Yves Mühlematter, Helmut Zander (Ed.)

Occult Roots of Religious Studies

Okkulte Moderne

Beiträge zur Nichthegemonialen Innovation

Herausgegeben von
Christian Kassung,
Sylvia Paletschek,
Erhard Schüttpelz und
Helmut Zander

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Occult Roots of Religious Studies

On the Influence of Non-Hegemonic Currents on Academia around 1900

Edited by
Yves Mühlematter and Helmut Zander

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Yves Mühlematter, Helmut Zander

The Occult Roots of Religious Studies: An Introduction

Abstract: The first and primary thesis of this book is that religious studies have little-known and sometimes repressed origins which lie in the field of esotericism. The second thesis, which stems directly from this idea, holds that esotericism is an intrinsic part of hegemonic cultures and not a separate, small, "secret", or "occult" field of minority groups. These two themes run through all the essays in this volume.

By adopting this perspective, we aim to shed new light on the history of the academic discipline of religious studies and esotericism.[1] In the historiographical narratives on the history of religious studies this dimension is usually completely absent,[2] even if the connections to other disciplines emerging in the 19th century (e.g. ethnology, cultural anthropology, geography of religion) are addressed or if the connection with ideological patterns of interpretation, e.g. evolutionary doctrines, which also play a central role in occultism, is present. One can read a lot about academisation, professionalisation and disciplinary differentiation, and, last but not least, about the dissociation from theology,[3] but nearly nothing about the connections with esoteric currents. It is less surprising that such perspectives are missing in the research on institutional developments in the genesis of religious studies[4]– although Friedrich Max Müller, whose appointment to the chair for "Comparative Philology" in Oxford, established in 1868, and his Introduction to the Science of Religion (1873) are considered to be founding acts of religious

1 We thank Sylvia Paletschek sincerely for the very helpful hints she provided. Currently, the most important publication is Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

2 Hans Gerhard Kippenberg, *Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte: Religionswissenschaft und Moderne* (München: Beck 1997); Axel Michaels, ed. Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft: Von Friedrich Schleiermacher bis Mircea Eliade (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1997); Kurt Rudolph, *Die Religionsgeschichte an der Leipziger Universität und die Entwicklung der Religionswissenschaft: Ein Beitrag zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte und zum Problem der Religionswissenschaft* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962).

3 Arie L. Molendijk, *The Emergence of the Science of Religion in the Netherlands* (Leiden/ Boston: Brill 2005); Sigurd Hjelde, *Die Religionswissenschaft und das Christentum: eine historische Untersuchung über das Verhältnis von Religionswissenschaft und Theologie* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

4 Rudolph, *Die Religionsgeschichte an der Leipziger Universität und die Entwicklung der Religionswissenschaft*.

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studies, has intensively dealt with Blavatsky's Theosophy. Hardly any other picture emerges for the chairs with strong ties to religious studies around 1900, for example in Indology, where "esoteric" connections have also remained practically unnoticed. In this volume, Marco Frenschkowski uses the debates in Great Britain as an example in order to document how close the connections could actually be. Further research might reveal a broad panorama of relations in other regions and at other periods.

However, this history raises a much more fundamental question with regard to the logic of research carried out within strict disciplinary boundaries. Scientific subjects such as religious studies, theology, or the study of Western esotericism at universities have their origins in largely arbitrary demarcations. These boundaries are unlikely to be overcome, at least in the foreseeable future; there are simply too many pragmatic reasons for their existence. However, this volume seeks to at least promote the study of esotericism more as a cross-cutting, interdisciplinary topic than as a clearly demarcated field of research. Global history, postcolonial studies, or translation studies in the field of esotericism will not bear fruit without interdisciplinary cooperation.

1 Occultism and Religious Studies

The origins of religious studies lie not only in rational procedures, as academic auto-historiography would lead us to believe, which attempt to eliminate a "non-scientific" understanding of religion. This book deals with these roots, which are nearly always missing in books on the history of religious studies. In the search for neglected traditions we focus on a field that contemporaries at the end of the 19th century called "occultism" or (in all likelihood – more rarely) "esotericism". To be more specific, religious scholars wrote about the history of religious studies in the second half of the 19th century as the history of the implementation of scientific methods, first, as the implementation of philological, then ethnological standards, then, finally, in the 20th century by using the tools of empirical social science. The problem with this form of historiography is not the underpinnings of these methods, which, despite having been the subject of controversial debates, have been part of religious studies ever since its origins, but rather in the fact that it conceals the motives which led the early protagonists to pursue religious studies.

These repressed roots have often created path dependencies and partly shaped religious studies for a long time – and probably continue to do so to the present day. However, the only available examples concern the years around 1900. To start with one such example, at least some, if not many, of the early

representatives of Tibetology had close ties with Theosophy (as shown by the contributions of Julian Strube on John Woodroffe and Tantra and of Jens Schlieter on Walter Y. Evans-Wentz and the links he established between Tibetan Buddhism and Western traditions). However, no traces of this were found in their research or scholarly work and thus the the general course of the discipline remained unaffected. In individual cases, we can show that the consequences of this have shaped research on religious studies well into the 20th century, e.g. Boaz Huss in the case of the Jewish Kabbalah with a look at Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem or Léo Bernard on Paul Masson-Oursel. Of course, it is unlikely that such connections have disappeared at all. They still exist today, but often remain hidden from the public as very personal decisions; examples of disclosures exist, but often remain limited to individual cases. Two examples illustrate this point. First, Antoine Faivre, who can be regarded as the founding father of academic research on "Western esotericism", was at times a scholarly follower of a form of "perennial philosophy" (cf. the short entry in the biograms in this volume). Secondly, Kocku von Stuckrad, who is the key figure in the shift to discursive analysis in esotericism, published in the field of esotericism before he began his scientific career.[5] The fact that both are excellent scholars is beyond question in the scientific community. Only in rare cases do researchers openly speak of their proximity to esoteric ideas, such as that of Jeff Kripal, Professor of Philosophy and Religious Thought at Rice University in Houston, Texas, who does not conceal his path from a Catholic seminary to incorporating esoteric ideas.[6]

These consequences extend to the theoretical foundations of the discipline, insofar as central dimensions of occultist claims to knowledge – e.g. personal insight as a condition for research in religious studies – were problematised in this process of delimitation. In the background are quite fundamental debates in early religious studies, namely concerning the definition of religious studies as a cultural and/or natural science. Around 1900, religious studies often sought to reconcile "science" and "religion".[7] The question of how to conceptualise religious studies' relationship with theology and whether religious studies should not strive to be an improved, more scientific form of theology was a recurring theme. All these problems can also be found in the debate surrounding the determination of the relationship of the emerging field of religious studies

5 Kocku von Stuckrad, *Lilith: Im Licht des schwarzen Mondes zur Kraft der Göttin* (Bielefeld: Aurum-Verlag, 2004).

6 Jeffrey John Kripal, *Secret Body: Erotic and Esoteric Currents in the History of Religions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 353–357.

7 Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse 1900–1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

to the less well-defined fields of "occultism" and "esotericism". Ultimately, in the second half of the 20th century, religious studies distanced itself sharply from normative approaches. The most important case was most likely the rejection of an epistemology based on "experience" or "*Erleben*", as Rudolf Otto demanded for phenomenology – a controversy that structurally addressed the same themes as the debate on esotericism, since esotericists often claimed to have experienced or attained religious "truth".

Of course, there were also religious scholars who distanced themselves early on from esoteric traditions in a decisive way. One famous example is Friedrich Max Müller, who is one of the founders of religious studies and who found himself immersed in a kind of negative path dependency when he rejected Theosophy. However, the detrimental impact created by religious studies' distancing from these esoteric traditions, which also places negative limitations on academic research, goes beyond the scope of this book.

Another common feature between occult and non-occult researchers is the comparison of religions. The comparative history of religions has roots in both milieus. Occultists, especially if they held perennialist ideas, often argued that a common core of all religions could be identified through comparison. Evidently this was a starting point for the later phenomenology of religion. Against this backdrop, we find the invention of the idea (and the noun) of universalism in early modern times in theology and philosophy, for example, in the concept of deism. In contrast to this focus on commonalities, there was an increasing tendency to consider differences between religions as the centre of scholarly research, along with the belief that this should be made possible by comparative methods. This second approach was widespread outside the occult milieu; in the second half of the 20th century it had a strong, perhaps even hegemonic influence on religious studies after it had distanced itself from the phenomenological concept of religion. Nevertheless, despite the divergent interests of both approaches, the methods were similar and could, for understandable reasons, strengthen the view of occultist researchers that comparative methods were a common platform of all scholarly work in the field of religious history. Therefore, theosophists created a parallel scientific universe, with their own conferences, journals and publishing houses. But the question of where and to what extent comparative research motivated by perennialism finally influenced religious studies in the 20th century has not yet been conclusively answered.

After all, nearly every author writing on the subject suggests that occultist themes or forms of esoteric thoughts still exist, albeit transformed and analysed from a critical perspective, to this day in "rational" religious studies, which eventually became the dominant form. During this process, "pseudo-scientific", "para-scientific" procedures were systematically separated – and

finally excluded – from "scientific" religious research starting in the early 20th century.[8] Ultimately, only the historical-empirical procedures of philology, sociology and ethnology were considered to be acceptable.

How should the "occultism" or "esotericism" from which the emerging field of religious studies has increasingly distanced itself since the end of the 19th century be defined? This is a more significant problem, since both the subject and the terminology used were part of the boundary work in academic discussions. Some fundamental considerations can be found in a separate compilation (cf. the contribution of Zander), but the central insight is evident: The clear distinction between occultism/esotericism on the one hand and science on the other did not bear fruit, because occultists and esotericists, like prominent scholars at that time, claimed to deliver empirical results that could be replicated and that were intersubjectively verifiable and thus close to the criteria that were used to define the concept of "objectivity", as it was understood in the natural sciences in the 19th century.[9]

This field of occultism and esotericism was not an amorphous collection of ideas or individuals, but included a multitude of associations, societies and movements. Theosophy was probably the most important group – at least for the purposes of this book, but also presumably for the history of religious studies in general. Founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott and others in New York in 1875, this association set itself the goal of making the border between religion and science more permeable, if not abolishing it completely. They had adopted an anti-materialistic world view and developed practical applications for it, from school foundations to meditative paths to knowledge. Above all, Theosophists claimed to be superior to all other religions. For many exponents of the emerging field of religious studies, which at that time was still often designated comparative religious history, Theosophy became attractive not only because of its affinity to "rational" scholarly religious research,[10] but also for other, much more concrete reasons: Theosophists claimed to work empirically and thus to have assimilated the precondition of rational scientific understanding; Furthermore, Theosophy became an important medium for the exchange of knowledge about other religions, often through personal contacts, though it made a particularly lasting impact through the (often popular) translations of

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8 Helmut Zander, "Esoterische Wissenschaft um 1900: „Pseudowissenschaft" als Ergebnis ehemals „hochkultureller" Praxis," in *Pseudowissenschaft: Konzeptionen von Nichtwissenschaftlichkeit in der Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, ed. Dirk Rupnow et al. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2008), 77–99.

9 Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity*, 3rd ed. (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

10 Wolfgang Eßbach, *Religionssoziologie: 1. Glaubenskrieg und Revolution als Wiege neuer Religionen* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2014), cf. Rationalreligion, e.g. 156–166, 259–265, 309–316.

texts from non-European religions into Western languages. Religious studies has also benefited from this, as can again be demonstrated by the example of Tibetology and Indology.

