotiations inside and outside the Theosophical Society, in each case I return to the intersection of Theosophy, occultism, science and Eastern religions as it was manifested by and through the human body.

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## “Esotericism and the Transmutation of Consciousness during the Fascist Period in Italy”



Roberto Bacci,  
Brown University, Department  
of Italian Studies

During the interwar period in Italy, the experience of individual transmutation was at the center of many fascist and esoteric discourses. Using a shared repertoire of images, these discourses aimed to create a new kind of man pushing toward a higher level of consciousness and the discovery of one's “true” self.

While fascist and esoteric discourses share many beliefs about transmutation, they diverge in the way they consider that of consciousness. In order to create the new Italian man, to form and fashion the masses, to mold them into a homogeneous and compliant collectivity, fascism disqualified individualistic tendencies: the subjects had to integrate into the collectivity, abandon their free will, and only thus attain consciousness of themselves as Italians and as fascists. Here the true self is attainable by the introduction of a pre-made self from the outside. In most discourses of esotericism, on the other hand, the recuperation of the self takes place entirely within the subject.

Many esotericists writing under the fascist regime expressed a deep concern about the self-determination and distinctiveness of individual consciousness, which they perceived as threatened by the influence of an external source of authority. This study focuses on the works of Julius Evola (1898-1974) and Mario Manlio Rossi (1895-1971) to show that, while both esotericism and fascism insisted on the shaping of a superior type of human being, most esoteric discourses warned against two risks that such transmutation might bring about: erasure of individuality and domination by an alien will. The discomfort with homogenization and loss of autonomy often led to subtle forms of defiance against the molding of consciousness by the regime, even in those authors who were relatively close to fascist positions on other issues.

## “The Vision of a ‘Christian Philosophy’: Christianity and Medical Alchemy in the Thought of Johan Baptista Van Helmont (1579-1644)”



Georgiana Hedesan,  
University of Exeter, EXESES  
Centre

My PhD dissertation (due 2012) addresses the work of the Belgian physician and alchemist Johan Baptista Van Helmont (1579-1644). In his posthumous magnum opus *Ortus Medicinæ* (1648), Helmont referred to himself as ‘a Bell, calling the Faithful together unto the Temple, which itself remains in the top of the Tower abroad’. This imagery points out that he viewed his life as a mission to reform the natural philosophy of his time by providing a Christian-driven perspective of the natural world. Thus, Helmont firmly believed he had been called to create a “Christian Philosophy” that would combine Christianity and natural philosophy in a harmonious whole. To do so, he felt his duty was to refute the tenets of the “heathen” Scholastic Aristotelianism of his era, which he found irreconcilable with Christian beliefs.

An analysis of Helmont's writings from his “Christian philosophy” perspective has never been undertaken. In my dissertation, I plan to assess the two main pillars of Helmont's thought, Christianity and alchemical philosophy. Helmont's Christian approach was an esoteric combination of Christian Neoplatonism, mysticism, Hermeticism and Kabbalah with a strong Augustinian tendency. Helmont's alchemical philosophy drew its inspiration from the theory and practice of medical alchemy, whose roots harkened back to medieval Roger Bacon, John of Rupescissa and Raymond Lully, and became strongly emphasized by Theophrastus Paracelsus and the Paracelsians in the 16th century. Medical alchemy often embraced a pronounced Christian mysticism, drawing parallels between Christ and the Philosopher's Stone and between the Biblical Genesis and distillatory alchemy. Thus, Helmont believed that Christianity and alchemical philosophy were fundamentally complementary and attested to the unity of knowledge and revelation from God. My dissertation, which builds upon my MA thesis at the University of Exeter, is hence analyzing Helmont's project of profound reformation of knowledge based on a fundamentally esoteric worldview.



## Recently published books

### Marco Pasi

Books preceded by an asterisk are available for review in *Aries*. Please contact the book-review editor, Marco Pasi ([m.pasi@uva.nl](mailto:m.pasi@uva.nl)) if interested.

Gian Mario Cazzaniga (ed.), *Storia d'Italia: Annali 25: Esoterismo*, Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2010, xxx + 781 pp. ISBN: 978-8806190354.

An important publication. Here is a volume published in a prestigious series of a very prestigious publisher. The essays included in the book are from Italian leading scholars and a few non-Italian specialists focusing on the history of esotericism in Italy.

Alessandro Grossato (ed.), *Forme e correnti dell'esoterismo occidentale*, Milano: Medusa, 2008, 232 pp. ISBN: 978-8876981777.

The proceedings of an important conference that took place at the Fondazione Cini, Venice, in 2007. Some of the leading international specialists in the field were invited and have contributed an essay in the book. Together with the book edited by Cazzaniga, a small sign that scholarly interest in esotericism is on the rise in Italy.

\*Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Joyce Pijnenburg (eds.), *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years' Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009, 164 pp. ISBN: 978-9056295721.

