

# H.E.R.M.E.S.

Autumnal Equinox 2010



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## H.E.R.M.E.S.' PURPOSE:

§ 1: To advance and balance the Academic Study of Esotericism.

§ 2: To establish and maintain an international and interdisciplinary Academic Research Society in the field of Esotericism in relation to Religion, Philosophy, Science and Art.



## CONFERENCES

**Alchemy, Hermeticism, and Islamic and Jewish Mysticism Around the Time of Chrétien de Troyes**

**Dates:** Friday, October 15<sup>th</sup> to Sunday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010

**Location:** Eagle Hill Foundation, Steuben, Maine, USA

**Cost:** 150 USD

This symposium will have a dual thematic focus on (1) major esoteric and mystical movements of the fascinatingly rich intellectual and religious cultures of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, namely, alchemy, hermeticism, and Islamic and Jewish mysticism; and (2) the works of Chrétien de Troyes, whose Arthurian romances seem to suggest an awareness of some aspects of these movements. Recent scholarship has suggested that there was not only a higher degree of intercultural and interreligious permeability during this time period-especially between Spain and France-than previously suspected but that important channels of transmission of ideas, treatises, and texts have been overlooked. The symposium is intended to foster an exchange of ideas among participants, whose areas of expertise are generally considered to be distinct from one another. This confluence of otherwise diverse academic perspectives will provide a comparative framework to explore the broad range of cultural resources accessible to writers and intellectual communities during the time of Chrétien de Troyes.

For further information, including the published proceedings and the new scholarly journal *Arcanum*, see

[http://www.eaglehill.us/publicity\\_flyers/Chretien\\_symposium.pdf](http://www.eaglehill.us/publicity_flyers/Chretien_symposium.pdf)

We welcome your interest in the symposium! Inquiries are welcome!

Contact person:

Dr. Ingrid E. Lotze

office@eaglehill.us; 207-546-2821

Eagle Hill Foundation, PO Box 9, Steuben, Maine, USA

www.eaglehill.us



## **Fourth International Conference of the Association for the Study of Esotericism and Mysticism: The Secret and the Manifest: The Variety of Representations of Esotericism and Mysticism**

**Dates:** 2<sup>nd</sup> December to 4<sup>th</sup> December 2010

**Location:** Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine. National Mining University, Department of Philosophy, lecture room 1/117.

49005 Ukraine, Dnipropetrovsk, Karl Marx avenue, 19.

Phone (+38)0562-470211, fax (+38)0562-470835

**Conference Fee:** 20 Euros (for participants who are not from countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States). Fee to be paid upon registration.

**Deadline for Submission of Papers:** 01 December 2010

This conference is presented in collaboration with:

National Mining University, Department of Philosophy (Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine)  
H. S. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy (National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine)  
Ukrainian Association of Religion Researchers  
Research Center for Mysticism and Esotericism (St. Petersburg, Russia)  
Centre for Religious Studies and International Spiritual Relations (Donetsk, Ukraine)

The presence of elements of esotericism and mysticism in contemporary culture can scarcely be overestimated. At the same time there is still the stereotyped view of esotericism as based on some 'secret knowledge'. The various actual public (re)presentations of 'esoteric knowledge', however, question the notion of its secrecy; esoteric and mystic phenomena require more accurate categories for description.

The dynamics of the representation of these phenomena in different forms of media, in films or museums etc. on the one hand, and the dialectics of global and local dimensions in the history and the present of esotericism and mysticism on the other, are the issues to be discussed at the fourth annual conference 'Mystic and Esoteric Movements in Theory and Practice' organized by the Association for the Study of Esotericism and Mysticism. Special attention should be paid not only to the variety of manifestations of esotericism and mysticism in the contemporary media scene but also to their interrelations with other social formations and institutions such as the dominating forms of institutionalized religiosity, the political mainstream in the matter of religion and spirituality and last but not least the academic study of religions and culture.

The conference organizers hope that this scholarly forum will contribute significantly to the development of this promising area of research. The study of the representations of esotericism and mysticism circulating within the esoteric and mystic environment itself, in their public perception via mass media and within academic circles may lay the ground for further development in the field of the study of mysticism and esotericism in Russia and other post-Soviet countries.

### **Call for Papers: Deadline 01 October 2010**

We invite suggestions for possible sessions as well as paper proposals dealing with the study of this phenomenon through various academic disciplines. Papers can be submitted on, but are not limited to the following sub-themes:

- esotericism, mysticism and media: theoretical aspects of interrelations;
- global and local dimensions of esoteric imaginations;
- theory & method in the study of mysticism and esotericism;
- problems in the representation of mystic experiences;
- hermeneutics of esoteric imagery;
- historical development of esoteric symbolic forms;
- symbolic language characteristics of esotericism and mysticism;
- self-presentations of esoteric groups in the mass media and other media forms;
- representations of mysticism and esotericism in museums;
- esoteric and mystic images in film;
- imagination and visualisation in mysticism and esotericism.