2 University History

Against the backdrop of these unclear boundaries, the emerging field of religious studies began the process of differentiation between occultism and esotericism on the one hand and the increasingly hegemonic understanding of science that took hold in universities as part of a profound transformation in the second half of the 19th century. Universities at this time underwent significant structural changes compared to the universities and academies of early modern Europe. A central process for religious studies was the determination of the spectrum of disciplines to be included and the progression from the four traditional faculties of theology, philosophy, medicine and law to a multitude of new disciplines and sub-disciplines.[11] This is the context in which religious studies as we know it today has evolved since the 1860s. Its boundaries with other disciplines, however, remained fluid for decades, mainly due to the fact that at that time scholars from a large number of disciplines engaged in the study of religion (e.g. philologists such as Friedrich Max Müller, ethnologists such as James George Frazer or Bronisław Malinowski, or sociologists such as Emile Durkheim). The establishment of classical criteria for a university discipline – such as the existence of subject-related journals,[12] scientific associations, theses or habilitation theses[13] (partial) denomination of chairs – was a slow process since the end of the 19th century, and even in the 20th century this process of stabilisation took decades. In this respect, the field of religious studies within universities appeared relatively late in the formation of academic disciplines.

11 Sylvia Paletschek, "Geisteswissenschaften in Freiburg im 19. Jahrhundert: Expansion, Verwissenschaftlichung und Ausdifferenzierung der Disziplinen," in *550 Jahre Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg*, ed. Dieter Speck et al., vol. 3 (Freiburg i.Br.: Alber, 2007), 44–71; Rudolf Stichweh, *Zur Entstehung des modernen Systems wissenschaftlicher Disziplinen: Physik in Deutschland 1740–1890* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1984); Rudolf Stichweh, *Wissenschaft, Universität, Professionen: Soziologische Analysen* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013).
12 The *Revue de l'histoire des religions* was founded in 1880, the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* in 1898. Cf. Martina Dürkop, *Das Archiv für Religionswissenschaft in den Jahren 1919 bis 1939*, (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013).
13 Qualification by means of a postdoctoral thesis for a senior position in a university department.

Finally, disciplines such as history, ethnology and sociology emerged alongside religious studies, which in turn created their own sub-disciplines (such as the sociology of religion, religious ethnology or the history of religion), which the field of religious studies was often paired with. Religious studies also existed within the fields of sociology, ethnology and historiography. As we show in this volume, however, the initial differentiation of disciplines at the end of the 19th century did not mean that the processes of exchange between different disciplines had come to a standstill. The cross-connections to Indology, Archaeology or Natural Science (as in Nees von Esenbeck, see Daniel Cyranka's contribution) are repeatedly visible in our book. In this respect, this volume documents not only one aspect of the emergence and demarcation of religious studies, but also the continuing effects of religious research on other fields of academic investigation. This is not really surprising, because this differentiation stemmed from a process of largely arbitrary demarcation, in which criteria based on internal policies within each discipline often took precedence over content-related criteria. The emerging field of religious studies had to position itself in this competition, not only against disciplines which later became established in academia, such as sociology, but also against occultism and esotericism. Occultism and esotericism finally drew the short straw despite their empirical-scientific claims and were excluded from scholarly research. In this context, the concept of "pseudoscience" became a sharp sword which made use of unclear criteria to discredit these fields to the benefit of hegemonic science.[14] However, religious studies was not alone in this effort. The field of medicine sought to discredit quacks, astronomers fought against astrology and chemists fought against alchemy. All these efforts are structurally analogous processes of exclusion, probably following similar epistemological rules. However, this is not the subject of this book. The result was a radical and sometimes problematic separation between methods and topics which were considered to be "dignified" enough for research. The connection between normative and empirical research, whose existence was demonstrated in "esoteric" research, was no longer accepted. This was the case most recently after the crisis of phenomenology, when the ideal of strictly non-normative research in religious studies prevailed. As a consequence, not only methods, but entire areas of research were dropped. The fact that academic research on esotericism has only existed since the 1980s testifies to this state of affairs, which cannot be explained by scientific decisions concerning the selection of topics, but is mainly due to the history of the discipline.

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14 Dirk Rupnow et al., ed., *Pseudowissenschaft: Konzeptionen von Nichtwissenschaftlichkeit in der Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008).

Religious studies self-image could not free itself from this historiographical zeitgeist either. In the standard historiography of the field, as already noted above, no mention is made of the field's occultist and esoteric roots.[15] The process of exclusion of these traditions is not even discussed. In this volume we cannot systematically remedy this deficit, but we can provide material for a future revision of the historiography of religious studies. These new perspectives should not only include the continuities and ruptures, but also ask to what extent the criteria for addressing a subject were imposed by "opponents" of esotericism.

3 Biographies

The most blurred area of these demarcations were probably personal biographies. In virtually all the examples in this book, the biographical interests of researchers in the decades before and after 1900 play an important role in keeping the border open between occultism/esotericism and science (other researchers do draw sharp distinctions between them, but this book does not address these examples). While conducting research for this project, it became clear that we had completely underestimated the dimensions of this field. This gap could only be partially closed by indicating untreated areas. For this reason, a section of "biograms" is included (p. 239 ff.), in which we show where further research is needed. Nevertheless, this collection of very short texts is probably only the tip of the iceberg.[16]

This is due to considerable practical research problems. In the history of science, especially in the German-speaking world, the link between the history of science and biographical histories was strong in the 19th century, but became weaker in the 20th century. This deficit also affects religious studies to an eminent

15 Rudolph, *Die Religionsgeschichte an der Leipziger Universität und die Entwicklung der Religionswissenschaft*; Kippenberg, *Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte*; Molendijk, *The Emergence of the Science of Religion in the Netherlands*.

16 For example, the anthroposophical milieu has not been researched sufficiently. One could think of the anthroposophist Uno Donner, a Finnish industrialist, who donated a chair for religious and cultural history to the University of Turku/Åbo and and also donated/held one of the largest book collections on religion in Northern Europe. Another would be the German Diether Lauenstein, priest of the Christian Community, who learned Sanskrit from the Marburg indologist Johannes Nobel, habilitated (presumably) in 1944 at the University of Greifswald, where he subsequently received a teaching assignment for Indo-European Studies and Sanskrit. He was involved in the founding of the Herdecke community hospital (a nucleus of the University of Witten-Herdecke) and died as a supporter of apartheid in South West Africa (modern-day Namibia). We thank Robin Schmidt for the clues.

degree. One reason is that the *forum internum* of a person with his or her religious beliefs is extremely difficult to grasp methodologically, if it is even possible at all. In addition, there are overlaps in biographies which contradict the "work of purification"[17] of the hegemonic scientific dogmatism of the 19th century – scientists could be "rational" researchers at the professional level, all the while supposedly having "irrational" convictions of occult or esoteric origin at the biographical level, from an external perspective. That such hybridisations are normal was not clear in many 19th century discourses, which were probably often more focused on eliminating ambiguity than on polysemy; only in the context of the postcolonial revisions of the late 20th century did it become clear that biographical hybridisations are an appropriate way of interpreting life paths. In this book, we try to take a different course by constitutively linking the history of science and individual biographies.

However, this problem is not specific to representatives of the cultural sciences; rather, these blurred boundaries can also and especially be found in the "hard" natural sciences, where an even clearer distinction between science and pseudo-science, or religious studies, is often assumed. Such examples include Marie Curie, who not only stood in the laboratory, but also attended spiritual seances, or Albert Einstein, who was not only a theorist in the field of physics, but also read Blavatsky and attended lectures by Rudolf Steiner. Georg Cantor, the inventor of set theory in mathematics, who was interested in both Catholic theories of infinity and the existence of the "true" Rosicrucians, may be added to this group, along with the mathematician Jan Arnoldus Schouten, the explorer of differential geometry, who was also interested in Theosophy, or Thomas Alva Edison, who not only invented the light bulb and the two-way telegraph, but was also a temporary member of Theosophical Society Adyar (partly for economic reasons, e.g. to better sell his products in India?). The separation between the humanities and the natural sciences, which was established in university practice – though always criticised in theory of science – never disappeared on an individual level.

4 Goals and Contributions

It is against this background that we set the goals of this volume. Of course, on the material level, we aim to determine which institutions, stakeholders and programmes have existed that do not appear in the traditional historiography

17 Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: Essai d'anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: Editions la Découverte, 1991).

of religious studies or are only briefly mentioned. This passion for discovering new narratives runs through this volume. The underlying questions are nevertheless more far-reaching: How did the hegemony of the approaches that dominate religious studies today become established and how did the pragmatically consensual or canonised research strategies, as was briefly mentioned above, become predominant? What foundational logic is the historiography of religious studies (and perhaps also its scientific understanding) subject to? Which esoteric traditions did it not fit into? To what extent does the projection of a later scientific understanding stem from the reconstruction of the history of the origin of religious studies, in which esotericism plays no role?

In light of these questions, a simple, classical principle of historiography comes to the fore in this volume: cultures must be understood (or at least an attempt at understanding must be made) in their respective contexts – which, as everyone knows, is always only possible asymptotically. This very attempt to understand history *sine ira et studio* is far too rare, if it is indeed done at all. Rather, every reconstruction of the past must carry out a self-critical reflection with regard to its construction from the normative preconditions of the present. This volume is thus concerned with depicting the rationality with which many contemporaries connected occultist and esoteric ideas with rational science as well as understanding the esoteric rationality from the horizon of the years around 1900 – even if we do not (or no longer) share these positions today, of course. Finally, as we indicated at the beginning, these perspectives should help to loosen the shackles that are placed on what we call academic disciplines. Religious studies and research on esotericism are indistinguishable fields of research par excellence.

The volume contains the following contributions:

- It opens with a proposal by **Helmut Zander** to define **esotericism** as a scholarly subject. He holds that different definitions of the esoteric will exist – and overlap. They will have family resemblances but never be identical.
- **Daniel Cyranka** opens the concrete historical considerations with a reflection on the natural scientist and German Catholic Christian Gottfried Daniel **Nees von Esenbeck** (1776–1858), who was a famous scientist in addition to being president of the Academy of the Natural Sciences Leopoldina, all the while holding magnetistic and spiritualistic interests throughout his life. He is a testimony to the fact that the distinction made between science and religion, including their so-called spiritualistic, spiritist or occult dimensions is ill-founded. Cyranka also raises the question of whether religious studies in this context hasn't outsourced the study of the genesis of non-rationalised religion to "exotic Oriential" settings like India.

- **Marco Frenschkowski** documents, for the years around 1900, the still extremely dense overlapping or linking or fusion (each of these metaphors draws only a selective and therefore problematic picture of the situation at that time) of "scientific" and "occult" fields in Great Britain. Biographies, ideas and social institutions did eben gerade nicht not exist separately.
- **Boaz Huss** shows that the early research of the **Kabbalah** in the decades around 1900 was, to an enormous extent, closely linked with positions that were (later) regarded as "perennialist" or "esoteric". This includes famous representatives such as Martin Buber (1878–1965) or Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), who distanced himself from Theosophy while still sharing common interests with it.
- **Julian Strube** opens the reflections on the interrelation between Europe and Asia with an analysis of the background of **John Woodroffe** (1865–1936), one of the first explorers of Tantra. Strube can prove that the interpretation of Tantra by Woodroffe and his Indian informants was marked, not only by "esoteric" Western ideas but especially by the regional context of Bengal, which gave them a starting point for interpreting the Tantra as a universal tradition.
- **Jens Schlieter** attributes a profound Theosophical influence to **Walter Y. Evans-Wentz** (1878–1965), the famous translator of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which shaped scientific and popular reception of theoretical ideas for decades. Evans-Wentz was not only personally close to Theosophy, but also influenced the translation of the *Book of the Dead* with its ideas.
- **Léo Bernard** examines the ideas of the French scholar in religious studies **Paul Masson-Oursel** (1882–1956), who developed comparative religious research in which *philosophia perennis* played a central role. This leads to a field where it is extremely difficult to distinguish between esoteric and non-hegemonic motifs. In any case, it is clear that his position was accepted in the Theosophical milieu.
- **Sabine Böhme** concludes our volume with a contribution on **Walter Andrae** (1875–1956), one of the most famous German archaeologists of the early 20th century. She can prove that his arrangement of key Near Eastern works of art on Berlin's Museumsinsel (including the Ishtar Gate and the Processional Street from Babylon) follows anthroposophical convictions.

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Helmut Zander

What Is Esotericism? Does It Exist? How Can It Be Understood?