*Hermes in the Academy* commemorates the tenth anniversary of the Centre for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents (GHF) at the University of Amsterdam. The volume includes a few essays from the scholars associated with the centre, information about its history and present organization, testimonies, and perspectives on its international network.

Jean-François Marquet, *Philosophies du secret. Études sur la gnose et la mystique chrétienne (XVI<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris: Cerf, 2007, 399 pp. ISBN: 978-2204081276.

A compilation of essays and articles published between 1972 and 2001, devoted to various esoteric authors such as Paracelsus, Guillaume Postel, Jacob Boehme, Athanasius Kircher,

Emanuel Swedenborg, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, and Franz von Baader. Marquet is professor emeritus of the university of Paris IV (Sorbonne).

\*Andreas B. Kilcher and Philipp Theisoehn (eds.), *Die Enzyklopädie der Esoterik. Allwissenmythen und universalwissenschaftliche Modelle in der Esoterik der Neuzeit*, München: Wilhelm Fink, 2010, 313 pp. ISBN 978-3-7705-5070-8.

Esotericism has always been closely related to the ideal of encyclopaedic, universal knowledge. The volume originates from a conference held in 2006 at the Herzog-August-Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel and includes contributions mostly in German (with a few in English) that investigate this relationship in its various historical forms.

Kevin van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 296 pp. ISBN 978-0195376135.

The first major study devoted to the early Arabic reception and adaption of the figure of Hermes Trismegistus. This book explains the origins of the Arabic myth of Hermes Trismegistus, its sources, the reasons for its peculiar character, and its varied significance for the traditions of Hermetica in Asia and northern Africa as well as Europe.

Kocku von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2010, 242 pp. ISBN 978-9004184220.

Addressing discourses of perfect knowledge in Western culture between 1200 and 1800, this book integrates the study of Western esotericism in the larger analytical framework of the European history of religion.

Jesper Aagaard Petersen (ed.), *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology*, Farnham – Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009, 277 pp. ISBN 978-0754652861.

This book brings together a group of international scholars to produce the first serious book-length study of religious Satanism. The first part contains broader studies of influential groups and important aspects of the Satanic milieu. The second part narrows the view to regional variations, especially with studies on Northern and Eastern Europe. The third part consists of primary documents selected for their representational and informational value.

Arthur Versluis, Claire Fanger, Lee Irwin, and Melinda Phillips (eds.), *Esotericism, Religion, and Nature*, Minneapolis: North American Academic Press, 2010, 344 pp. ISBN 978-1596500099.

Published by the Association for the Study of Esotericism (ASE), this is the second volume of the Studies in Esotericism Book Series. The contributors explore how nature can be understood in a wide range of esoteric religious contexts. Subjects range from alchemy and panpsychism to music, Appalachian folk magic, and new religions.

Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible. The Paranormal and the Sacred*, Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2010, 320 pp. ISBN 978-0226453866.

According to Kripal, research into the paranormal has often been dismissed too easily and without serious investigation of its premises and procedures. The book focuses on four major figures in the history of paranormal research: psychical researcher Frederic Myers; writer and humorist Charles Fort; astronomer, computer scientist, and ufologist Jacques Vallée; and philosopher and sociologist Bertrand Méheust.

Hartmut Binder, *Gustav Meyrink: Ein Leben im Bann der Magie*, Prag: Vitalis, 2009, 784 pp. ISBN 978-3899190786.

A lavishly illustrated biography of the famous author of *Der Golem*, with many details about his interest for, and involvement in, the occultist milieus of his time.

Theodor Harmsen, *Der magische Schriftsteller Gustav Meyrink, seine Freunde und sein Werk beleuchtet anhand eines Rundgangs durch die Meyrink-Sammlung der Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam, unter Verwendung weiterer Sammlungen*, Amsterdam: Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, 2009, 320 pp., ISBN 978-9071608254.

Another important publication on Meyrink, also with many illustrations and based on the beautiful collection of documents held by the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica in Amsterdam.

\*Béatrice Delaurenti, *La puissance des mots : Débats doctrinaux sur le pouvoir des incantations au Moyen Age*, Paris: Cerf, 2007, 579 pp., ISBN 978-2204082273.

What is the power of words? What is the origin of this power? Is it divine, demonic, or natural? In the Middle Ages these questions were hotly debated and different answers were given. This book focuses on these debates and their broader cultural implications.

\*Benedek Láng, *Unlocked Books: Manuscripts of Learned Magic in the Medieval Libraries of Central Europe*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008, 312 pp. ISBN 978-0271033778.

Lang's book focuses on the transmission of magical texts in central and Eastern Europe, a phenomenon that until now had received less attention from scholars than its Western counterpart.

Dave Evans and Dave Green (eds.), *Ten Years of Triumph of the Moon. A Collection of Essays*, n.p.: Hidden Publishing, 2009, 232 pp., ISBN 978-0955523755.

The book collects essays that look back at research on contemporary paganism ten years after the publication of the groundbreaking *Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, by Ronald Hutton. It includes an extended essay by Ronald Hutton on the history of research in this field, the state of it today and some of his thoughts for the future.



