

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

ESSWE Newsletter

Winter 2016
Volume 7, Number 2

Words from the Editor

– *Christian Giudice*



As was customary in the winter editions of the *Newsletter* edited by my predecessor, I will limit my own words to a minimum and leave you with a poem dedicated to Yuletide. On this issue of the *Newsletter* you will find the usual abundance of new publications presented, interviews with senior and junior scholars, presentations of new networks devoted to the study of esotericism and a list of upcoming conferences. I wish you all happy holidays and a great Christmas, Hannukah, Winter Solstice, Saturnalia, Crowleymas, Bodhi Day, Day of Return of the Wandering Goddess, Kwanzaa or Shabe-Yalda, as the case may be! ♦

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H. P. Lovecraft – Egyptian Christmas (nd.)

Haughty Sphinx, whose amber eyes
Hold the secrets of the skies,
As thou rippest in thy grace,
Round the chairs and chimney-place,
Scorn on thy patrician face:
Rise not harsh, nor use thy claws
On the hand that gives applause-
Good-will only doth abide
In these lines at Christmastide!

From the ESSWE Board

- *Mark Sedgwick*

The Board met in London on 8 July 2016, following the successful Thesis Workshop held at the Warburg Institute on 7 July. The Board reviewed the status of the ESSWE's various activities, especially the forthcoming 2017 conference in Erfurt, the ESSWE's publications, and regional, thematic and affiliated networks. Two new networks were approved: the Irish Network for the Study of Esotericism and Paganism (INSEP) as a regional network, and the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE) as a thematic network. It was decided to investigate the possibility of establishing a UK regional network. Various ways of expanding the ESSWE's presence in countries and fields where it is currently little known were discussed, and a number of initiatives agreed on. Ways of improving the ESSWE's website were also discussed, and plans were made for the appointment of a new webmaster. Student needs and concerns were discussed as well, and the Board decided to establish five extra student bursaries, the recipients of which will receive free admission to the ESSWE conference, in return for which they will help out at the conference in suitable ways.

The Board Meeting and the associated Meeting of Members also passed the necessary resolutions to implement the reforms in the ESSWE's governance that were first announced in 2011. As a result, most importantly, the next Student Representative will have a regular, voting Board position, and will be chosen electronically by the students among the ESSWE's membership. Future Board elections will also be conducted with electronic voting, making possible wider participation and more democracy. Following implementation of these reforms, Henrik Bogdan was appointed Secretary in succession to Mark Sedgwick. ♦

- *The ESSWE Board*

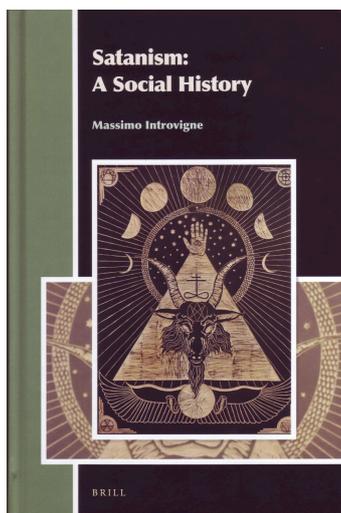
This summer, Professor Dr. Mark Sedgwick's term as secretary of ESSWE came to an end. The ESSWE board and community thanks him for his many years of extraordinary service to the Society and to the field. As a founding member he has been instrumental in shaping the organization, and his tireless work as secretary has made sure that future generations can rely on a smooth-running institution promoting the field of Western esotericism in Europe.



The new secretary of the Society is Dr. Henrik Bogdan, Professor at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. We welcome Henrik in the position and look forward to his service. General inquiries about the society, as well as specific tasks falling to the secretary's domain should now be addressed to him. ♦

Two new publications by ESSWE members

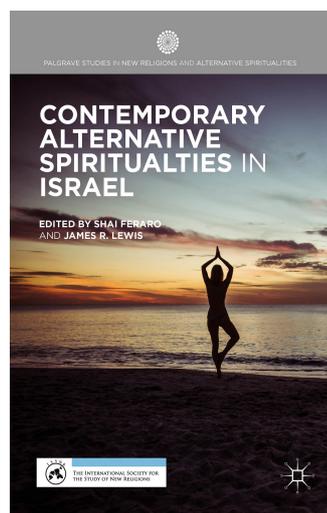
Massimo Introvigne
Satanism: A Social History
 (Leiden: Brill, 2016)