Abstract: The term "esotericism" has been used by practitioners since the late 18th century to describe non-hegemonic ideas and practices. The ideas behind this term were mainly Christian ideas – or ideas from other sources (e.g. "pagan" ones), interpreted by Christians. In the 20th century, the term esotericism became a scientific concept in Western Europe and North America, following a theological path which was opened in the 17th century. This cultural relativity limits the possible application of this term to other regions, cultures or language traditions and claims to determine possible semantic, pragmatic or functional equivalents from a critical perspective. Consequently, there is no culturally invariant "essence" of "esotericism". Each concept applied to "esotericism" contains only possible – not mandatory – features and involves normative decisions. If one uses such a "toolbox" of features, a comparison of different phenomena or traditions is only possible with regard to specific features or a group of features. Consequence: Concrete definitions of esotericism apply only to concrete fields of research – which means: Different definitions of esotericism will overlap. They will have family resemblances but never be identical. Since our concepts of esotericism will always be different, intercultural comparison will remain difficult. However, scholarly research must resist (over-)simplification when it comes to interpreting reality.

1 The Religionist Problem of "Esotericism"

The term "esotericism" (which will henceforth be used mainly without quotation marks) is a relatively recent production of the history of the English language. Comparable results are found for the other languages of Western Europe.[1] This term first appeared in German in 1792 in a text on the "esotericism of the Order" of the ancient Pythagoreans,[2] but remained extremely rare for a long time. It only began to take off in the last two decades of the 19th century.

1 I would like to express my sincere thanks to Yves Mühlematter, Dimitry Okropiridze and Julian Strube for their critical reading and helpful hints.

2 Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, "Historische Esoterikforschung, oder: Der lange Weg der Esoterik zur Moderne," in *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, vol. 3, *Wege in die Moderne*, ed. Monika Neugebauer-Wölk et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 41.

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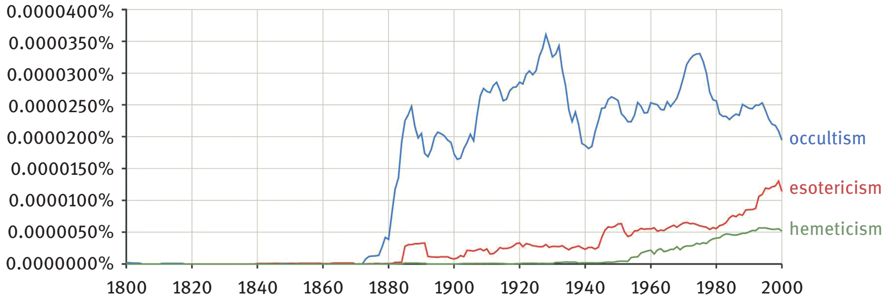

This also applies – as shown by a cursory glance at the books scanned by Google on the Ngram platform – to related and, at the same time, competing terms such as occultism or hermeticism.
The adjectives for these three terms are much older and date back to Antiquity.

This innovation in terms is not of secondary importance, because their history – as expounded upon by Reinhart Koselleck in the "Begriffsgeschichte"[3]– makes one thing very clear: whenever a new noun appears, there are intellectual and social reasons for its creation, which, for the historian, contain important indications of mental or ideological changes. The traditional counterargument considers new terms to be irrelevant because the object (here: esoteric practices or ideas) exists long before the term (here: esotericism). Even if this argument were true – which I deny as a general rule – this would not eliminate the tension between *signifiant* and *signifié* – between term and object – because a term is always coined in a specific time and context. Therefore, two developments can only be understood in a given context: What exactly is meant by a term? And, above all: Why did a term have to be "invented"? Why did it not already exist (although, as the counterargument would have it, the object had already existed for some time)? A more precise reconstruction of the history of the term "esotericism" and of kindred terms, is difficult to achieve because users of the terms since the end of the 18th century have not taken great care to define them. However, though detailed historical research on the history of the semantics of occultism, hermeticism and esotericism is lacking, some semantic fields can be roughly outlined. Around 1900, the term occultism, which appears as a noun around the middle of the 19th century in France (presumably first used by Eliphas Lévi),[4] had many

3 Reinhart Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006); Reinhart Koselleck, ed., *Historische Semantik und Begriffsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979).
4 Julian Strube, "Occultist Identity Formations Between Theosophy and Socialism in fin-de-siècle France," *Numen* 64, no. 5/6 (2017): 568–595.

points in common with the concept of (empirical) science. As a consequence, terms such as occult science, occult research, or, more concretely, occult chemistry or occult physics were either coined or gained in popularity (such as the "sciences occultes" in France). Hermeticism, which may have first appeared in the English language in the (late?) 19th century,[5] is likely to be more clearly defined because it is closely linked to the Neoplatonic tradition, which, in turn, goes back to a reference text – Marsilio Ficino's translation of the "Corpus Hermeticum" – published in 1463. The concept of esotericism might be, at least today, the vaguest of the three. That being said, in view of the lack of research, my considerations are currently only plausible conjectures on a possible accumulation of features in certain contexts.

The reasons for the scarcity of academic research in this area (despite the widespread use of these terms and their associated practices into the late 20th century) are known, at least in principle. The blurred boundary between practitioners and analysts, as documented in this volume, persisted among scientists well into the 20th century, discrediting the entire field of research on esotericism, since, in the eyes of established scholars in religious studies, the research on esotericism was "corrupted" by ideological interests – or by the "religionists", as this group of scholars is called in academia. The highly influential scholar Frances Yates provides an example of the problematic adoption of terms in the object language ("Objektsprache") and at least some of the underlying "esoteric" concepts,[6] but these debates are still ongoing.[7]

2 Merits and Limits of the Scholarly Debates

The most significant change in this situation occurred when Antoine Faivre (*1934) entered the field. Faivre was trained as a literary scholar and was highly qualified in non-hegemonic currents of the early 19th century. In 1979, he was appointed "*Chaire d'Histoire des courants ésotériques et mystiques dans l'Europe moderne et contemporaine*" at the Sorbonne in Paris. Following his first writings, in

5 First appearance in 1894, according to: *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "hermetism"; There are older references in German; for example for 1709, cf. Florian Ebeling, *Das Geheimnis des Hermes Trismegistos: Geschichte des Hermetismus* (München: C. H. Beck, 2009), 71. However, a history of the term has only been briefly touched upon in research.

6 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Beyond the Yates Paradigm: The Study of Western Esotericisms between Counterculture and New Complexity," *Aries* 1 (2001): 5–37.

7 Cf. the debate between Wouter Hanegraaff and Arthur Versluis; http://wouterjhanegraaff.blogspot.com/2018/06/esotericism-and-criticism-platonic.html [accessed on 30 September 2019].

which he appeared to be close to adopting a philosophia perennis,[8] he became one of the primary historico-critical explorers of esoteric currents. In 1992, a booklet resulting from his work was published which contained a systematic outline for defining esotericism. "Esotericism", according to Faivre's concept, must contain four "critères nécessaires" for "une forme de pensée":[9]

– the interpretation of correlations as "les correspondences";
– the idea of "la Nature [sic] vivante";
– knowledge through "imagination" and "médiations" (transmission/transfer);
– the alteration of man by "l'expérience de la transmutation".

"Critères supplementaires" are, in his eyes, the formation of a "concordance" of all religious traditions and the "transmission" of knowledge in a master-disciple relationship.

This systematisation represented an enormous step forward in making research on esoteric objects more scientific, but it turned out to be both a blessing and a curse. It offered a framework of categories that could be used to map, systematise and critically discuss the vast field of "esotericism". This was a clear advantage. At the same time, however, this was also a disadvantage since this concept, because of its clear and simple structure, took root without being discussed critically in large parts of research on esotericism, both among researchers working in the narrow field of esotericism and even more so among those working in scientific fields in which esotericism was only a part of the field of research. Nevertheless – and here lies an enduring problem – Faivre's concept enjoyed (and still enjoys) great popularity in scholarly reflections,[10] and was even more popular in the non-academic world – even after it had long since been revised in the scientific debate.

Scientific criticism of Faivre's concept has been expressed in two areas: content and epistemology. When it comes to content, it soon became clear that some notions only fit into narrow segments of esoteric traditions; transmutation, for example, comes from alchemy. It would be difficult to apply it outside this field; in the end, it can only be used metaphorically. At the same time, and surprisingly at

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8 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 339–355; see also the short biography in this volume, p. 247f.
9 Antoine Faivre, *L'ésotérisme* (Que sais-je ? 1031) (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992), 14–19.
10 Cf. the recent proposal of Peter-André Alt, *Imaginäres Geheimwissen: Untersuchungen zum Hermetismus in literarischen Texten der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2012), 41–42, which is only partly based on Faivre's concept.

that, the dimension of the secret or hidden was missing in Faivre's list – although esotericism is derived from the Greek ἐσωτερικός [esoterikos], which can be translated as inner, secret, hidden, concealed, arcane, occult, belonging to a circle of disciples.[11] The term was later translated into the Latin "occultus", and finally, in the early 18th century, the neo-Latin term "esotericus" appeared.[12] Other possible characteristics, which may be found in scholarly literature, are also missing, such as the idea of universal knowledge[13] or that of the connection between science and (religious) knowledge.[14] Altogether, it turned out that Faivre's definition was (too) closely connected with the Romantic philosophy on nature, on which Faivre was an expert. Nevertheless, many scholars continued to define esotericism with content-related criteria, sometimes using new criteria (as discussed in chapter 3) or more cautiously speaking of "religious characteristics of esoteric spirituality".[15] Others, however, refused to tie their scholarly work to a definition.[16]

With regard to epistemology, a radical critique of Faivre's and many other older works was made in 2004 by Kocku von Stuckrad, now a scholar in religious studies at the University of Groningen (the Netherlands). He proved that those who spoke of esotericism almost always projected their own ideas on esotericism into the sources without sufficiently asking whether these ideas were covered by the sources.[17] He proposed the thesis that esotericism is a discursive construct; in other words, it is what followers or scientists think it is. A look at Wikipedia makes

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11 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, comps., *A Greek–English Lexicon*, revised and augmented by H. St. Jones, with the assistance of R. McKenzie, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), s.v. ἐσωτερικός.

12 Neugebauer-Wölk, "Historische Esoterikforschung", 64f.

13 Andreas B. Kilcher, ed., *Constructing Tradition: Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

14 Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900–1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

15 Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

16 Such as (at least temporarily) in Hanegraaff, "Introduction", in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al., vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), xi: "It would have been unwise to link the present Dictionary too specifically to one particular definition or theoretical approach. Such an attempt would, moreover, have been unnecessary, because (. . .) scholars in this domain often strongly disagree about abstract theoretical definitions although they in fact share a broad consensus about the historical phenomena".

17 Kocku von Stuckrad, *Was ist Esoterik? Kleine Geschichte des geheimen Wissens* (München: C.H. Beck, 2004); for a detailed analysis, see Kocku von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), or, similarly, Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

it clear that he put his finger on a key issue. Here we find a diffuse field of terms. The German Wikipedia portal "Esoterik" contains twelve main terms: alchemy, anthroposophy, astrology, hermeticism, kabbala, magic, manticism, meditation, Rosicrucian, shamanism, thelema, Theosophy. These are followed by hundreds of keywords, of which I will only mention the first ten under the letter A: Abaris, Abraham von Worms, Abrakadabra, Achtsamkeitsmeditation, Adam Kadmon, adept, Adyar Library, affirmation, Agni yoga and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim.[18] Stringent criteria for a definition are missing. This is admittedly a non-academic use of the term esotericism. However, if we examine the subjects addressed at the biennial conferences of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), we find a narrower and more well-thought-out field of topics, though, in the end, these topics are still not clearly defined.

In this debate, Michael Bergunder, scholar for religious studies at the University of Heidelberg, has articulated the consequences even more radically than von Stuckrad: all our notions, including esotericism, are actually "empty signifiers" void of fixed content,[19] since we always create meaning when we use terms. But in linguistic pragmatics, terms are not assigned content at random, because a term is bound to a language and thus to certain contexts, which entail the existence of content. Content is thus only created in specific contexts and, consequently, understandable only in these contexts.[20] This definition brings to light the problem of the constructed nature of our concepts.