## **Conference Languages:** Russian, Ukrainian & English

Applications for the conference are to be sent to the address of the organizing committee [conference.esot2010@mail.ru](mailto:conference.esot2010@mail.ru) by 01 October 2010. We kindly request to fill in the forms in the following manner:

1. Full name:
2. Date of birth:
3. Academic degree:
4. Home address:
5. Place of work:
6. Current position:
7. Contact phone:
8. E-Mail:
9. Need of accommodation (yes/no):
10. Need of an official invitation from the Organizational committee (yes/no):
11. Need of technical equipment for your report presentation (yes (please, specify which equipment you need)/no):
12. Paper title:
13. Short paper abstract (approx. 200 words):
14. The language of the paper presentation:

The decision on the applications will be communicated within a week after the deadline via e-mail.

### **Style Format**

The organizing committee plans to publish selected papers in the conference proceedings (minimum editing in cooperation with authors will take place where required). The papers of authors who do not present their papers during the conference cannot be published. The size of the full paper text including footnotes and bibliography should be between 10.000 and 20.000 characters including spaces (calculated e.g. by the MS Word feature). The text is to be sent to the organizing committee in electronic form (accepted formats are \*.doc or \*.rtf) by 01.11.2010. The model paper text is available at the homepage of the ASEM. It can also be sent per e mail upon request.

### **Conference E-mail and Homepage**

For additional information about the conference, please send an e-mail to the conference organizers ([conference.esot2010@mail.ru](mailto:conference.esot2010@mail.ru)).

The latest information about the conference will be published at the homepage of the Association for the study of Esotericism and Mysticism (ASEM) <http:// asem.ucoz.org>

### **Organizing Committee**

Chair: Prof. Dr. Julia Shabanova (Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine), Dr. Sergey Pakhomov (Saint-Petersburg, Russia)

Members: Prof. Dr. Andrey Zabayako (Blagoveshchensk, Russia), Prof. Dr. Igor Kozlovsky (Donetsk, Ukraine); Prof. Dr. Ludmila Filipovich (Kyiv, Ukraine), Prof. Dr. Birgit Menzel (Mainz, Germany); Dr. Yuriy Zavhorodniy (Kyiv, Ukraine); Dr. Sergey Kapranov (Kyiv,

Ukraine); Vadim Zhdanov (Erlangen, Germany).



### **Third ESSWE Conference: Lux in Tenebris: The Visual and Symbolic in Western Esotericism**

**Dates:** 06 July 6-10 July 2011

**Location:** Szeged, Hungary ;Faculty of Arts and University Library, University of Szeged

The European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE) 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”.

#### **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)

#### **Call for Papers: Deadline 15 November 2010**

Papers in written in English focusing on verbal and visual representations of Western Esotericism from late Antiquity to the present age are invited to be submitted. Please send the title of your proposed 20 minute paper, along with your affiliation and a short abstract, via e-mail to György E. Szönyi: <geszonyi@lit.u-szeged.hu> by 15 November 2010.

#### **Program Overview**

Wednesday July 6:

15:00-18:00 Registration on the first day and each morning of subsequent days

16:00-18:00 Sightseeing in Szeged (optional)

18:30-19:30 Welcome reception

20:00-20:50 Plenary talk 1

Thursday July 7

09:00-10:30 Session 1;

11:00-11:50 Plenary 2;

12:00-13:30 Session 2

14:30-16:00 Session 3;

16:30-18:30 Session 4

19:00 ESSWE Members' Meeting

20:00 Reception

Friday July 8

09:00–10:30 Session 5;

11:00–12:00 Plenary 3;

12:00–13:30 Session 6

15:00 Visit to the Somogyi County Library, which holds an exquisite collection of early modern esoterica. Conference dinner: Szeged Fish-souping (optional)

Saturday July 9

09:00–10:30 Session 7;

11:00–12:00 Plenary 4;

12:00–13:30 Session 8;

13:45 Conference closes

July 10, Sunday

10:30–14:00 Excursion in Budapest: "A Magical Mystery Tour in the Catacombs of the Buda Castle" (optional)

### **Anticipated Costs**

**Pre-registration** for the conference (through the ESSWE website until 1 June, 2011)

- Full members of ESSWE: € 70
- Student members of ESSWE: € 50
- All other participants: € 90  
Reduced fee for ex-East-bloc citizens: € 40 (for students € 30)