A 17th-century French haberdasher invented the Black Mass. An 18th-century English Cabinet Minister administered the Eucharist to a baboon. High-ranking Catholic authorities in the 19th century believed that Satan appeared in Masonic lodges in the shape of a crocodile and played the piano

there. A well-known scientist from the 20th century established a cult of the Antichrist and exploded in a laboratory experiment. Three Italian girls in 2000 sacrificed a nun to the Devil. A Black Metal band honored Satan in Krakow, Poland, in 2004 by exhibiting on stage 120 decapitated sheep heads. Some of these stories, as absurd as they might sound, were real. Others, which might appear to be equally well reported, are false. But even false stories have generated real societal reactions. For the first time, Massimo Introvigne proposes a general social history of Satanism and anti-Satanism, from the French Court of Louis XIV to the Satanic scares of the late 20th century, satanic themes in Black Metal music, the Church of Satan, and beyond. ♦

Contemporary Alternative Spiritualities in Israel, edited by Shai Feraro and James R. Lewis (London: Palgrave, 2016)



This volume is the first English-language anthology to engage with the fascinating phenomena of recent surges in New Age and alternative spiritualities in Israel. Contributors investigate how these New Age religions and other spiritualities—produced in Western countries within predominantly

Protestant or secular cultures—transform and adapt themselves in Israel. The volume focuses on a variety of groups and movements, such as Theosophy and Anthroposophy, Neopaganism, Channeling, Women's Yoga, the New Age festival scene, and even Pentecostal churches among African labor migrants living in Tel Aviv. Chapters also explore more Jewish-oriented practices such as Neo-Kabbalah, Neo-Hassidism, and alternative marriage ceremonies, as well as the use of spiritual care providers in Israeli hospitals. In addition, contributors take a close look at the state's reaction to the recent activities and growth of new religious movements. ♦

Scholar Interviews

- *Chris Giudice*

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

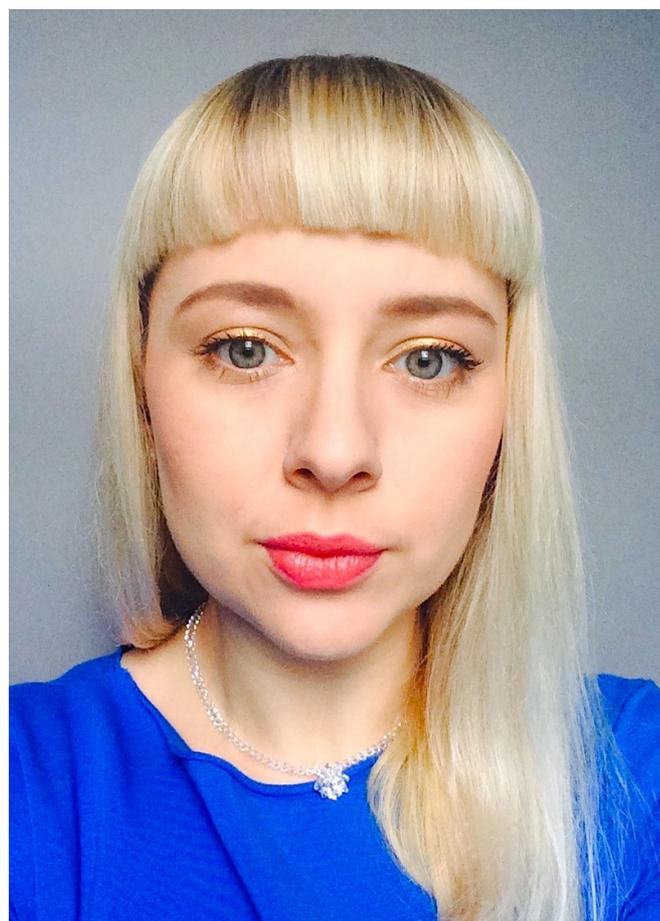
Małgorzata Alicka Dulcka,
Ph.D. Candidate
Institute for the Study of Religion
Jagiellonian University,
Krackow, Poland

How did you come to be interested in Western esotericism?