A key to understanding esotericism and related terms lies in reflecting on the genesis of this concept. Esotericism (inter alia) arose in demarcation from Christian theology, occultism (partly) in demarcation from the natural sciences of the 19th century, hermeticism (also) in confrontation with 18th-century philosophy. Demarcation does not only mean that these concepts were formulated against certain positions or traditions, but also that they were already part of the counter position. Esotericism has thus not only arisen in conflict within and outside of Christian theologies but has also been shaped by Christian ideas (for instance, with regard to the relationship between the public and private spheres and be-

18 "Esoterik," Wikipedia, accessed on 4 August 2018. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Esoterik ().

19 Even if this emptiness might be a "central moment of the discursive manufacture of meaning"; Michael Bergunder, "What is Esotericism? Cultural Studies Approaches and the Problems of Definition in Religious Studies," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (2010): 23.

20 Michael Bergunder, "Was ist Religion? Kulturwissenschaftliche Überlegungen zum Gegenstand der Religionswissenschaft," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 19 (2011): 3–55. The application of his theory on the concept of esotericism in Bergunder, "What is Esotericism?," 9–36.

tween the institution and the individual, concretely with regard to mysterion/sacramentum) and was normally inseparable from Christian theology. This is part of an intensive and ongoing debate in the field of religious studies, since it has become clear that central analytical concepts are inextricably linked with Western and, more specifically, Christian concepts.

The last major proposal addressing the problem of a definition of esotericism was presented by Wouter J. Hanegraaff, who has held the chair of "Geschiedenis van de Hermetic filosofie en verwante stromingen" at the University of Amsterdam since 1999. In 2012, he presented an intellectually challenging publication on this topic, which remains probably the most important publication to date: "Esotericism and the Academy". One of his important findings was the evidence that the conception of a "heretical" tradition later called esotericism was to a considerable extent the result of Protestant controversial theology. Since the late 16th century, theologians have identified spiritualistic and hermetic ideas within Christianity as non-orthodox and excluded them from the "orthodox" traditions. Ehregott Daniel Colberg, by means of his "Das Platonisch-Hermetisches [sic] Christenthum", is, in addition to Jakob Thomasius (before him) and Jakob Brucker (following him), probably a pivotal figure in this debate.[21] Interestingly, he refused to draw a sharp distinction between spiritualistic and hermetic traditions,[22] mainly because both (always, in Colberg's eyes) questioned the authority of the Bible by means of a theory of internal access to religious knowledge and their concept of the divine essence of man. The systematic consequences Hanegraaff drew from this can be found in the subtitle of the book, which considers esotericism as "rejected knowledge". In this perspective, everything that has been rejected in academic discourses or that theology has considered to be heresy can be labelled as

21 Ehregott D. Colberg, *Das Platonisch-Hermetisches [sic] Christenthum, Begreiffend Die Historische Erzehlung vom Ursprung und vielerley Secten der heutigen Fanatischen Theologie unterm Namen der Paracelsisten, Weigelianer, Rosencreutzer, Quäcker, Böhmisten, Wiedertäuffer, Bourignisten, Labadisten und Quietisten*: [Vol. 2] *Darinn die Stücke der heutigen Fanatischen Theologie nach Ordnung der Glaubens-Artickel vorgetragen, aus den Schrifften der Schwärmer gründlich untersuchet, nach ihren rechten Verstand und Ursprung erördert, und aus Gottes Wort kurtz und deutlich widerleget werden* (Frankfurt am Main: Weidmann, 1690/1691).

Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 107–114, labelled him "the heresiologist" and was aware of the role that Jacob Thomasius played in the background, but things seem to be much more complicated, e. g. with regard to Italian debates surrounding Giovanni Battista Crispo; cf. Sicco Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte: Philosophiegeschichte zwischen Barock und Aufklärung* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2004), 26–27.

22 Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, 156–164. Cf. the ongoing debate on this question in Hans-Georg Kemper, "Hermetik – das 'Andere' im Luthertum: Zur Diskussion um die Anfänge deutscher Naturlyrik," *Zeitsprünge* 20, no. 1/2 (2016): 2–14.

"esotericism". This historical and normative distinction had then, according to Hanegraaff, also become the basis for the academic determination of the field of esotericism. By taking such a position, Hanegraaff was closely bound up with definitions of discourse theory as presented by Stuckrad and Bergunder. In these concepts, everything can become wrapped up in the content of a definition of esotericism. In Stuckrad's and Bergunder's view, scholars defined the content, while with Hanegraaff it was the theologians who did so by using the term esotericism. In all these perspectives, esotericism was the product of a process of negotiation, usually from asymmetrical positions, since the interpretive power of academic scholarship became stronger than that of practicing "esotericists" in the course of the 20th century.

Nevertheless, following Hanegraaff's proposal contained its own problems. If everything that was rejected by academia were esotericism, one would ultimately have an extremely broad field in which any non-hegemonic thinking would be considered esoteric. In addition, there was a further problem: Hanegraaff himself, at the end of his volume, again reverted to defining esotericism in terms of content. Ultimately, there are, he wrote:

> . . . very suggestive commonalities that structure the discourse as a whole; and in spite of its great diversity, it refers to real historical currents and ideas that are grouped under a label such as 'esotericism' not just arbitrarily, but for specific reasons that have as much to do with their own nature and intellectual content as with the discourse that constructs them as such. There is something "out there" after all . . . An obvious red thread runs through my entire narrative in the four chapters of this book: we have seen that an intellectual culture grounded in biblical monotheism and Greek rationality was forced to come to terms with the presence of paganism. The development of what we now call Western esotericism is unimaginable without this fundamental fact. I will not try to summarize the argument in my previous chapters, but merely point out that the "wisdom of the pagans" was the heart and core of the ancient wisdom narrative, the central target of Catholic and (especially) Protestant polemicists culminating in the anti-apologetic current, and the principal object of ridicule for Enlightenment critics.[23]

The virtue and the strength of Hanegraaff's book, despite the sharp lines he draws in his discursive definition of esotericism, lie in the fact that he admits

23 Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 369. Cf. Marco Pasi, "The Problems of Rejected Knowledge: Thoughts on Wouter Hanegraaff's Esotericism and the Academy," *Religion* 43 (2013): 201–212, and the debate in this volume of the journal "Religion". Concerning one element (the philosophy of identity as a core conviction), cf. Helmut Zander, "Das Konzept der 'Esoterik' im Bermudadreieck von Gegenstandsorientierung, Diskurstheorie und Wissenschaftspolitik: Mit Überlegungen zur konstitutiven Bedeutung des identitätsphilosophischen Denkens," in *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Wege in die Moderne*, ed. M. Neugebauer-Wölk et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 113–135.

that there are common elements which might apply to large parts of early modern esotericism and also, possibly, to the esotericism of the 19th and 20th centuries. Ultimately, as Hanegraaff makes clear several times in his book, early modern Christianity took issue with two elements: on the one hand, the (Neoplatonic) philosophy of identity, according to which God and the world, God and matter were only two sides of the same coin, and, as a consequence, the very essence of man was thought to be identical with the divine. A second point followed from this: in this conception, man possessed a direct relationship to the divine; he was no longer dependent on mediators (at least after receiving instruction from a master). Concerning this point, Protestant theologians started to distance themselves from orthodox Christianity towards the end of the 17th century. In Catholic theology, on the other hand, in reaction to the Reformation, a theology developed starting in the 16th century in which a multitude of places of revelation[24] and an amalgamation with non-Christian traditions could legitimise religion; as a consequence, it explicitly distanced itself from occultism only in the 19th century, and mildly and cautiously at that. At the beginning of the 19th century (and perhaps earlier – there are no investigations concerning earlier centuries), many esotericists adopted the Protestant perspective. Hanegraaff regarded this as the core of the above-mentioned "pagan" tradition which the theologians turned against – and in this paganism one again encounters (albeit not only) the Neoplatonic-hermetic tradition, since it could be regarded as a core element of paganism. This opens up a further problem in the definition of the content of esotericism, which is analogous to the question of the significance of the "secret" or the "hidden". It is evident that positions of philosophical identity, which aim at abolishing the difference between spirit and matter, and, in the end, frequently lead to the idea of a divine human being, play an important and often key role in "esoteric" ideas. And, of course, one can ask, along with Hanegraaff, whether this is not indeed a constitutive element of such traditions here.

That being said, another systematic problem of Hanegraaff's approach lies in the following pivotal point. Certain ideas which Hanegraaff (though this also applies to others) often called "rejected knowledge", were not exactly such. Often, the opposite was true. Hermetic ideas, for example, were part of the established theological and philosophical discourses in early modern times and among enlightened elites in the 18th century.[25] Although they could be the subject of theological controversies (which can be found much earlier, and more distinctively, in

24 Pivotal text: Melchior Cano, *Locorum theologicorum libri duodecim* (Venice: Rubinus, 1567).
25 Cf. Jan Assmann and Florian Ebeling, *Ägyptische Mysterien: Reisen in die Unterwelt in Aufklärung und Romanti; Eine kommentierte Anthologie* (München: C. H. Beck, 2011), 7–27 passim.

Protestantism than in Catholicism), this did not mean that they were rejected knowledge. One such example is the history of religious studies, which is the subject of this volume. Here, around 1900, the contemporaries often did not know exactly where the boundaries between hegemonic and non-hegemonic knowledge should be set (as the present volume shows). If one approaches this question from the perspective of individual biographies, the matter starts to become completely confusing. Accepted and rejected knowledge were often intertwined, or “peacefully” coexisted side by side. An older historical example of these mergers are pietistic, hermetically influenced ideas that can be found in pietism itself, as well as in orthodox Protestantism or among dissenting Protestants, such as Baptists.[26] In the Catholic Church, as one might expect from the aforementioned details, the conflicts were far less pronounced. Agostino Steuco (1496/97–1548), a polyglot scholar who preceded S. Marco in Venice (and thus presumably had access to Bessarion’s library and its Neoplatonic texts), librarian of the Vatican Library and Council Father in Trento, was able to publish his Philosophia perennis, which gave this tradition its name, without encountering any problems.[27] Furthermore, the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher was able to combine orthodox Catholic and hermetic positions without causing any major conflicts.[28] Another (Protestant) example is given in Hans-Georg Kemper’s important history of German Baroque poetry, in which he documents the high presence of hermetic ideas and the intrinsic connection – indeed, one might often speak of a fusion – between hermetic and other “hegemonic” ideas.[29] In particular, Monika Neugebauer-Wölk,

26 Anselm Schubert, *Täufertum und Kabbalah: Augustin Bader und die Grenzen der Radikalen Reformation* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008); Hermann Geyer, *Verborgene Weisheit: Johann Arndts “Vier Bücher vom Wahren Christentum” als Programm einer spiritualistisch-hermetischen Theologie*, 2 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001); Hans-Georg Kemper, “Aufgeklärter Hermetismus: Brockes’ Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott im Spiegel seiner Bibliothek,” in *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, ed. M. Neugebauer-Wölk with the assistance of H. Zaunstöck (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1999), 140–178. The starting point for the research on Goethe and his Protestant context: Rolf Christian Zimmermann, *Das Weltbild des jungen Goethe: Studien zur hermetischen Tradition des deutschen 18. Jahrhunderts*, vol 1, 2nd ed. (1969, enl. and rev. ed., München: Fink, 2002).

27 Agostino Steuco, *De Perenni philosophia libri X* (Lyon: Gryphius, 1540); cf. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis: Historische Umrisse abendländischer Spiritualität in Antike, Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 677–678.

28 Felicia Englmann, *Sphärenharmonie und Mikrokosmos: Das politische Denken des Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680)* (Köln: Böhlau, 2006).

29 Hans-Georg Kemper, *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Neuzeit*, 6 vols. (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1987–2002). In addition, cf. the intriguing dissertation by Kristine Hannak, *Geist=reiche Critik. Hermetik, Mystik und das Werden der Aufklärung in spiritualistischer Literatur der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin u.a.: de Gruyter, 2013).