### **Extra charge for**

- On-site late registration: +€ 10 in all categories
- Conference Dinner: € 25 (optional)
- Budapest tour: TBA (optional)
- Lodging in Szeged: HUF 6000–20000 per night (about € 20-70)

Szeged, declared a free royal town in 1246, is the fourth largest city in Hungary, a college-centre, with many institutions of higher and secondary education, museums, and theatres. The University, established in 1921, is the second largest in Hungary, with about thirty thousand students. After a devastating flood in 1879, the inner city was rebuilt in neo-classical, eclectic, and spectacular Art Nouveau styles. Situated on the River Tisza, Szeged is also famous for its spas, and is the home of paprika. The city is connected by direct motorway to most parts of Europe, and can be reached in two hours by train from Budapest's Ferihegy International Airport.

See: <<http://www.szegedportal.hu>>.



## **International Symposium on Fin-de-siècle Symbolism: Between Light and Darkness**

**Dates:** 09 December-10 December 2010

**Location:** Helsinki, Finland, Ateneum Art Museum - Finnish National Gallery

The focus of the symposium is on religion, mysticism, and subjectivity in Symbolist art and theory, and on the fin-de-siècle relationship between art and science, considering also the ways in which the Symbolist influence has continued after the fin-de-siècle period. The purpose is to bring together scholars studying Symbolism and related subjects and to shed new light on the interconnectedness of esoteric thought and the discourses of Modernity.

Between Light and Darkness is organized as a collaboration by the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki, the Department of Art History at the University of Helsinki, and the Ateneum Art Museum - Finnish National Gallery, which hosts an important collection of Symbolist art mainly by Finnish artists, such as Magnus Enckell, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Hugo Simberg, and Ellen Thesleff. The symposium is supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation.

The symposium wishes to pay tribute to the Finnish art historian Salme Sarajas-Korte who was among the first researchers to initiate a discussion on the relations between artistic and mystical discourses. Her doctoral dissertation on Symbolist art, published in 1966, for which she did extensive archival work at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, is still unparalleled in its understanding of the interconnectedness of Symbolist art with the broader cultural field of literature, philosophy, religion, and mysticism.

Professor Lynn L. Sharp of Whitman College, author of the 2006 book *Secular Spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century France*, has been confirmed as a keynote speaker. Further information about speakers, sessions, and the program will be announced later on the symposium web page <http://www.ateneum.fi/default.asp?docId=13811>

The organizers of the symposium invite paper proposals from scholars of art history, literature, music, cultural history, religion, etc. The presentations may cover any topic relating to the theme of the symposium. Presenters are asked to prepare a 20 minute talk and allow 10 minutes for discussion.

Those interested in presenting a paper at the symposium should send an abstract in English (max. 400 words) to Marja Lahelma ([marja.lahelma@helsinki.fi](mailto:marja.lahelma@helsinki.fi)) by September 15, 2010.



**Forty-Sixth International Congress on Medieval Studies: Alchemy in the**

## **Literature, Art, and Natural Philosophy of the 14th Century**

Session sponsored by Societas Alchimica: (co-sponsored with the 14th Century Society)

**Dates:** 12 May-15 May 2011

**Location:** Kalamazoo, MI, USA

**Call for Papers:** Deadline extension to September 30<sup>th</sup>.

Societas Alchimica has extended the deadline for abstracts for those interested in presenting at their sponsored sessions at the 46th International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, MI, May 12-15 2011. The September 15th deadline has been extended until September 30, and papers on the intersection of alchemy and magic are more than welcome. Independent scholars (those not affiliated with a university) are also welcome. The original topic was Alchemy and the History of Science, but the small number of papers so far received may require re-titling the sessions depending upon the proposals received. The new topic has been broadened to alchemy and whatever you might like to talk about, as long as you do so in an entertaining and erudite fashion.

If interested, please send an abstract to Teresa Burns at [burnst@uwplatt.edu](mailto:burnst@uwplatt.edu). If you are an independent scholar, please send a paragraph describing your background of scholarship along with your proposal.



## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **ESSWE PhD Thesis Prize**

Nominations are invited for the second biennial ESSWE PhD Thesis prize, awarded by the board of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism. The prize will be given for an outstanding European PhD thesis completed between 1 January 2009 and 1 March 2011 on any aspect of Western Esotericism (broadly conceived). The thesis may be European in the sense of having been submitted at a university in Europe, or in the sense of having been submitted by a European citizen at a university anywhere in the world. The thesis must have been approved formally by the nominee's thesis committee, but the degree need not have been formally awarded.

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, 6-10 July 2011. 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, not the Prize Committee. If it deems that no thesis reaches an appropriate standard, the Prize Committee will not award a prize.