Well, I think that the biggest force that drives me towards penetrating the mysteries and looking for all the answers is curiosity. I have always been interested in the themes connected with esotericism. I received my MA degree in Art History (specialization: Painting) in 2008 and that was the moment when I realized I wanted to develop my academic interests yet in another field. As Western esotericism has always been an area of my interest, the Jagiellonian University's Institute for the Study of Religion seemed the best choice for me.

I experienced my personal turning point in 2009, when I was asked to write a paper on New Age for one of the classes. That was the moment when I discovered Wouter Hanegraaff's *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, which was a true revelation for me. Following the river I got to the sea. Thanks to that book, I've reached the works of other scholars of Western esotericism. They've showed me a vast, fascinating world, which was practically unexplored in Poland of that time. I can say that the works of Antoine Faivre, Wouter Hanegraaff, Artur Versluis or Massimo Introvigne gave me strength to begin my adventure with PhD studies. Currently I continue my PhD studies at the Institute for the Study of Religions, and my PhD project combines study of religions and Western esotericism, as it deals with the

specificity of soteriological concepts developed during the interwar period in the esoteric milieu of Wisła, a town in Silesia.



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

Western esotericism as a field of study keeps on developing very extensively, yet there are many problems, which yearn to be solved. We surely need more high quality works and publications in the field. Moreover, there is still a relatively small number of academic positions and courses dedicated to Western esotericism in general. The integration of the academic milieu and spreading

the most recent research seems to be another crucial thing. It sometimes happens that scholars work separately and do not know what the others are currently working on. That's the reason why I believe that development of local ESSWE communities like CEENASWE (whose head is György Szőnyi) is extremely important for the future of the whole field. The last CEENASWE conference, which was organised by Nemanja Radulović in Beograd, gathered more than 40 scholars and was a huge success. Thanks to this kind of gatherings we get to know each other's work, develop an international network of cooperation, and we begin to create a bigger and consistent scholar society.

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

I travel a lot with my friend Karolina Maria Hess, also a PhD candidate at the Jagiellonian University.

It seems that the two of us are magnets for hilarious and/or surreal situations, especially during conferences and research queries. One of the funniest stories (and, let's get it straight, I'm talking about the kind of stories that can actually be printed in an academic newsletter) happened in 2013, soon after we'd met Rafał Prinke – he's a legendary Polish scholar of alchemy, who writes on such characters as Michał Sędziwój. During one of our queries, we came across a bizarre footnote in a paper published in the 1990s by a Polish scholar from the Theosophical Society. In this footnote, the author made a reference to a text by Rafał Prinke allegedly published in 1892! Since then we suspect Prinke to be the owner of the philosophical stone... or even Sędziwój himself!

What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?

I deal with the history of art, focusing especially on contemporary art. I'm passionate about medieval paintings. My interests also cover such topics as sociology of religion, new religious movements, history of science and literature. Just like other scholars, I do love to read and collect

books. I'm crazy about Levis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" and I gather its numerous issues. I love vampires, so I create my own vampirical library. I'm also addicted to sport, especially lifting weights.

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

After describing my work to other people, a common question I hear is "what do you TRULY do", suggesting that in a fact I am a practitioner of a black magic etc. Very often my explanations do not satisfy the listener, who judges with an almost divine certainty that I am a lady "of the occult and demons".

Another big problem, especially for young scholars, is lack of academic positions devoted to Western esotericism and problems with receiving research grants. Dealing with Western esotericism is still considered to be kind of suspicious at Polish universities. Scholars of that kind are usually treated with a great deal of scepticism.

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

I believe that research on the Western esotericism is a very important contribution to the humanities as a whole. Not only does it deepen the knowledge of Western culture, but it also helps to understand phenomena and events that were previously misrepresented and misunderstood.