Professor Emerita for the History of the Enlightenment at the University of Halle, has investigated this connection for the early modern period using the keyword “Enlightenment and Esotericism”[30] in the study of spiritualism. Friedemann Stengels most important book on Emanuel Swedenborg is another example of this entanglement, including the amalgamation of Christian ideas with concepts that were later labelled esoteric.[31] However, the opposition to “modernity” had already been questioned earlier.[32]

In any case, it makes no sense to speak of independent esoteric traditions, because they are intricately intertwined with “hegemonic” ideas and form hybrids that elude clear separation.[33] One can analytically distinguish the different traditions, but not, as the metaphors of heresy or rejection suggest, separate them. As a rule, it makes no sense to ask *whether* a tradition is (purely) esoteric, but only *to what extent* it contains ideas which are considered to be esoteric.

The de facto separation of research objects is – though this is of secondary importance here – often associated with another problem: the common – though obviously not ubiquitous – separation of research practices. In an ensuing intensive and unfinished scholarly debate in German Studies (see below), important topics from the Enlightenment, such as pantheism, deism or the understanding of history, are discussed, again against the background of the unclear boundaries between hermeticism and spiritualism that Colberg had already discussed at the end of the 17th century. The fact that current research on esotericism apparently has not taken note of these discussions in literary studies (and vice versa) is a communicative problem in academic research, which might have promoted the notion of clear boundaries contra factum. Researchers who concentrate on esotericism are often insufficiently aware (or entirely unaware) of findings in neigh-

30 Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, ed. with the assistance of H. Zaunstöck, *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, vol. 1 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1999); Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, ed. with the assistance of Andre Rudloph, *Aufklärung und Esoterik*: *Rezeption – Integration – Konfrontation*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008); Monika Neugebauer-Wölk et al., ed.*Aufklärung und Esoterik*: *Wege in die Moderne*, vol. 3 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013).

31 Stengel, Friedemann, *Aufklärung bis zum Himmel: Emanuel Swedenborg im Kontext der Theologie und Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

32 cf. Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), and especially Corinna Adele Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of German Modern* (PhD diss., 1999, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

33 Cf. Julian Strube, *Sozialismus, Katholizismus und Okkultismus im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts: Die Genealogie der Schriften von Eliphas Lévi* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 17–23, and his analysis of 19th-century French Catholicism.

bouring disciplines.[34] Let me give just one example. In German literature, there is an intensive debate surrounding the significance of hermetic traditions in which literary scholar Peter-André Alt (former president of the Freie Universität Berlin and current president of the German Hochschulrektorenkonferenz), following Kemper, has paid tribute to the great significance of hermetic traditions regarding the meaning of an "imaginäres Geheimwissen" (imaginary secret knowledge) for the transformation of anthropological and cosmological ideas from the Enlightenment, thereby methodically linking approaches from literary studies and from the history of knowledge.[35] Volkhard Wels, Professor for the History of Knowledge at the Freie Universität Berlin, on the other hand, disagreed and partly denied the significance of hermeticism, mainly advocating the paramount significance of spiritualistic traditions. Pantheism, for example, had not been derived, in his perspective, from hermetic traditions; rather, he identified its sources in the work of "orthodox" reformers (Luther, Melanchthon) and in a "radikalem Spiritualismus".[36] This thesis is at least structurally close to the above-mentioned position of Colberg. Kemper recanted later in a monograph.[37]

This contention bears witness to a separation between disciplines, since, if I see it correctly, the debate on literature and philosophy in 18th-century Germany has not been perceived by those who claim to do research under the label of esotericism. This example in the field of early modern literature stands only pars pro toto as an example of the partial isolation of research on esotericism from research in other disciplines. Another neighbouring field in which the state of research is often lacking is the history of theology. However, the barriers to entry in this field are extremely high; on the one hand, because the centuries-long debates of theologians are often not accessible to scholars due to a lack of knowledge of Latin, and, on the other hand, because the scholarly analyses form an extremely large corpus.[38]

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34 Other examples may be found in the sciences (e.g. in the fields of chemistry, alchemy or pharmacology), in philosophy or in the arts.

35 Alt, *Imaginäres Geheimwissen*.

36 Volkhard Wels, "Zwischen Spiritualismus, Hermetik und lutherischer 'Orthodoxie': Zu Hans-Georg Kempers Vorgeschichte der Naturlyrik," *Zeitsprünge* 16, no. 3/4 (2012): 256–257, 284–285.

37 Kemper, "Hermetik".

38 However, this problem exists in varying degrees of severity. In the research on the early modern period there is, in part, an intensive reception of theological debates (cf., as an example, Peter J. Forshaw and Kevin Killeen, eds., *The Word and the World: Biblical Exegesis and Early Modern Science* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), or Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*; for an indication of the problems, cf. Egil Asprem,"Esotericism and the Scholastic Imagination: The

One can only suspect that the tendencies to delimit or separate esotericism as an object and as an academic discipline are linked to the occasionally insufficient reception of contributions from other disciplines. On the other hand, things become even more dramatic, insofar as there is often no reception of the conceptual debates on esotericism. This applies, anecdotally, to the entire debate previously mentioned in the field of German studies. Names like Faivre, Hanegraaff or Stuckrad are often sought in vain here.[39]

Let us return to the problems of discourse theory. The discursive concepts left the definition of esotericism open (or unclear). With the shift from content to a discursive practice (a far-reaching shift in the work of Stuckrad and Bergunder, a partial shift in the work of Hanegraaff), extremely different and broad definitions of esotericism became possible. The field of research benefited from this openness, because this renunciation of clear boundaries opened the door for the immense expansion of esoteric research into the most diverse times and contexts. There were hardly any limits to scientific curiosity, which the ESSWE conferences again show. This boundlessness is essential in order to be able to properly define an extremely controversial object. Research on esotericism is probably one of the "wildest" and most stimulating fields of research in cultural studies, in which disciplinary boundaries (one of the great catastrophes of the history of science since the 19th century, since they separate intertwined topics) hardly play a role. The ESSWE networks which have emerged in recent years[40] make clear which areas research on esotericism has spread to in the meantime. In addition to the regional networks (Central and Eastern Europe, Israel, Ireland, Italy, Scandinavia, South America), there are thematic networks on aesthetics, Antiquity, contemporary esotericism, Islam, mysticism, paganism, politics and gender. At the same time, one problem is evident: a person can understand, by means of discursive justification, nearly anything he or she wants about esotericism – including retreats to Faivre's proposal.

It seems to me that at least the following has become clear as a result of these deliberations:

1. It does not make sense to use such a narrow definition as Faivre's because it excludes too many phenomena while simultaneously postulating a general concept that is actually bound to particular cultural contexts.

Origins of Esoteric Practice in Christian Kataphatic Spirituality," *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism*, 4 (2016): 3–36.

39 They are completely absent, for example, in Wels, "Zwischen Spiritualismus,"; Alt, *Imaginäres Geheimwissen*, and mostly absent in Kemper, "*Hermetik*," 14–15.

40 "Networks." ESSWE, accessed on 5 August 2019. https://www.esswe.org/Networks.

2. At the theoretical level, discourse theory has made the constructed nature of a concept such as esotericism – and, ultimately, of all our concepts – clear. On the practical level, however, this has led to an insufficient reflection on the concept of esotericism. However, scholarly research that is unable to properly define the object of its research (and only as an analytical tool, which does not claim to mirror reality) has little chance of obtaining pertinent results.

In short, neither a strictly discourse-related nor a strictly content-related concept of esotericism provides a satisfactory solution to the conceptualisation of this field of research.

3 Global Esotericism

As an example, the problematic consequences of dealing with conceptual questions in an unsatisfactory way are obvious in a new field of research: esotericism outside of Europe, or esotericism as a "global" phenomenon. In 2018, the journal *Correspondences: Online Journal for the Academic Study of Western Esotericism* decided to forego the use of the adjective "Western". In addition to the hint at the increasing entanglement of cultures, "political and ideological motivations" in research were given as reasons for this renunciation.[41] Such normative implications continue to play an important role in the intensifying debate surrounding the concept of global research on esotericism. Simultaneously, classical categories of comparative cultural research are only addressed to a small extent. Central issues in this debate would be methodical questions concerning entanglement, comparatistics and the transferability of terms and concepts. These elements have brought the older debates about postcolonial theory from the end of the 20th century,

41 Aren Roukema and Allan Kilner-Johnson, "Time to Drop the 'Western,'" *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 6, 2 (2018): 109–115. Concerning the older debate, cf. Kennet Granholm, "Locating the West: Problematizing the Western in Western Esotericism and Occultism," in *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, ed. Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 17–36, who considers the term a relic of Western colonialism and therefore refrains from using it, or Wouter Hanegraaff, "The Globalization of Esotericism," *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 3 (2015): 55–91, who proposes historicising the term instead of eliminating or repressing it. – A recent publication, which at least implicitly emphasizes Western characteristics, is Monika Neugebauer-Wölk's book *Kosmologische Religiosität am Ursprung der Neuzeit 1400–1450* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2019).

which worked with relatively sharp demarcations of "cultures" and with strong asymmetries, to a complexity that has hardly become part of the reflection on a global concept of esotericism. From this perspective, at least two dimensions would have to be discussed. First, to what extent does a globally applied concept of esotericism constitute a continuation of the traditions of European imperialism – will a European concept not once again become a matrix for the explanation of non-European cultures? Second, to what extent does a concept of esotericism that is not determined by regional or other contexts come close to an essentialist conception of esotericism? Does research thus return to an interpretation from which – as explained above – it had painstakingly liberated itself? Of course, one can justify any conceptual decision, with or without regional precision, but reflection on opportunities and risks is still in its early stages. Once again, a lack of interdisciplinary collaboration is noticeable here; the discussions are, to a large extent, conducted without including the dense corresponding reflections, for example, in literary studies, religious studies or ethnology, all disciplines which have been discussing the issues surrounding globalisation for a long time.

The consequences of these problems can be illustrated by the attempts to determine the relationship between esotericism and Islam (similar difficulties would arise in comparison with other religions[42]). At the inaugural Conference of the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism in Venice in June 2018,[43] the problem of definition in the Western debate became all the more acute in intercultural analysis. Basically, esotericism can be a translation of or refer to the Arabic term *batin*, which primarily evokes a semantic field, at the most basic level, centred on predicates such as secret, hidden and concealed. The pragmatic nature of the way the concept of esotericism was used at the Venice conference became quite clear when many participants confessed to have used the term "esotericism"

42 In 1883, the theosophist Alfred Percy Sinnett postulated the "Esoteric Doctrine" of an "Esoteric Buddhism", which was to be based on "the possession of spiritual faculties and perceptions of a higher order" (Alfred Percy Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism* (London: Trübner 1883), p. v.). However, Thomas William Rhys Davids, a British colonial official, Professor of Pāli at the University of London and editor of Buddhist Pali writings, vehemently disproved this view this three years later: "The original Buddhism was the very contrary of esoteric." (Thomas William Rhys Davids, *Buddhism, Its History and Literature* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), 210.) Michel Pye, on the other hand, with regard to Japanese Buddhism, argued that "esoteric" did not mean something which was "not accessible to all", but "much more that some are already able to understand something and understand that others are still closed to it". (Michael Pye, "Entwicklung und Vielfalt des japanischen Buddhismus," in *Der Buddhismus III. Ostasiatischer Buddhismus und Buddhismus im Westen*, ed. Manfred Hutter (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2018), 291.
43 Organised by: Mark Sedgwick (Islamic studies), Francesco Piraino (sociology) and Dilek Sarmis (Turkology).

in their lecture titles only because they wanted to fulfil the expectations of the organisers.