\*Martin Mulso (ed.), *Spätrenaissance-Philosophie in Deutschland 1570-1650: Entwürfe zwischen Humanismus und Konfessionalisierung, okkulten Traditionen und Schulmetaphysik*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2009, 404 pp. ISBN 978-3484366244.

The various essays collected in the book focus on the philosophical landscape of the German-speaking area during the late Renaissance, until the middle of the seventeenth century. This includes currents and authors strongly influenced by esotericism.

Monika Neugebauer-Wölk (ed.), *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Rezeption - Integration - Konfrontation*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2009, 518 pp., ISBN 978-3484810372.

As a conclusion of a big research project on esotericism and the Enlightenment led in Halle by Neugebauer-Wölk, this volume collects essays that were presented in a conference held in 2008 and that address many different aspects of this complex relationship.

\*Aurélie Choné, *Rudolf Steiner, Carl Gustav Jung, Hermann Hesse : Passeurs entre Orient et Occident : Intégration et transformation des savoirs sur l'Orient dans l'espace germanophone (1890-1940)*, Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2009, 411 pp., ISBN 978-2868203960.

The book focuses on three important figures of the cultural and spiritual landscape of the 20th century: Rudolf Steiner, Carl Gustav Jung, and Hermann Hesse. The author is particularly interested in their views concerning intercultural dialogue and the relationship between West and East.

\*Gísli Magnússon, *Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik: Esoterische und okkultistische Modernität bei R. M. Rilke*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009, 453 pp., ISBN 978-3826040764.

A thorough investigation of the esoteric dimension of Rainer M. Rilke's literary work.

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### Latest titles in the "Aries Book Series", published under the auspices of the ESSWE:

Laurence Wuidar (ed.), *Music and Esotericism*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2010, 379 pp. ISBN-13: 978-9004182677.

This collection of essays analyzes the relationships that exist between esotericism and music from Antiquity to the 20th century, investigating ways in which magic, astrology, alchemy, divination, and kabbala interact with music.

Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi, and Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Kabbalah and Modernity: Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2010, 463 pp. ISBN 978-9004182844.

The persistence of kabbalistic groups in the 20th century has largely been ignored or underestimated by scholars of religion. Only recently have scholars begun to turn their attention to the many-faceted roles that kabbalistic doctrines and schools have played in 19th- and 20th-century culture. This volume brings together leading representatives of this ongoing debate in order to break new ground for a better

understanding and conceptualization of the role of kabbalah in modern religious, intellectual, and political discourse.

Andreas B. Kilcher (ed.), *Constructing Tradition. Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2010, 474 pp. ISBN 978-9004191143.

The book is based on essays presented at the first international conference of the ESSWE, held in Tübingen in July 2007. The question of constructing tradition, concepts of origin, and memory as well as techniques and practices of knowledge transmission, are central for cultures in general. In esotericism such questions and techniques play an even more outstanding role. Esoteric paradigms understand themselves in elaborated mytho-poetical narratives as bearers of "ancient", "hidden", "higher" knowledge. They also claim that this knowledge has been transmitted by particular (esoteric) means, media and groups. Consequently, esotericism not only involves the construction of its own tradition; it can even be understood as a specific form of tradition and transmission.

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## Henny Homan Essay Prize

Submissions are invited for the Henny Homan Essay Prize, established by ESSWE to honour the memory of Mrs Henny Homan, who served as the ESSWE's Secretary from its foundation in 2005 until 2010.

The prize is to be awarded annually for a previously unpublished essay by an MA student in any area of the scholarly study of Western Esotericism, judged by the selection committee to be of outstanding quality. The prize-winning essay will normally be published in the *ESSWE Newsletter*, and the author will receive a cash prize of €100. The President of the ESSWE will appoint the Chair of the selection committee, and that Chair will then appoint two further members to serve on the committee.

Essays from all academic disciplines are welcome. Submissions may be in English, French, German, Italian, or Spanish and should be between 2,000 and 3,000 words in length, including footnotes and bibliography.

All entries should be submitted in electronic form (as a Word document) to the Secretary, Mark Sedgwick, [mjs@teo.au.dk](mailto:mjs@teo.au.dk). Each entry should contain a separate title page giving the author's name, institution, academic program, postal address, and email address. The author's name and contact details must not appear on the pages of the essay as the identity of the author will not be made available to the judges.

The deadline for submissions for the 2011 prize is 31 July 2011.

## Closing words from the editor

This issue of the *Newsletter* marks a new strategy in ESSWE's communication with its members, or perhaps more precisely: a return to an older tried and tested means of communication, but with a couple of new twists. As editor I welcome all suggestions for how the *Newsletter* can be improved. Please let me know what you think works, and what does not. Ideas for new sections or features, or just praise or complaints in general, can be emailed to me at [per.faxneld@rel.su.se](mailto:per.faxneld@rel.su.se). The next issue will be published during the autumn of 2011. ♦