What are the best things about dealing with western esotericism? As I previously stated, I'm driven by curiosity. I never know what I will discover, nor what I will come across during library queries. Stories that I hear during interviews and participant observation are also charmingly unpredictable. It's almost like a detective's job! Discovering new threads, putting things together, and constant emergence of new, broader pictures of studied cases make this work extremely satisfying and rewarding. ♦

Pier Luigi Zoccatelli
Center for Studies on New Religions
Professor of Sociology of Religion
Pontifical Salesian University,
Turin, Italy

How did you come to be interested in Western esotericism?

I believe that everything started during my youth, when, with group of friends, I was involved directly in the milieu of the European musical and artistic avantgardes. The kind of interests I then entertained had brought me to discover Oriental religious cultures, Tibetan Buddhism in particular. As an expanding phenomenon, this interest – especially after a prolonged stay in Nepal, when I was 20 – directed me towards the reading of some books, which, little by little, allowed me to discover the esoteric dimension of the approach to the sacred. In this regard, I remember that for me crucial readings were – among others – Mircea Eliade, Gershom Scholem and René Guénon. Through the latter author, I became intrigued by the life and works of Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, and of the implications of what has been defined “esoteric Christianity”, to which I dedicated my first (but not last!) explorative studies, thanks to the collaboration and the fruitful exchange of ideas with colleagues whom I cannot not avoid mentioning: Stefano Salzani, Antoine Faivre, Jean-Pierre Laurent, Jean-Pierre Brach, Jérôme Rousse-Lacordaire, Jean Borella. At the same time, towards the end of the 1980s, I met the man whom in many ways has been my mentor and to whom I owe much – Massimo Introvigne – at the time when he was preparing the fundamental volume *Il Cappello del Mago*. A fruitful collaboration was born – culminating in the *Encyclopedia of Religions in Italy*, reprinted for the third time in 2013 and which we co-edited – and I would add a methodology of work and study which has characterised the works of CESNUR for 25 years, and in which we have explored in various ways the context of modern and contemporary esotericism in the wider framework of the approach to the sacred, to spiritualities and religiosity.



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

When I began to deal with these subjects, the world of the academic study of esotericism was not yet institutionalised and structured as has happened in the successive years. In a certain way, dealing with esotericism was “esoteric”, and I am certain that – at least for me – this aspect contributed to making this experience of research culturally attractive. Of course, there was Faivre’s teaching at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in Paris, and from the beginning of the 1990s his precious proposal of a methodological approach to the discipline, which from the point of view of the symbolic import represented a real watershed. But we were still far away from the development which the field has seen with the proposal of an “empirical method in the study of esotericism” put forth by Wouter J. Hanegraff and, especially, with the creation of the Amsterdam centre, whose effects – in terms of cultural and academic politics – we see clearly today, not least with an extension

in activities and of the network represented by ESSWE. All this said, I would like to voice an unpopular sentiment. Often, our colleagues worry about contributing to a wider growth of the discipline, for example in terms of academic positions, of a major structuralization of the field, of the legitimization of the field of study, and so on. Let's be clear: it is normal that such things happen, and I am amongst those who hope that these things may happen. Yet, I think what has disappeared is the behaviour of insatiable and innate research of a meaning within one's area of study, which I feel must still constitute the most important thrust of one's involvement, before the search for a position, may it be academic or not.

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

As many scholars will have experienced, the milieu of contemporary esoteric movements – I use the term “movements” on purpose, in order to underline the sociological dynamic, which is what brings me to approach this phenomenon – is very varied and not lacking in curious personalities, without wanting to make a reductive or sarcastic judgment. Therefore the fun episodes are never lacking, and contribute to the humanization of research. However, a particular episode had a major impact on my life. In 1997 I lived in Verona, and was invited to participate in a conference on Rosicrucians organised by the University of Turin. Besides me, scholars like Roland Edighoffer, Antoine Faivre, Massimo Introvigne, Jean-Pierre Laurant, Aldo Alessandro Mola, Robert Vanloo, were presenting papers. The subject of my paper was a wide review of the implications between a certain contemporary Rosicrucianism and the magical and occultist milieu. In preparing my paper, I got in touch with some of the main movers on the scene, in order to study some particular aspects in greater depth. Among them, a very peculiar character, who threatened me with a diabolical deadly curse if I were to speak about his movement. I didn't take much notice, but just before the conference I had to battle with an infernal (it was really the case!) tooth abscess, which almost prevented me from speaking at all. I apologised to the audience, attributing the incident, for the benefit of the

spectators, to shortcomings in my fieldwork. Among the public, a female student came to console me and gave me a painkiller to calm the pain, which disappeared almost instantly: in little more than two years later, she became my wife...