Nominations must be made by electronic mail to the Chair of the Prize Committee, Andreas Kilcher (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich, [akilcher@ethz.ch](mailto:akilcher@ethz.ch)) by 1 March 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, Zurich (Chair)
- Boaz Huss, Ben Gurion University of the Negev
- Helmut Zander, Ruhr-Universität, Bochum

### **The Richard Kieckhefer Prize**

The Richard Kieckhefer Prize was established by the Societas Magica in 2009 to honor Professor Kieckhefer's contributions to the field and his mentoring of younger scholars. It is awarded annually for an unpublished article by a recent PhD (within 2 years of graduation), in any area of the scholarly study of magic, witchcraft, or related fields, judged by the selection committee to be of outstanding quality. In exceptional cases consideration will also be given to graduate student submissions. The prize is supported by Penn Press Journals and the Societas Magica.

The winner will be announced at the Societas Magica meeting in May 2011 as well as in its newsletter and on its website. The winning entry will also be published in the journal *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* and the author will receive a cash prize of \$500. Articles from all academic disciplines are welcome. Submissions should be in English and approximately 6,000 words in length. Applicants must not have received their PhD earlier than September 2008. A committee appointed by the Societas Magica will judge the entries. It is not necessary that the prize be awarded each year. The deadline for submissions is January 15, 2011. Please forward an electronic version of the article (.rtf or .doc preferred) to [frank.klaassen@usask.ca](mailto:frank.klaassen@usask.ca). In addition, please send three printed copies with a letter indicating date of past or expected reception of PhD and the granting institution to:

Frank Klaassen, President  
Societas Magica  
Department of History  
University of Saskatchewan  
718 - 9 Campus Drive  
Saskatoon, SK  
Canada S7L 0M3



## **CONFERENCE REPORT**

### **IAHR Conference: August 15<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> in Toronto, Canada**

The theme of the twentieth World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions was Religion: A Human Phenomenon. The choice of this theme was intended to include scholarly work from the natural and social sciences, as well as the more commonly associated fields of history and comparative studies. The program's goal,

as stated in the Congress handbook, was 'to bridge traditional geographic and academic specializations in [...] the modern academic and scientific study of religion.'

The subject of Esotericism seems a fitting vehicle to facilitate such bridge-building. Indeed, there were six sessions either directly or indirectly linked to Esotericism. In addition, the plenary on Eastern religions and esotericism given by a scholar whose PhD is in microbiology, echoed the connection between science and esotericism explored in the 'Seduced by Science' panel.

The discussion delineating the boundaries of the field of (Western) Esotericism continues to evolve and will probably continue on for some time. One of my colleagues reported that a session he attended dealt with similar debate in the longer-established domain of religious studies.

This year marks the fifteenth anniversary of the participation of our field in the IAHR. Hopefully, the contributions esotericism's scholars have made will be recognized by a plenary address delivered by one of our members at the next session of IAHR.

What follows is a report of the twentieth Congress, necessarily given the lens of my own understanding. I am entirely at fault for any inaccuracies. (Cecile Wilson)

### **Seduced by Science Panel**

The first to be presented was the panel 'Seduced by Science', facilitated by Egil Asprem and Tessel M. Baudin, both of the University of Amsterdam. The morning session featured papers by Baudin, William Ramp (University of Lethbridge, Canada) and myself (Cecile Wilson).

**Tessel Baudin's** paper, **Artists as Modest Instruments of the New Era: Science, Religion and the Avant-Garde**, elucidated the manner in which "revolutionary developments in science" influenced avant-garde artists as they attempted to create a new kind of art, freed from the limited conceptions of a three-dimensional reality. Using the linking concept of space-particularly "deep space", or the visual perception of a third dimension-Baudin demonstrated how different painters rejected the traditional and academic value of perspective in order to explore other dimensions suggested by developments in, for example, atomic theory and mathematics. She also connected these developments with concepts being promoted in the occult milieu of the time.

In his paper on **Traces and truths: Science and self-invention in the Edwardian cult of art**, **William Ramp** examined the 'possible confluence of science and religion in the world of art-connoisseurship'. 'Ramp used the examples of several doctors who were art connoisseurs who sought to use "systematic and scientific" attention to detail to supplant the mysterious, undefinable techniques of the aristocratic aesthete in order to prove authenticity. Ramp linked this obsession for infallible proof of the legitimacy of an artwork with a desire for demonstrating the authenticity of the self.

My own paper on **The Intersection of Science and 'Practical Mysticism' in the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC 1917-1926** looked at various references made to scientific concepts or texts in the early publications of AMORC. I concluded that while the Order encouraged an interest in the scientific discoveries and theories of the day, the main purpose seemed to be to legitimize AMORC's particular ontological viewpoint with evidence from the work of well-known and respected scientists.