Meanwhile, in the published transactions, Sedgwick proposed a more detailed interpretation of the relationship between Islamic traditions and Western esotericism based on semantic analysis. In addition to *batin*, the word *ghayb* can also be situated in the semantic field of esotericism.[44] In contrast to *batin*, however, *ghayab* appears in the Quran. In Sedgwick's eyes, "the main difference" on the conceptual level is that *batin* refers to "realities" while *ghayb* refers to "meanings and ideas";[45] thus, these two concepts can be related to content objects (*batin*) and to discursive concepts (*ghayb*).[46]

Nevertheless, how convincing is this intertwining of Western-Christian and Eastern-Islamic ideas when it comes to the concept of "esotericism"? Of course, there is a history of entanglement and exchange processes, which Sedgwick points out for example, in the reception of Neoplatonic concepts in the Arabic-speaking world, which led there to a concept of "esotericism",[47] or later, in the 12th and 13th centuries in the Latin world, where they were mediated by Arabic literature, or, further, in the 19th century through the reception of perennialist ideas from Europe in the Islamic world (some of which were then described as "esoteric").[48] Sedgwick now argues, similarly to Liana Saif,[49] that the reception of Neoplatonic ideas in the philosophical traditions of Islam and, in this framework, the inclusion of ideas related to *batin* makes it possible to speak of "esoteric ideas"[50] or "esotericism" in Islam. However, this is not entirely justified, since equating (or even establishing a relationship between) *batin* and "esoteric ideas" or "esotericism" seems to be (or is, in my eyes) a transfer of Western ideas into Arabic texts. This is where the problem lies: Neoplatonism itself is neither "esotericism" in today's

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44 Mark Sedgwick, "Islamic and Western Esotericism", *Correspondences Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 7, no. 1 (2019): 279–281.

45 Sedgwick, "Islamic and Western Esotericism," 281.

46 Sedgwick creates three epistemological categories in this context: a historical one that can be related to a "historical phenomenon", a "discursive tradition", and a "'rejected knowledge' or . . . 'a structural element in Western culture'". This third dimension may be considered a sub-category of the discursive dimension. Sedgwick, "Islamic and Western Esotericism," 278–279.

47 "Ancient philosophy, and especially Neoplatonism, was also important for the development of a major historical body of Islamic bāṭin discourse including the ghayb that may, on that basis, be called 'Islamic esotericism'"; Sedgwick, "Islamic and Western Esotericism," 285.

48 Sedgwick, "Islamic and Western Esotericism," 286–292.

49 Saif, Liana, "What is Islamic Esotericism?" *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism*. vol 7, no. 1 (2019): 159.

50 Sedgwick, "Islamic and Western Esotericism," 295; Saif, "What is Islamic Esotericism?", 2.

sense (and this also applies, as Sedgwick knows, to Plotinus's ideas,[51]) nor its root – and therefore its reception in Islam does not (necessarily) mean that esotericism was incorporated along with it.

This assumed esotericism in Islam can then, according to Sedgwick, become one of the starting points for a history of esotericism in the West: "Arabic sources, then, contributed to the early development of a form of Western esotericism [now without quotation marks, HZ] even before the Renaissance".[52] In short, in this perspective, if we consider Neoplatonism to be a possible root of esotericism, then, in Islam, it gives rise to an Islamic esotericism which, in turn, becomes another form of esotericism in the West. However, each of these criteria for esotericism is an external ex post construction. Here, the suspicion arises that criteria that originate from the discussion about esotericism in Europe in the 19th century are transported to earlier times and swept under the rug of other cultures. Since the 19th century was the period when perennialist concepts of European provenance were received in Islamic countries – as a result of European imperialism and cultural exchange processes – this would correspond with other research on globalisation that asserts that the 19th century was a crucial period in the history of modern globalisation.[53] This view would not negate the extremely high importance of Neo-platonic ideas in a historical development which we describe using the label "esotericism" (furthermore, I maintain that the importance of this Ancient tradition is definitely underestimated in some research on Western "esotericism"), but rather claims to look for reliable arguments for the equivalence/relationship of *batin*/*ghayb*.

Boaz Huss, professor of Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and expert on Kabbalist traditions, pointed out, at the Venice conference, the importance of historicism in this "loose" use of the term esotericism in his reflections on the entanglement between Kabbalah, Sufism and esotericism.[54] All these terms were massively (albeit to a different degree) shaped and normatively charged by the Western scholarship of the 19th century. This cultural imprint does not exclude

51 Sedgwick, "Islamic and Western Esotericism," 285.

52 Sedgwick, "Islamic and Western Esotericism," 289.

53 Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: Beck 2009). Many examples may be given. Cf. all the contributions in *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism*, 7 no. 1 (2019), special issue Islamic Esotericism, (2019) or Thierry Zarcone, "Occultism in an Islamic context: the case of modern Turkey from the nineteenth century to the present time." In *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, ed. Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 154–156, or the research of Alexandre Toumarkine (forthcoming).

54 Boaz Huss, "Kabbala and Sufism: Connection, Comparison and Mystification" (presentation, inaugural conference of the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism: Common and Comparative Esotericisms; Western, Islamic, and Jewish, Venice, 13 June 2018).

their use in other contexts, such as in Islam before the 19th century. Nevertheless, it requires a reflection on the history of the construction of these concepts, on their cultural relativity and only then on possible commonalities and differences that can be associated with a term like "esotericism", however it is defined. If one refrains from using this critical approach, one threatens not to match the academic standards that have been instituted, ranging from hermeneutic to postcolonial reflection.

This being said, Sedgwick raises some important questions about esoteric research. On the one hand, he asks about different social conditions. He postulates that:

> in the West, esotericism has generally been highly controversial, far more often rejected and repressed than promoted by the dominant culture and by religious authority. In Islam, esotericism in the form of Sufism has been controversial from time to time, sometimes repressed by the dominant culture and religious authority, but has far more often been promoted by them.[55]

If these two forms of esotericism are indeed comparable, tricky problems of comparatism arise. For comparison cannot only discuss similar structures or contents of concepts, but must include much more – for instance, the functional dimensions of the comparison and the social conditions which affect it (in this case, the different social structures of churches and Ummah and the resulting differences in dealing with "deviant", e.g. "esoteric" currents). Comparative research in religious studies has discussed these aspects in detail (see below), yet these discussions have not received sufficient attention in research on "esotericism". However, having such debates – and this is the pivotal point – presupposes that we are dealing with a comparable subject.

Furthermore, Sedgwick reminds us of a neglected area of esoteric research, namely the role of the hidden or the secret, which are key components of the terms *ghayb* and *batin*. This problem remains unresolved since the proposals of Faivre, who did not use this criterion of the hidden or the secret. Evidently, this does not apply to all phenomena that are considered esoteric, but it does apply to many. And, of course, as previously mentioned, this criterion is a key component of the term esotericism itself and, surprisingly, has not often been discussed in depth – not even as an additional or partial criterion – in scientific research. However, this has not silenced the question of why such an element could not be considered as a feature of esotericism, at least partially, in some traditions. Including this characteristic (though not to the exclusion of others) as one possible element would probably also liberate research on esotericism from its isolation

55 Sedgwick, "Islamic and Western Esotericism," 293; similar Saif, "What is Islamic Esotericism?," 47.

and integrate it into the general history of religion, where a secret or concealed dimension is often discussed in research on "esoteric" traditions.

An intriguing example of this is the reflections of Jan Assmann, Emeritus Professor for Egyptology at the University of Konstanz and well known for his research on cultural memory, in his book *Religio duplex*.[56] There, he discusses the relationship between open vs. secret and public vs. private practice as a fundamental tension in European religious history since Antiquity. This gives weight to the option of incorporating an "esoteric" element in the research on "esotericism". Assmann reflects on terms such as folk religion and mystery cults, hermeticism and esotericism, revelation and reason in this tension, including groups such as the freemasons and other "esoteric" currents. In this context, he analyses the genesis of religious studies[57] and assigns significance to the concept of Religio duplex – and thus (partly) to what is known today as "esotericism" – because of its origin. Disciplinary boundaries play no role in Assmann's argumentation; interpreting the material within these borders would again conceal the dialectic presence of the open and hidden dimensions of religion that run across our established scholarly fields. Another researcher, the aforementioned Peter-André Alt, also drew heavily on this "esoteric" (i.e. hidden, concealed) dimension by interpreting German Baroque literature against the background of an alleged secret knowledge and its allegorical decipherment.[58] The integration of the hidden or secret as a possible, not mandatory, feature of esotericism would also make it easier to relate Islamic traditions to Western esotericism, as not only Sedgwick, but also Saif, Cüneyd Yildirim[59] and others have shown.

Ultimately, an issue is raised by the expansion of research on esotericism beyond modern Europe and Northern America: How Western is "Western esotericism"? Is there an Eastern one, as the logic of the term implicitly suggests? (Or a Northern or a Southern or a South-Western one . . . ?). It is clear that the term Western esotericism is not neutral – an "innocent" analytical term coined by academic research –, but rather a cultural construction and probably a child of theos-

56 Jan Assmann, *Religio duplex: Ägyptische Mysterien und europäische Aufklärung* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010).

57 Jan Assmann, "Das Geheimnis der Wahrheit: Das Konzept der 'doppelten Religion' und die Erfindung der Religionsgeschichte," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3 (2001): 108–134.

58 Alt, *Imaginäres Geheimwissen*.

59 Cüneyd Yildirim, "Sufismus als Esoterik," *Zeitschrift für junge Religionswissenschaft* 13 (2018), accessed on 31 January 2019, doi: 10.4000/zjr.948; Zarcone, "Occultism in an Islamic context," 154–156; Saif, "What is Islamic Esotericism", 25–33.

ophy and the debates surrounding esotericism in the late 19th century.[60] The label "Western" was adopted by research on esotericism in the last quarter of the 20th century as the field became more scientific, and with good reason. This confinement made it possible to limit the field geographically and to draw a line against perennialist concepts that advocated an idealistic, decontextualised and transcultural concept of esotericism. Since the critical revision of postcolonial theories, it has become clear, however, that different cultures are not directly confronted like the Eastern and Western blocks but are rather entangled in processes of exchange, and it is within these processes of exchange that "entities" such as esotericism are constructed. What this means for the concept of Western esotericism is only just now being debated.[61] One enters here into the field of discussion both of exchange processes that question sharp demarcations, and, at the same time, of cultural grammars which enable us to describe stable developments in different cultures. Recent research, however, has made it very clear that at least that which has been referred to as "esotericism" since the 20th century has developed in a process of exchange with the West – and that it was largely influenced by Western ideas (and vice versa).[62]

On the conceptual level, however, I do not see the necessity to conclude that the existence of a Western esotericism implies the existence of an Eastern, Northern or Southern esotericism: "Western" can be read as an indication of a regional limitation (as esotericism in the West or as a Western tradition) – which would not entail the existence of a "Southern" esotericism or one from another region. To what extent it might ultimately be meaningful to speak of an Eastern or Western (or Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, etc.) esotericism must be shown by the ongoing debate. However, if another religious, cultural or regional esotericism were coined, it would hold as much normative value as "Western" esotericism.

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60 Strube, "Occultist Identity," 568–595.

61 C.f. recently Julian Strube, "Towards the Study of Esotericism Without the 'Western': Esotericism from the Perspective of a Global Religious History," in *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*, ed. Egil Asprem and Julian Strube, (2021).

62 An analysis of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century c.f. Zarcone "Occultism in an Islamic Context," 157–176, who cautiously (using quotation marks) speaks of the genesis of a "Muslim 'Occultism'" (157) in this Islamic context. Likewise, the analysis of the role of René Guénon would illustrate this asymmetric entanglement. A magistral study on the French colonial period in North Africa by Alexandre Toumarkine is expected to be published. For now, see his lecture: Alexandre Toumarkine, "Tlemcen (Algeria): Would-be Fin de Siècle and Colonial Esoteric Setting," (presentation, inaugural conference of the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism: Common and Comparative Esotericisms; Western, Islamic, and Jewish, Venice, 13 June 2018).

4 Proposal: An Open Concept of “Esotericism”

In any case, it would make sense to sharpen the concept of esotericism and thus to make it practicable. Any solution must take two aspects into account:

1. All terms are the result of discursive definition. No concept of esotericism applies to all cultures or to all times.
2. The concept of esotericism is largely forged by (semantic) content stemming from Western/Christian traditions.