What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?

Essentially and substantially, my first and greatest interest is my family: my wife and our five children, who constitute, for me, a universe with infinite facets. Remaining in the area of Western esotericism, my collateral interests are new religiosity, religious pluralism and new religious movements. Privately, I am an avid reader of Russian literature, and of the history and spirituality of Benedictine monasticism, and I'm very interested in the scenarios of the so-called “anni di piombo” in the history of Italian politics of the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, for years I have cultivated a very captivating interest in painting both tangible and abstract – I like to believe that I am a painter myself! – and for non-conventional music, with a predilection for blackgaze and folk-metal. For some years I passionately smoked Cuban (and only Cuban) cigars, finally succumbing to the temptation of writing an encyclopedia on them, which has been translated into four languages!

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

Other than the frustration of not having to be able to completely explain to my children what their father actually does, especially in the 1990s – when I started to devote myself to research in a permanent way – being involved in this kind of study has often meant my being exposed to criticism, misunderstandings and attacks, in a great part due to ignorance regarding where my studies belong. In many ways the climate today has changed, but the fact remains that to deal with esotericism, in particular with contemporary esoteric movements, often evokes the wrong impression – which can translate into malicious disinformation – that there is a personal involvement (spiritual, cultural, political) in the object of one's studies, which is not the case.

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

To quote the words of Columbian thinker Nicolás Gómez Dávila: “The history of religions is not a history of opinions, but of adventures”. Transferring this thought to the context of Western

esotericism, the idea of dealing with the in depth analysis of the ways in which these “adventures” are socialised, and therefore the ways in which they have an influence of social dynamics, still seems to me – as it did when I started taking an interest in these researches – a good way of taking one’s life seriously. Which often becomes adventure.♦

New Regional, Thematic and Affiliated Networks

JNASE: The Japanese Network for the Academic Study of Esotericism

The Japanese Network for the Academic Study of Esotericism (JNASE) is a group of scholarly researchers of esotericism founded in 2016. First we need to explain three words from the name of this network. “Japanese” means that many of the network’s members reside in Japan, but there are no restrictions as to the nationality of the members or to the research field. We welcome researchers from other countries, and research about both Western and Asian esotericism. “Academic” in this title does not necessarily presuppose an affiliation with an academic institution or the possession of an academic title, but it refers to the unbiased and non-sectarian stance of this network. We are open not only to so-called academics but also to independent researchers or practitioners, who respect various approaches other than theirs and follow a fact-based methodology. “Esotericism” is concerned with different areas, reflecting the broad scope of this word. First it includes the research of pre-modern esotericism in the West like hermetism, alchemy or astrology. Second, modern esotericism in the West and its influences on contemporary spirituality. Thirdly, modern Western Esotericism and its related spiritual movements in Japan and Asia, which would cover everything, from pre-WWII spiritual techniques like Reiki to New Religious Movements. Fourth, pre-modern esoteric religious thoughts in Japan and Asia, such as Shintoism, Buddhism or Daoism. The main objective of our group is to clarify how far the term “esotericism”

could be applied to the Asian history of religions.