The afternoon portion of the Seduced by Science panel was presented by Gemma Kwantes (University of Amsterdam), Orlando Fernandez (University of Exeter) and Francisco Santos Silva (Universidade Nova de Lisboa).

In **The Same but Better: Science in the Thought of Yehuda Ashlag (1885-1954)**, **Gemma Kwantes** examined Ashlag's "ambivalence towards science", identifying scientific themes that occur in his own particular system of Kabbalah and giving examples of ways in which Ashlag adopted some of the features of popular science, while at the same time maintaining his firm belief in the superiority of Kabbalah. Furthermore, Kwantes drew the link between Ashlag's "strategic use of science" and the approach to science followed by Bnei Baruch and the Kabbalah Centre, two modern organizations grounded in Ashlag's Kabbalistic system.

This was followed by **Orlando Fernandez's** presentation on **Esotericism and the Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics: David Bohm (1917-1992)**. A physicist who was both revered and reviled, Bohm was heavily influenced by the thought of Hegel and Jiddhu Krishnamurti. According to Fernandez, Bohm's philosophy of being contained 'all the essential characteristics of an esoteric system'. In essence, Bohm proposed 'a different way of doing science.'

The final paper of the session was **Crowley and the Unconscious** by **Francisco Santos Silva**. Silva outlined Crowley's innovative approach to magic, which he put forth in his essay 'The Initiated Interpretation of Ceremonial Magic.' In essence, Crowley attributed the results of magical operations to the efficaciousness of their effect on the brain and the unconscious, achieving 'a de-sacralisation of magic'.

### **Western Esotericism Panel**

The three panels specifically falling under the rubric of Western Esotericism debated the application of the term 'Western Esotericism' from various perspectives.

**Steven Wasserstrom** (Reed College) opened the first session of the panel, addressing the question **Is Judeo-Islamic Hermeticism "Western Esotericism"?** Wasserstrom enumerated various mentions of Hermes in Jewish and Muslim texts, pointing out associations with various figures in those traditions, such as Enoch and Metatron. He considers Hermes to be a metaphor for the occult sciences and science in general. And the Sabians to be 'stand-ins for Hermetics.' He cautioned, however, against distorting history by considering Hermeticists to be 'a discrete, self-identified group.' 'It may be true,' Wasserstrom said, 'but we don't have any evidence of it.'

**Wouter Hanegraaff** (University of Amsterdam) followed with an examination of **Platonic Orientalism and Western Esotericism**. Hanegraaff advanced the position that the term 'Hermeticism' should be replaced by 'Platonic Orientalism' and that 'Western' serves as a key adjective for defining the field. For Christian Platonists, Plato and Plotinus were 'mouthpieces...of God', developing their philosophy from the earlier wisdom of the ancient tradition of the East, including Egypt, Persia and India. The two philosophers were viewed in a religious context, not as 'innovative' and rational, because Western Esotericism is, therefore, a Christian phenomenon, Jewish and Islamic esotericism should, he said, be studied as 'autonomous fields'.

**Gordon Djurdjevic** (Simon Fraser University) followed with **A Web or Relations: Interpreting Indian Yoga and Tantra as Forms of Esotericism**. In his talk, Djurdjevic asserted that esotericism as a conceptual category could be applied to cultures other than western and gave examples of correspondences, the replacement of physical sacrifice with mental ritual and the idea of a teacher conferring an initiation. Djurdjevic favours a definition of esotericism as 'hidden, secret'. As an example he cited the reference to tantra as the equivalent of a woman from a good family who is kept hidden away to protect the

purity of her status, while yoga is considered like a courtesan who is open to public view. He also noted a figure in the Indian pantheon that is comparable to the western Hermes. The second session opened with **Marco Pasi** (University of Amsterdam), who examined **The Origins of the Concept of “Western Esotericism” in the Context of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Occultism**. The Theosophical Society was particularly influential in this respect, as it forced the delineation of ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern.’ Blavatsky was of the opinion that the Christian influence, for one thing, influenced the western mind to such an extent that Westerners could not appreciate the practical Eastern teachings. The western alternative was signaled by the use of the term ‘Hermetic.’

Second up was **Anita Stasulane** (University of Daugavpils) addressing **The Construction of the New Theosophical Identity: the Roerich Movement**. Roerich, a Russian Theosophist, made contributions to art and the preservation of historical and cultural artifacts. He also offered himself as the anticipated ‘Buddhist messiah’ and proposed ‘God as Mother’. Roerich, along with his wife, intended to combine East and West but targeted an Eastern, not a Western, audience.