In the following, I propose a solution based on Benson Saler’s reflections concerning the use of ethnocentric, relativistic concepts of religion from different cultures, thereby considering possible family resemblances (referring to Wittgenstein),[63] as well as on Rodney Needham’s concept of a polythetic classification and on Michael Stausberg’s proposal for the practical application of concepts.[64] The basis for these reflections is a discursive justification of the content of terms. Adopting this perspective, however, does not mean that this content is regarded as arbitrary, because of its pragmatic use.

– *Characteristic elements*. Components of a term, whether they are “found” in it or assigned to it posteriori, can be considered as representative or characteristic of said term. In this perspective, the assumption of family resemblances (in contrast with the biological metaphor) is also a cultural construction based on contingent decisions.[65] There can be a “kinship” without common features - only based on resemblances.[66] In a polythetic group, according to Rodney Needham, there is no attribute that all members of that group necessarily possess, and no member necessarily possesses all the attributes that are considered characteristic of that group.[67] Following Wittgenstein,[68] it is usage that creates a family resemblance between a group of terms. This resemblance has its origins in a “general term” that is applied to a certain group of objects. The criteria for determining such a general term, however, are different depending on which perspective is adopted (e.g. whether one is

63 Rodney Needham, “Polythetic Classification: Convergence and Consequences,” *Man* NS 10 (1975): 349–369; Benson Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).
64 Michael Stausberg, “Religion: Begriff, Definitionen, Theorien,” in *Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Michael Stausberg (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 42–44.
65 Cf. the critique in Bergunder, “Was ist Religion?,” 8f.
66 Needham, “Polythetic Classification”, 351.
67 Needham, “Polythetic Classification“, 363.
68 Rudolf Teuwsen, *Familienähnlichkeit und Analogie: Zur Semantik genereller Termini bei Wittgenstein und Thomas von Aquin* (Freiburg i. Br.: Alber, 1988), 48–101.

considering function, form, content, appearance, etc.). Therefore, determining will remain subjective process. This very notion of family resemblance can be usefully applied in the field of religious studies[69] and, specifically, with regard to the field of esotericism. In this case, terms such as rejected knowledge, secrecy, higher knowledge or transmutation are employed more frequently than emission standard, theory of probability, solar panels or stage fright. This accounts for the pragmatic use of practitioners, scholars or other observers. Such a definition does not lead to an idealistic or fundamental definition, because it depends on the pragmatic use of terms and on discursive decisions made by scholars. With this kind of definition, esotericism is always the result of a particular consensus – and *remains* only the result of a particular consensus.

- *Probability*. We can define characteristics, but we don't necessarily find them in a term. It is probable that a term like "secret" is a feature of esotericism, as shown in the attempts to define "batin", but it is not a mandatory component, as shown in the definition of Faivre, who refrains from using "le secret" or "le caché". Furthermore, there is no rule to determine the minimum number of elements used to define a subject that must be present in a term's definition; it is the task of the scholar to propose a definition, which, in turn, must be accepted by the scientific community.
- *Cultural relativity*. Any definition and any concept of esotericism is therefore culturally relative. It is thus primarily (though not exclusively) comprehensible in the culture in which it has been defined. However, its meaning changes with each transfer into a new context, especially through translation into another language. Consequently, the original meaning is only partially – if at all – preserved after an intercultural transfer or a translation and is inevitably infused with new information. Additionally, it is sometimes extremely difficult to find adequate terms for a translation – if they exist. To put it bluntly, concepts are ultimately untranslatable:[70] *Il traduttore è un traditore*. More specifically, it is clear that the term esotericism is of Latin-Western origin and carries its Western-bound content. This historical path dependence cannot be eliminated, but only (and necessarily) problematised through ongoing critical reflection.

69 Cf. the application in Katja Rakow, *Transformationen des tibetischen Buddhismus im 20. Jahrhundert. Chögyam Trungpa und die Entwicklung von Shambhala* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

70 Barbara Cassin, *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (Paris: Le Robert, 2004).

- *Comparatistics*. Such procedures can draw on fundamental insights of comparative methodology.[71] These determine commonalities (genera proxima) and differences (differentiae specificae) with regard to a point of comparison (tertium comparationis). Such a process is – and this is a central insight of the comparative approach – not neutral, but the result of normative determinations, in all three dimensions of comparison. Insofar as norms are never articulated and enforced independently of cultural contexts and power structures, this means that scholars involved in this process determine their object from a hegemonic position. Such asymmetry of power cannot be avoided, but, again, only continuously reworked and reflected on. Comparisons are always made when different objects are brought into a relationship: such was the case for the comparison between "heretical" or "orthodox" theology in early modern times, for the comparison of hermeticism, occultism and esotericism with "hegemonic" traditions, and, of course, for the comparison between Christian (Western?) and Islamic (Eastern?) "esotericism".
- *Genealogical reconstruction*. The identification of objects of comparison (which are always shaped by norms) assumes the existence of comparable objects in the past.[72] However, in the process of writing history we have always (re-)constructed these objects. Although history runs from the past to the present, historiography writes history in the reverse direction, looking at the past from the present. Thus, what we identify as esotericism in any past or any area is not truly a past from of esotericism, but rather our perspective on an object which has been constructed for the purposes of comparison. Identifying the terms *batin* and/or *ghayb* as esotericism in an Islamic tradition – or "hermeticism" in the early modern Western period – stems not only from past conceptions, but also – and presumably primarily – from our own interests and knowledge. In this respect, any form of esotericism that we "discover" in the past exists only because we want to discover it, i.e. because we claim that these objects are comparable in structure and content.

71 Oliver Freiberger, *Considering Comparison: A Method for Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); James Mahoney and Kathleen Ann Thelen eds. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

72 Volkhard Krech, "Wer β sagt, kann auch α sagen: Zu Reinhard Schulzes Ansatz der ‚retrospektiven Genealogie'," *Islam in der Moderne, Moderne im Islam: Eine Festschrift für Reinhard Schulze zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Florian Zemmin et al., (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 85–110; Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992).

In practice, this means accounting for these selections when defining elements of a concept. More specifically, we as scholars must decide how and why we define a term such as esotericism on the basis of our research interests. We must determine its polythetic components, e.g. which terms, content and metaphors fit within a field. Possible features include: the marginality of groups, the secret/hidden, the theory of spirit and matter, the transfer of knowledge in a teacher-student relationship, the claim to universal knowledge and the pagan and/or Neoplatonic tradition. In addition, we must decide whether we prefer a more functional or sociological definition to a more content-oriented one: Esotericism as "rejected knowledge"? As knowledge critical of secularisation? As a worldview of the upper classes?

To put it in a nutshell: Concrete definitions of esotericism apply only to concrete fields of research. Consequently, as briefly mentioned: Different definitions of esotericism will overlap. They will have family resemblances but never be identical.

On the basis of these reflections, we can apply a term like esotericism to different spatial and temporal contexts. We can also transfer terms from one (religious) culture to another; knowledge of the logic underlying the construction of terms and the history of the use of such terms and ideas enable a critical reflection concerning their applicability. Researchers must ask themselves what content and what objects are being designated when they invoke the term or the concept of esotericism. This means, for example that the term "batin" in the work of Mansur al-Hallaj and the term "esotericism" in the work of Rudolf Steiner can overlap to varying degrees. Whether in Islam, for example, "batin" can be translated as esotericism is thus still to be decided; it is the task of scholarly discourse to resolve the question. Furthermore, this question obviously cannot be answered in the narrow space of theorising on "esotericism"; such an answer would have to integrate the results of concrete historical, sociological or ethnographic research.

At this point, I would like to make a proposal that draws on classical elements of scholarly work: at the beginning of each essay and of each monograph, we must clarify which elements we use to define our concept of "esotericism" – and not simply assume that we will somehow share a common understanding of its definition. We must realise that this is and will remain a culturally bound conception which will undergo changes when it is used to interpret other cultures – in the same way that it will surely undergo changes in the course of the ongoing scholarly debate. In the end, common elements might (and probably will) be found in different definitions of esotericism, but no general, "universal" concept of esotericism will emerge. This does not make scientific work easier, but it does make it more scientific. Obviously, by stating this, I doubt that Ockham's razor is

an adequate tool for the analysis of cultural objects. Reality is always more complex than our (necessary and useful) analytical tools. Such instruments are necessary conditions for work in a scientific community, but, at the same time, also show the limits of scholarly work.

This way of analysing "esotericism" must also take personal dimensions and interests in the reflection on knowledge into account. Anyone who attempts to define esotericism must determine the extent to which he or she brings his or her own ideas to bear on a field of objects. Consequently, each definition tells us something about the interests of the researchers. This affects an extremely sensitive area of scholarly work: What is the relationship between a researcher's religious or ideological beliefs or convictions and practices on the one hand and his academic interests on the other? Once again, the connection between knowledge and interest is touched upon. Furthermore, when working in the field of biographies, we are faced with a dilemma: We must assume that there are junctions or overlaps, but at the same time we must respect the forum internum: Each person has the right to treat religion and other convictions as his or her own private matter. We often know from personal conversations or coincidences what a researcher thinks or practises in matters of religion or other convictions, but we do not make use of this knowledge. This is an ethical imperative. However, it is clear, as the biograms in this volume demonstrate, that interference is widespread in the field of historical studies on religion, and perhaps most notably in the research on esotericism. At present, biographical overlaps with esoteric beliefs or practices only come to light in exceptional cases, and often only in a certain phase of life, as illustrated by the cases of Antoine Faivre, Kocku von Stuckrad or Jeffrey Kripal mentioned in the introduction. However, as long as a researcher does not publicly disclose his or her beliefs or practices, we have no right to analyse this interior dimension concerning the relationship between knowledge and interest.

That means: Whether a term such as "esotericism" can then be meaningfully applied to a chosen subject must be demonstrated in the course of research. Ideally, the debate is an infinite, "abductive" (to borrow a term from Charles Pierce) process in which arguments are played back and forth between the field of study and its terms on the one hand and scholarly conceptualisation on the other. A back and forth game between the field of study and the development of the theory is necessary in order to create a term like esotericism.

A term coined in this way is dependent on the consensus of a scientific community.[73] This means that researchers do not decide whether a definition is "true"

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73 Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979).

or "false"; rather, consensus is an indicator of the appropriateness of the term in relation to research questions. Its reception among scholars is quite likely to say something about its applicability. Of course, terms like esotericism can be used in a hegemonic way, which does not take into account their use in the sources, or their pragmatic use, for example, because it improves the conditions for research funding. It can also be used for pragmatic reasons due to a lack of alternatives or in the expectation that a concept will be clarified in the course of debates; this seems to be the case at numerous conferences on esotericism. However, scholarly research is not sustained merely from a somehow pragmatic use of a term or a concept, but also from the expectation that arguments will play a decisive role in the long run. We therefore need an ongoing debate on the possibility of using the term esotericism – keeping in mind that any definition, like any scientific statement, is relative and time bound, and that its meaning changes when it is transferred into another culture, another language or another system of symbolic forms.

We will then encounter the argument that research based on an open conception of esotericism shares no common basis of understanding. I would say, more tentatively, that the basis usually consists of partial commonalities. Any claim to a universal definition of esotericism raises the question of whether this definition is closer to utopia or to metaphysics. However, a more open conception would allow us to identify and discuss the problems openly, especially in intercultural encounters, and would no longer leave us faced with the aporia of a purely discursive or purely content-related definition of esotericism.

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Marco Frenschkowski

The Science of Religion, Folklore Studies, and the Occult Field in Great Britain (1870–1914): Some Observations on Competition and Cain-Abel Conflicts

Abstract: The emergence of Religious Studies, or "the science of religion", as it used to be called in Great Britain, in the late 19th century is accompanied by a competition with other discourses interpreting religion. The present article (abridgment of a longer study) analyses the social and cultural place of Victorian and Edwardian Religious Studies as a project only partially existing in a University context, but mainly in learned societies, as the Folklore Society, and promulgated by scholars with a predominantly non-theological background. As such Religious Studies were both influenced by and competing with occult and esoteric groups interpreting religion and searching for a basic unity of religions as first of all the Theosophical Society, but also by and with other groups.