Coordinators:

Shin’ichi Yoshinaga (National Institute of Technology, Maizuru College)
Naoko Kobayashi (Aichi Gakuin University)
Hiro Hirai (Radboud University Nijmegen)
Satoshi Itō (Ibaraki University)
Tetsuro Tanojiri (University of Tokyo)
Ioannis Gaitanidis (Chiba University).♦

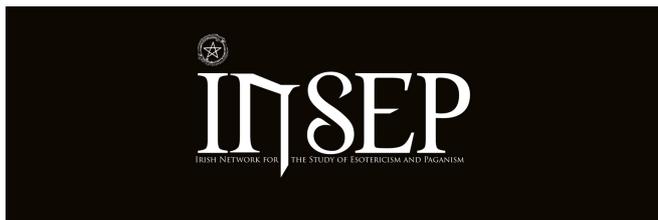
ENSIE: European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism

The European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE) aims to bridge the gap between the study of Islamic esotericism and mysticism and the study of Western Esotericism. It is hoped that scholars of Islamic mysticism will benefit from the understandings and perspectives that have been achieved in the study of Western Esotericism, and that scholars of Western Esotericism will benefit from knowledge of Islamic esotericism. Benefits are also expected in areas where the distinction between “Islamic” and “Western” does not really make sense, for example in the medieval period, when Western esotericists drew heavily on Arab and Islamic sources, and in the modern period, when Western esotericists have again drawn on Islamic sources, and when Western esotericism has also been received in the Muslim world, especially in Turkey, but also elsewhere. Membership is open to senior and junior scholars, and also to other interested persons, so long as at least 75% of

active members are scholars. The ENSIE uses its Google group to share information, discussions, conferences announcements, and so on.

The ENSIE is coordinated by Mark Sedgwick (Aarhus), mjrs@cas.au.dk. Email him if you wish to join the Google group. ♦

INSEP: Irish Network for the Study of Esotericism and Paganism



The Irish Network for the Study of Esotericism and Paganism is a Regional Network of the ESSWE. The INSEP was founded in May 2015 by Dr Jenny Butler, a specialist on Irish Contemporary Paganism who teaches modules on Western Esotericism and New Religious Movements at the Department of Study of Religions at University College Cork, along with

Colin Duggan, a PhD researcher at UCC's Department of Study of Religions who specialises in the study of Theosophy and Chaos Magick. INSEP is a multidisciplinary research network which establishes a forum for academics working on any aspect of Esotericism (historical or contemporary) or Contemporary Paganism that relates to the Irish context and which aims to promote interdisciplinary collaborations. Its mission is to provide a forum for networking among scholars who are based in Ireland and those based abroad who have research interests in these subject areas as they relate to Ireland. It will organise Irish-based workshops and conferences as well as panels at international conferences. Additionally, edited books and journal special issues are planned under the auspices of the INSEP. A website is currently under construction, and there is a Yahoo Group (Email Forum): <https://groups.yahoo.com/group/IrishNetworkStudyEsotericismPaganism>.

Coordinators:

Dr. Jenny Butler, University College Cork

Colin Duggan, University College Cork ♦

Call for Papers

**Launch and First Workshop of
The Irish Network for the Study of Esotericism
and Paganism
In association with the Department of Study of
Religions
University College Cork
Friday 31st March 2017**

We are pleased to invite scholars to take part in the launch and first workshop of the Irish Network for the Study of Esotericism and Paganism (INSEP), a multidisciplinary research network for scholars working on any aspect of Esotericism (historical or contemporary) or Contemporary Paganism that relates to the Irish context. Its mission is to provide a forum for networking and collaboration among scholars who are based in

Ireland and those based abroad who have research interests in the subject areas of esotericism and contemporary Paganism as they relate to Ireland. A general goal of the network is to establish a forum for academics – whether established researchers, postgraduate students, early career researchers or independent scholars – to communicate with each other, share information on relevant conferences and other events, and to promote interdisciplinary collaboration among those researching in the areas of Irish esotericism and Pagan Studies. The Irish Network for the Study of Esotericism and Paganism is a Regional Network of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism: www.esswe.org/Regional.