**Henrik Bodgan** (University of Gothenburg) returned our attention to India with **The Holy Order of Krishna and the Migrations of Western Esotericism into a Hindu Context**. Examples in his paper demonstrated western influences. One of the most interesting was the presence of Crowley’s motto, ‘Do what thou wilt’, in the Holy Order of Krishna, which existed in the 1930’s. A reference in the Order’s Manifesto points to the dissemination of the ‘mysteries of Krishna’ through various Western Orders, including that of the Rosy Cross.

**John L. Crow**’s presentation, **Placing Western Esotericism on the Map: Exploring the Geographic Distribution of a Modern Occult Organization** put the concept of ‘western’ into a visual context. Using membership numbers from the Ordo Templi Orientalis as his sample, John plotted the distribution of members on a world map.

The final panel of Western Esotericism took place on Friday morning. It opened with **Kennet Granholm** (University of Stockholm) and his paper on **The West-Non-West Dynamic in Western Esotericism**, a key issue for the development of the field. One point Granholm made was that the positive focus on the East is a key feature of esotericism.

**Søren Feldtfos Thomsen** (University of Aarhus) addressed what he considers an over-emphasis on the inductive approach in his presentation titled **Representing the Esoteric: Problems and Potentials of Current Approaches in the Study of Esotericism**. Pointing to the return to comparative studies in the study of religions, Thomsen advocated a deductive approach.

**Egil Asprem** (University of Amsterdam) examined **Boundaries and the Problem of Comparison in Esotericism Research**. I will point the reader to Asprem’s own thumbnail sketch of his talk at [heterodoxology.wordpress.com](http://heterodoxology.wordpress.com), as he can portray it more accurately and succinctly.

The final paper of the session was delivered by Per Faxneld (University of Stockholm). The paper (originally slated for a Satanism panel, which was, unfortunately, cancelled) was **Infernal Madonna and Patron Saint of Abortions: Lilith in Satanism and the Western Left Hand Path**. Faxfeld gave an outline of the development of the Lilith mythology up to the present day. His summation was that although Satanist groups may enjoy the ‘shock value’ they receive, they actually reflect ‘commonly held values.’ As an example, Faxfeld presented a Satanist group in Sweden whose ‘ideals’ of equality, fertility control and access to abortion are commonly accepted in modern society.

## Esotericism Panel

This panel was actually distinct from the three earlier panels, all of which were modified by the adjective 'Western.' The three presenters were Karl Baier (University of Vienna), Marco Pasi (University of Amsterdam) and Franz Winter (University of Vienna). Responding was Peter Schreiner (University of Zurich).

**Franz Winter** opened with **Mesmeric Yoga? The Interpretation of Indian Meditation Techniques in the *Oupnek'hat***. Written by Abraham H. Anquetil-Duperron, the *Oupnek'hat* was the first translation of the Upanishads into a European language. Winter ended with the reception of the *Oupnek'hat* with Eliphas Levi's injunction to study its 'mysteries' and the identification of Anquetil as 'Christian yogi.'

**Karl Baier** followed with a discussion of **Mesmeric Yoga and the Development of Meditation within the Theosophical Society**. Using the Theosophist journal as his source, Baier traced the rise and fall of mesmerism in the Theosophical Society. When the Theosophists discovered Kundalini yoga, they recognized a theory that could explain the phenomenon of astral travel. The point was made that although most popular descriptions of chakras derive from a book published in 1919, the *Theosophist* had already discussed the concept of the chakras in 1880. Eventually, the influence of actual Indian yogis waned and 'passive emptying of the mind, concentration on certain body parts and mesmerism' were discouraged or downplayed. Instead, Blavatsky created a 'neo-Kundalini yoga.'

The panel was rounded off with **Marco Pasi's** explication of the **Varieties of Magical Experience: Aleister Crowley's Views**. Using Crowley's importance because of his 'originality and creativity' as his starting point, Pasi traced Crowley's involvement with yogic practices and concepts. Crowley and his mentor Allan Bennett followed Patanjali yoga, with Crowley claiming to have reached samadhi (the highest state) through his use of magic. An encounter with William James underscored the importance of Samadhi as a source of 'energy and power', which religious leaders use to establish a new religion. The reply to the speakers was given by **Peter Schreiner**. He pointed out the similarities in method applied by the three speakers. All the presenters used textual sources. They also all spoke of individuals, raising-for Schreiner-some interesting questions, such as How many copies were published? Who read these books? What was the psychology of the authors? and What made the author choose a particular book to emphasize in his translation or conveyance of a system or idea? Schreiner also pointed out a 'correspondence of ideas' in the papers. One difficulty he sees in the study of religion and yoga is the question of what happens to the body when one is 'in' samdhi. Finally, Schreiner suggested that one way to advance the field would be to talk more about the techniques employed, so that these things could be compared.

