

Résumé:

Several biographical studies have been written on the Russian occultist and aristocrat H. P. Blavatsky (1831-1891), but her theosophy still remains a rather overlooked terrain in the history of religions. The overall aim of the present article is therefore to examine Blavatsky's theosophy as a historical phenomenon. Grounded in recent empirical-historical studies of western esotericism the article sets out to challenge earlier studies on the subject which generally argue that Blavatsky's theosophy and the occult are 'irrational', unhistorical, bi-products of established society. By discussing and analysing the structure and historical context of Blavatsky's theosophy the article shows how Blavatsky's theosophy rather should be regarded as a historical continuation of what now has been identified as 'traditional western esotericism' fused with some of the most crucial characteristics of modernity itself. The composition of Blavatsky's theosophy is revealed to both contain all of the six pre-modern constitutional elements of Antoine Faivre's definition of 'traditional western esotericism' and central features of modernity itself such as evolution and scientism. It is also made clear how the theosophy of Blavatsky, in the spirit of syncretism, not only should be understood as an attempt to re-mystify the world or as a reaction against modernity, due to its pre-modern character, but in fact also should be understood as a part of modernity itself; as an expression of modern religious creativity and the adaptation of western esotericism to the modern world.