The INSEP invites papers and contributions on the subject of esotericism and Contemporary Paganism that relate to the Irish context, including areas such as:

- * Esotericism, political change and social movements
- * Ethnography and Western Esotericism
- * Contemporary Pagan Studies in Ireland and/or international connections
- * Media representations
- * The notion of Celtic Spirituality
- * Theoretical frameworks/changing paradigms in the academic study of religions

Call for papers: Please submit your proposal in the form of a title and an abstract (max. 250 words), stating institutional affiliation (or independent scholar) to Dr Jenny Butler: j.butler@ucc.ie by Friday 13th January 2017. Please put 'INSEP Proposal' in the subject line. ♦

The 2017 CESNUR Conference

Co-organized by:

Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR)

The Israeli Information Center for New Religious Movements (MEIDA)

The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute

The Goldstein-Goren International Center for

Jewish Thought, Ben Gurion University

International Society for the Study of New Religions (ISSNR)

Holy Lands and Sacred Histories in New Religious Movements

Van Leer Jerusalem Institute

2 July - 6 July 2017

In 2017, the CESNUR conference will take place, for the first time, in the city of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, a sacred site to the three monotheistic religions, is a thriving hub of contemporary religious activity. The conference will explore the

ways New Religious Movements perceive, create, and reinterpret holy places and sacred histories.

We welcome papers on this year's theme: 'Holy Lands and Sacred Histories in New Religious Movements'. More specifically we welcome lectures that examine perceptions and practices related to holy lands and sacred histories and the (re)creation and invention of new holy spaces and sacred histories in new religious movements. In addition we welcome specific examinations of the Holy Land and its sacred history in Jewish, Muslim and Christian new religious movements.

The conference will begin on Sunday afternoon, July 2nd 2017, with a reception and plenary session. Conference sessions will run Sunday afternoon, Monday and Tuesday, through Wednesday Morning (2-5, July). Tuesday afternoon (July 4th) will be dedicated to complementary tours of Jerusalem, which will focus on contemporary Jewish, Muslim and Christian encounters.

An additional tour of sites related to new and old religions in Northern Israel will be offered on Wednesday and Thursday (5-6 July).

Papers and session proposals should be submitted by E-mail before the close of business on Monday, January 2nd 2017 to cesnur_to@virgilio.it, accompanied by an abstract of no more than 300 words and a CV of no more than 200 words. PhD students should attach a letter of support from their advisor. ♦

**Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv
Department for the Study of Religions (The
Faculty of Philosophy)**

**Youth Association for the Study of Religions
Association for the Study of Esoterism and
Mysticism**

**European Society for the Study of Western
Esotericism**

**“Western Esotericism and Spiritualism in the
19th - 21th Centuries” to take place on July 1-
7, 2017, in Kyiv, Ukraine**



Theme: the school will focus on the development of Western esotericism in the 19th - 21st centuries, as well as on the methodologies currently used in the humanities for the study of Western esotericism.

Form: the school will include lectures by key scholars of Western esotericism, presentations by school participants and meetings with representatives of contemporary esoteric organizations.

How to apply: the applicant needs to fill out an online form before **April 15, 2017**. 20 applicants will be selected for the school, wherein they will be able to present their papers. The organizers will cover living and food costs,

while traveling costs must be paid by the participant him or herself. **The participation fee is 50\$.**

Proposed topics:

1. Methodologies for the study of esotericism in Western and Eastern Europe.
2. Occultism, Martinism and irregular Freemasonry.
3. Magical orders and the 19th century occult revival.
4. Alchemical and neo-Pythagorean explorations.
5. Orientalist esoteric movements.
6. Neo-Paganism in a post-Christian world.
7. New Age as an antithesis to secularism.
8. Traditionalism.

*School working languages: **English** (main), Ukrainian, Russian*

**Applications accepted until April 15, 2017.
Results will be announced on May 1, 2017.**

For all questions concerning the summer school, please e-mail Ruslan Halikov at either of the following addresses: ngo.yasr@gmail.com or halikoffr@gmail.com. ♦

Upcoming Conferences

**International Conference
Modernity and Esoteric Networks:
Theosophy, Arts, Literature and Politics
March 7 and 8, 2017
National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka**

Theosophy had been underestimated unfairly, or to put it correctly, neglected by academics for a long time. It had been regarded as a bogus Buddhism, and not an appropriate theme for serious study. However, this academic tendency began to change towards the last decade of the 20th century owing to the development of several research fields: investigations on New Religious Movements, cultural studies of modern literature and art, and religious and political studies of the South Asian region; the shift was also due to the

establishment of the academic discipline of Western Esotericism. In the 21st century, this trend has become evident in the growing number of scholarly publications and in the holding of international conferences in Europe, the United States and Israel, with Japan added to the list this year.