## Plenary Address

Meera Nanda advanced her view of **How *not* to Study Eastern Religions: Western Esotericism in the making of Neo-Hinduism**. Nanda countered the view of Edward Said that Neo-Hinduism is a 'construction of Western colonizers.' She asserted that modern Hinduism has much more in common with the Theosophical Society than with Semitic monotheism and specified that she was referring, for the most part, to the Theosophical Society when she referenced Western Esotericism. In her opinion, Theosophy's 'anti-Christianity' was de-stabilizing for the British raj and the Theosophists were the only ones to 'accept native Indians as Masters.' The idea the Hinduism has been Semitized does not

show up in any of the texts, she says, and concluded that 'spiritual monism' was integral to the Hindu view, a view shared by the Theosophical Society.

Briefly, in Hans Kippenberg's plenary address on Phoenix from the Ashes: New Kinds of Religious Communities in the Globalized World, he mentioned Scholem's opposition to the use of Hebrew as the daily language of the state of Israel. Scholem felt Hebrew's intrinsic power could be dangerous when used by people who did not understand its potency.



## ARTICLES

### **Gershom Scholem and the Kabbalah:**

#### **a brief overview**

**by Tim Rudbøg (c)**

Gershom Scholem (1897-1982) is a major figure in the field of esotericism and beyond doubt one of the most influential scholars of Jewish Kabbalah, especially because he succeeded in creating and making the academic study of Kabbalah a legitimate and important part of the history of Judaism on its own account, as Martin Buber has remarked '... only Gershom Scholem has created a whole academic discipline.'[\[1\]](#)

Scholem's thesis, which rightly has been called 'counter historical'[\[2\]](#), was critical and in some ways in contrast to the general trend of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and its treatment of Kabbalah because Scholem argued that Kabbalah, as irrationalism/mysticism, is important to Judaism as something in itself and consequently it has been very influential as to how Jewish history has evolved[\[3\]](#). This basic thesis is present throughout most of Scholem's extensive studies[\[4\]](#), which are all, more or less based on a strictly historical and empirical methodology[\[5\]](#).

Scholem thus wanted to rid himself of the negative biased attitude towards Kabbalah, as he called it, found in the work of 19th century Jewish scholars and also of the 'humbug' of the 19th and early 20th century occultist studies of Kabbalah in order to apply 'the strict standards of historical research' to the field[\[6\]](#). This was the task he set for himself. But

what exactly was Kabbalah in Scholem's opinion? Scholem was inspired by both the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and theories developed within the history of religions of his days and naturally chose to construct Kabbalah in the overall framework of mysticism[7].

To modern scholars mysticism was and still is, very simply put, defined in terms of mystical experience; Scholem did also view mysticism as embodying an *unio mystica* experience, even though in 'Jewish mysticism', he argued, it was rather a case of *communion* than actual *union*. Theoretically Scholem also wanted to move beyond the more ontologically speculative and essentialistic definitions of mysticism, prevalent in his days, towards a more historical and functional definition[8], which would support him in regarding 'Jewish mysticism' as something particular and distinct from other forms of mysticism[9]. Each religion might have a mystical tradition attached to it, he argued, but each mysticism is different and they do not share a common trans-historical essence[10]. Mysticism is, on the other hand, important to all religions and their development because mysticism - according to Scholem's tripartite developmental scheme from natural religion, over institutional religion, to mysticism - embodies the highest stage in the internal development of religion itself[11].

To Scholem 'Jewish mysticism' was a religious movement inside Judaism and he was especially intrigued by the relationship, function and structure of 'Jewish mysticism' to Orthodox Judaism. He came to the general conclusion that the relationship builds on interpretation, since mysticism attempts 'to interpret the religious values of Judaism in terms of Mystical values'[12]. Judaism with its tradition, laws, texts and rituals actually became a system of mystical symbols by which the mystic could validate as well as enter into the mystical experience and it therefore also became a system reflecting both the mystery of God and the universe[13].

Symbolism is therefore according to Scholem an important key to understanding 'Jewish mysticism' and Kabbalah[14], because the mystic claims access to a realm, which only symbols can give access to since the realm is non-conceptual and inexpressible[15]. The mystics therefore focus on creating keys or ways to interpret Judaism and the world, which to them are systems of symbols able to give access to the non-conceptual reality[16]. The function of Kabbalah as mysticism thus becomes for Scholem a vitalising dialectic and

reflexive interplay between the new intuition or mystical experience and the authoritative tradition[17] - and it is this interplay, which moves history forward.

Thus for Scholem the overall framework of Kabbalah is 'Jewish mysticism' but Scholem also more specifically states that Kabbalah is: 1. a religious movement within Judaism[18]; 2. secret or esoteric teachings within Judaism[19]; 3. theosophy[20]; 4. a mode of thought, which is both mythological and symbolical[21]; 5. a mystical theology[22] and 6. that it presents a unique positive attitude towards language[23].