This conference has two objectives. First to discuss “networking” through Theosophy. As has been already pointed out, one characteristic of Theosophy lies in its fluidity as a thought and as an organization. It has trespassed the boundaries of nations and become the medium through which the East and the West influenced each other. Theosophy also broke the barriers between religious thoughts and those of other fields such as art, literature, and politics. Its hitherto unknown networks can be found in the unexpected quarters

of modern history. In this conference, we will delve into these vast areas of hidden influences through an examination of network making processes in literature, art and politics.

The second objective of this conference is to explore the degree to which the term “esotericism” could be applied to Japanese phenomena. Indeed, Japan finds itself in a contradictory position. For, on the one hand, the Theosophical movement is weak and inconsistent here compared to other Asian countries, but, on the other hand, “esotericism” could be found abundantly in the traditional religions of Buddhism, Daoism and Shintoism. And the influences of Western esotericism in modern Japan are not small, but only rarely have been discussed. This conference will offer a reference point to think over local and the global usages of “esotericism,” through case studies from Japan.

In either way, we hope this conference will start international discussions about the meanings of Theosophy and of Western Esotericism not only for the West but also for the East. ♦

**The Sixth International ESSWE Conference:
Western Esotericism and Deviance
University of Erfurt, Germany
2 – 4 June 2017**

One of the master narratives in the study of Western esotericism is that esoteric ideas, authors and currents have, for the most part of Western history, been subject to processes of othering, marginalization, rejection or prohibition by dominant or mainstream cultural and religious discourses. For some scholars, this exclusion has been one of the main criteria for defining the very concept of ‘Western esotericism’. However, recent approaches that have highlighted the entanglement of esoteric ideas and mainstream culture point to the need of developing a more nuanced picture of the relationship between esoteric and mainstream discourse, in pre-modern as well as contemporary times. The conference theme ‘Western Esotericism and Deviance’ thus calls for a closer examination of this master narrative by

specifically addressing the social and cultural embeddedness of esoteric ideas, authors and currents in Western history.

Keynote sessions with: Marion Gibson, Olav Hammer, Jay Johnston, Claire Fanger, Marco Pasi, and Kocku von Stuckrad.

Crucial questions to be addressed during the conference may be:

- (How) can we evaluate or measure the deviant or marginal status of esoteric ideas, authors, or currents?
- Are polemics against esoteric ideas, authors or currents evidence for their marginal acceptance or rather their wide distribution and large appeal in a given historical context?
- What are the driving forces behind the rejection, othering and marginalization of esoteric ideas, authors, or currents?
- Is the talk about ‘deviance’ only the product of scholarly stereotypes or misconceptions?
- Can we distinguish different forms or types of ‘deviance’ in the study of Western esotericism?
- How do polemics against esoteric ideas, authors and currents differ across time periods?
- Is ‘occulture’ a phenomenon of the 20th and 21st centuries only?
- What are the motivations and strategies of ‘secrecy’ and ‘concealment’ in different strands and periods of Western esotericism? To what extent are they a response to perceived ‘deviance’? ♦

**The Seventh Annual Conference of the Israeli Network for the Academic Study of Western Esotericism: ‘Western Esotericism and the Art of Translation’
Open University of Israel
18 January 2017**

For the program:

http://www.publicators.com/app/dms.asp?ms_id=17377 . ♦

**The International Workshop: The Cosmic Movement: Origins, Contexts and Impact Ben-Gurion University, Beer-Sheva, Israel funded by the Israeli Science Foundation the Goren-Goldstein International Center for Jewish Thought
20-22 March 2017**

Lectures will be given by: Toshio Akai, Asher Binyamin, Jean-Pierre Brach, Helena Capkova, Julie Chajes, Christian Chanel, Orit Cohen, Pat

Deveney, Christine Ferguson, Bat Sheva Golman Ida, Peter Heehs, Boaz Huss, Anusuya Kumar, Gur Livneh, Jonathan Meir, Michele Olzi, Daniel Raveh, Arie Rottenberg, Gal Sofer, and Alexandre Toumarkine. ♦