Scholem was foremost a historian, so he invested much of his effort in reconstructing the history and development of Kabbalah. As has been observed by later scholars, however, Scholem's reconstruction of the history of Kabbalah was somewhat bound up with his Zionist leanings, hence his historical construction of Kabbalah was quite narrow.

Scholem's historical studies such as *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941) and *The Origins of the Kabbalah* (1962 and 1987 in English) mainly deal with Kabbalah as a relatively homogeneous set of doctrines and symbols of a theosophical character - 'a systematic exposition of the structure of the divine world'[24] - wherein ancient Gnostic, Neo-platonic and Judaic symbols and myths are integrated. Kabbalah is therefore historically mainly regarded as a unique inner mystical/theosophical tradition within Judaism, which emerged in secret circles, in fully-fledged form, in 13th century Provence, Catalonia and Castilia as a reinvigorating rebellion against Rabbinic Judaism. Theosophical Kabbalah or Kabbalah as a mystical theology thus holds centre stage for Scholem in his, near Hegelian, linear progressive developmental scheme in contrast to other forms of Kabbalah or 'Jewish mysticism', which are more praxis oriented such as: 1. magical Kabbalah; 2. Kabbalah of names and 3. ecstatic Kabbalah[25].

Finally it is to be noted that Scholem's theory and work now stands out as the foundational or 'classical theory of Kabbalah', though new alleys have begun to open up.

Tim Rudbøg

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[1] Quoted by Weiner (1985) in *Judaism and Mysticism according to Gershom Scholem* p. 1, from *Literatur und Kunst*, 11 June, 1967, *New Züricher Zeitung*.

- [2] See: Biale (1979) *Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah and Counter-History*.
- [3] Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* pp. ii, 1-3. Scholem (1965) *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* p. 2. Schweid (1985) *Judaism and Mysticism according to Gershom Scholem* p. 21. Dan (1987) *Gershom Scholem* pp. 20-37. Scholem (1975) 'Mi-tokh hirhurim al Hokhmat Israel'. Myers (1995) *Re-inventing the Jewish Past* pp. 155-157, 167-168. Abrams (2000) 'Defining Modern Academic Scholarship', Abrams (2000) 'Presenting and Re-presenting Gershom Scholem'. Wasserstrom (1999) *Religion after Religion*.
- [4] Scholem's major studies include: 1. Bibliographical and philological essays on a specific subject; 2. Books on larger subjects, trends or history such as his (1987) *The Origins of The Kabbalah*, (1941) *Major trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (1973) *Sabbatai Sevi*. 3. Phenomenological essays analysing central motifs and categories. See Schweid (1985) *Judaism and Mysticism according to Gershom Scholem* pp. 13-14.
- [5] Hanegraaff (1998) 'On the Construction of "Esoteric Traditions"' pp. 47-52.
- [6] Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* pp. 2-3.
- [7] Scholem(1941) *Major Trends* pp. 1-20. Scholem (1974) *Kabbalah* pp. 3-4. Scholem (1965) *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* pp. 1, 5.
- [8] Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* pp. 2, 5-6, 10.
- [9] Scholem (1974) *Kabbalah* p. 3.
- [10] Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* p. 6. Schweid (1985) *Judaism and Mysticism according to Gershom Scholem* p. 25.
- [11] Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* pp. 7-9. Schweid (1985) *Judaism and Mysticism according to Gershom Scholem* pp. 25-26.
- [12] Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* p. 10.
- [13] Scholem (1965) *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* pp. 5-6.
- [14] See: Dan (1987) *Gershom Scholem* p. 164.
- [15] Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* p. 27.
- [16] Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* pp. 27-28. Scholem (1974) *Kabbalah* p. 6.

- [17] Scholem (1965) *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* pp. 5-25. Scholem (1974) *Kabbalah* p. 3. Schweid (1985) *Judaism and mysticism according to Gershom Scholem* p. 52.
- [18] Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* p. 18. Scholem (1974) *Kabbalah* p. 3.
- [19] Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* pp. 20-21. Scholem (1974) *Kabbalah* pp. 3, 4.
- [20] Scholem (1974) *Kabbalah* pp. 3, 4.
- [21] Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* pp. 22, 26.
- [22] Scholem (1974) *Kabbalah* p. 5.
- [23] Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* p. 17.
- [24] Dan (1987) *Gershom Scholem* p. 207. Scholem (1941) *Major Trends* p. 206.
- [25] See: Laura (2005) *The Ashkenazi Kabbalah of R. Menahem Ziyiyoni* pp. 30-45.