1 The Emergence of a New Science of Religion in Great Britain: Introductory Remarks

How do new sciences come into being?[1] "We are all, we who work at these topics, engaged in science, the science of man, or rather we are painfully labouring to lay the foundations of that science", Andrew Lang says in the same year that Queen Victoria died.[2] Now the Scottish writer Andrew Lang (1844–1912) during his lifetime had been a perhaps even more well-known scholar of folklore, folktales, magic, religion and tradition in a more general way than even Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941) who today is most often seen as the acme of late Victorian and Edwardian scholarship on these subjects, both being Scotsmen and late descendants of Scottish *Enlichtenment*, as it happens. Both had also been (in a respectful way) opponents, and both embody the different poles of scholarship on religion in late Victorian England.

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1 This is a very much abridged version of a study which for space constraints could not be published in this volume, with most documentation left out, which should appear at some other occasion.

2 Andrew Lang, *Magic and Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901), 9.

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The Victorian and Edwardian Ages in Great Britain have seen the birth of quite a number of new scientific approaches, culminating of course in Darwinism that quickly changed so many outlooks and created a new profile of the whole age. Edward Clodd (1840–1930), a scholar on the anthropological lines of E. B. Tylor, biographer of Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley and Herbert Spencer, wrote in 1891:

> Thus, the study of myth is nothing less than the study of the mental and spiritual history of mankind. It is a branch of that larger, vaster science of evolution which so occupies our thoughts to-day [. . .]. The evidence which it brings from the living and dead mythologies of every race is in accord with that furnished by their more tangible relics, that the history of mankind is a history of slow but sure advance from a lower to a higher; of ascent, although with oft backslidings. It confirms a momentous canon of modern science, that the laws of evolution in the spiritual world are as determinable as they are in the physical. [. . .] With the theory of evolution in our hands as the master-key, the immense array of facts that seemed to lie unrelated and discrete are seen to be interrelated and in necessary dependence.[3]

This is a telling passage, expressed by a scholar both deeply sceptical about religion and deeply interested in it, as might also be said about Frazer. Evolution became a basic paradigm: for biology as for cultural anthropology, for history and philosophy, for religion as well as – we may add – for occultism and other forms of rejected knowledge (to use the term of James Webb[4]).

During the second half of the nineteenth century the colonial age had reached a critical stage. British society realized that at least some of the countries which were part of the Empire did not simply exhibit inferior cultures, and especially India had as much to give as it had to take from Europe. The drive to re-organize the world according to British standards also allowed for a new fascination with the sheer otherness of the cultures encountered. This colonial experience coincided with a new look at one's own cultural background. Traditional agrarian society perceived from an industrial and urban setting suddenly seemed as strange as a far-away foreign country. What soldiers, merchants, administrators and missionaries encountered in the colonial situation somehow gave a new meaning to their own folktales and folklore at home. This complex development contributed to the science of religion, defining its ideological background, and its deep connectedness to ethnology and folklore studies. A new science always will cover aspects of discovery as well as of conquest, of curiosity and of fascination, but also of taking possession, even of invading a

3 Edward Clodd, *Myths and Dreams* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1891), 139.

4 James Webb, *Die Flucht vor der Vernunft. Politik, Kultur und Okkultismus im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Marco Frenschkowski and Michael Siefener, trans. Michael Siefener (Wiesbaden: Marixverlag, 2009).

new area of knowledge. To express it in another way: a new science is the epistemological equivalent of colonialism. Does this apply also to Religious Studies, or the science of religion? And how does it relate to the tension between mainstream discourses and fringe discourses, between the basic epistemological identity of nineteenth century society and its alterity? I concentrate in the following remarks on Great Britain, and do not generally claim that the origin of Religious Studies (to use a rather neutral though more recent term) in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Japan or even in the USA can be described along the same lines.

"The antecedents of comparative religion were far more numerous, and far more diverse, than is commonly realised".[5] The "Science of Religion" can with some plausibility be said to have come into being in the 1860–1900 period. The term itself is a nineteenth century British creation coined first by Friedrich Max Müller in 1860.[6] Of course religion as a subject of comparative research has a long scholarly ancestry with names like Herodotus, Plutarch and Porphyry, al-Bīrūnī and aš-Šahrastānī, Nicolaus Cusanus, Alexander Ross, John Spencer and Charles François Dupuis. A large number of ethnographic, oriental and other scholars, travellers, colonial administration clerks and missionaries have contributed to this ancestry as well. These older writers very much discuss the diversity of religions, and seriously collect data, but they do not yet define a new science. What they have achieved is not the same as what Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917), Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), William Robertson Smith (1846–1894), Andrew Lang, Edwin Sidney Hartland (1848–1927), Jane Ellen Harrison (1850–1928), Sir J. G. Frazer and, as an American spending much time in Europe and a somewhat different thinker, William James (1842–1910) had tried to do. What these scholars had in view might be called a general theory of religion and its origins, analysed outside of Christian theological prerequisites. As such it was meant to become a reference frame of religious history (more or less according to an evolutionary paradigm) that allows for a general pattern on how religion develops, and what its changing place in culture might be. Comparative religion (a term coming into more general use in the early twentieth century) or history of religion were established as parts of anthropology, and, perhaps even more telling, in very close contact with folklore studies. With the exception of Spencer and James all scholars we mentioned strongly interact with folklore studies (or criticize it, as Müller): comparative religion and

5 Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1986), 1.

6 Cf. Louis Henry Jordan, *Comparative Religion: Its Genesis and Growth*. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905), 25; Lourens van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller: A Life Devoted to the Humanities* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 294 n. 3.

folklore studies are almost twin sisters, and their ways separated in Britain only slowly around WWI.

Historical linguistics with the Leipzig School of Neogrammarians had in the 1860s–1890s proven the strict regularity of sound changes, and by this had founded a science of language that could treat language and etymology on historical lines comparable to the natural sciences. Scholars like Müller who had a strong background in historical linguistics to some degree hoped for a science of religion that could meet on equal terms with such achievements. His interest had been originally in mythology and its origin. Like Charles François Dupuis (1742–1809), Adalbert Kuhn (1812–1881), George William Cox (1827–1902), Friedrich Leberecht Wilhelm Schwartz (1821–1899), Abram Smythe Palmer (1844–1917) and many others, he was fascinated by mythology as a possible poetic interpretation and expression of nature and its forces ("naturmythologische Schule"), but as is well known he also emphasized its possible origin in metaphorical language as such.[7] With William Robertson Smith and his *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889)[8] ritual took its place next to mythology as something to be researched on comparative and historical lines as well. The term "comparative mythology" is much older than "comparative religion", used e.g. by Müller already in his "Comparative Mythology" of 1856, a study re-issued by his disciple Abraham Smythe Palmer with many annotations as late as 1908. Interestingly Müller himself saw the Moghul emperor Akbar (1542–1605) as the first person "who ventured on a comparative study of the religions of the world".[9]

Earlier scholars of religions had been mostly theologians, or at least they moved in a reference frame defined by different Christian theologies of religion. This now changed rapidly, for quite different reasons. William Robinson Smith had been mobbed out of academic theology at Aberdeen Free Church College in 1881 (he became librarian in Cambridge, and later first Reader and then from 1889 on Professor of Arabic), as in Germany something similar happened a year later to Julius Wellhausen, greatest Old Testament scholar of his generation, when he had to resign his theological chair at the University of Greifswald.[10] More importantly, scholars increasingly began researching religion who had no

7 Cf. Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, 253–292.

8 William R. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites: Fundamental Institutions,* 1st ser. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1889).

9 Friedrich Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion: Four Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution; With two Essays on False Analogies, and the Philosophy of Mythology* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1873), 209.

10 Marco Frenschkowski, "Wellhausen, Julius," in *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchen Lexikon* 13, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Bautz (Hamm: Bautz, 1998), 716–727.

theological background, had never worked in a church context and did not use a theological reference frame in their style of asking questions. F. M. Müller had been a German philologian of Indo-European languages specializing in Sanskrit, who was invited to work in Oxford and edit the *Rig-Veda* (being a foreigner, he did not become Boden Professor of Sanskrit, however).[11] E. B. Tylor came from a wealthy family of Quakers who owned a London brass factory, a religious background which effectively prevented his gaining a University degree and an early academic career: he started his work by collecting ethnological data in Mexico. J. G. Frazer was initially a classical philologian (his commentaries on Ovid, Ps.-Apollodor and Pausanias still are monuments of erudition), and he only slowly began to include ethnological material in his theories, after having read Tylor and having made the personal acquaintance of W. Robertson Smith (whom he regarded as the "greatest man he had ever known", as he told to his biographer R. Angus Downie), widening the horizon of classical studies in an unprecedented way.[12] E. S. Hartland had made a career as a solicitor in Swansea (though his father was a congregational minister). Frazer's father also had wanted his son to enter the legal profession, and Frazer even qualified for the bar, though later he never practiced law. Hartland, who lived from this practice, turned from folklore scholarship to impressive comparative studies on religion, giving attention also to aspects of social history. (John Ferguson McLennan, 1827–1881, who preceded Hartland in his extensive studies on family and kinship structures in primitive religion, also by profession had been an advocate). Andrew Lang, son of a town clerk at Selkirk, had been a historian, literary critic, writer, editor of the most successful folktale collections of the Victorian age, a poet and general man of letters. Later he became an honorary fellow at Merton College, Oxford. In Religious Studies he was the main opponent of Frazer, though they had more in common than meets the eye at first glance. Other names might be mentioned as well (William James, born into a wealthy American family, interestingly had a different background, having been the son of a Swedenborgian preacher, Henry James Sr.). No one of these scholars we have in view had ever studied Christian theology as a regular study. Religion was very much a subject of public debate in Victorian society, however, and many non-theologians participated. Müller could even write, in the passages introducing his *Sacred Books of the East*, the most

11 His German roots made him suspect in the United Kingdom: "Von der deutschen Theologie sprach man wie von einer Art verbotener Frucht, die man weder ansehen, noch antasten, noch gar kosten dürfe" (Friedrich Max Müller, *Aus meinem Leben: Fragmente zu einer Selbstbiographie* (Gotha: Perthes, 1902), 244).

12 Cf. Emily Varto, ed., *Brill's Companion to Classics and Early Anthropology* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

enduring monument of Victorian scholarship on religion: "No doubt there exists at present a very keen interest in questions connected with the origin, the growth, and decay of religion".[13] Even Thomas Huxley, Darwin's most successful and noted populariser, biologist and defender of rationalism, wrote extensively on religion. In the nine volumes of his *Collected Essays* (1893–1894)[14] approximately a third of the studies touch on religious matters, and two full volumes are dedicated to "Science and Hebrew tradition" (i.e. the Pentateuch and other Old Testament matters) and "Science and Christian tradition", interpreting religion on evolutionary lines. About Huxley's standing as a public intellectual Andrew Lang could even write in 1894: "In England, when people say "science", they commonly mean an article by Professor Huxley in The Nineteenth Century".[15]

2 The Science of Religion and Its Hidden Dialogue with Occultism

This volume (and the conference it records) starts with the working hypothesis that occultism in a wide sense, encompassing spiritualism, theosophy and other forms of rejected and alternate knowledge, has a place in the early history of religious studies. What exactly this place might have been remains to be figured out. If we cast our net too wide, we will not be able to get past vague impressions and general ideas about possible influences. This will lead exactly nowhere. But we can reasonably ask a number of relevant smaller questions that can possibly be answered, and might indeed help to get to a more nuanced image of the science of religion in its early days. Some of these smaller questions are: What can reasonably be said about common ideas and paradigms between the competing systems of interpretation? Do they have a common social and cultural background, to some degree? What about their networking? To what degree did the relevant people know (and perhaps respect) each other? To understand a new science it is not enough to take a close look at its intellectual world, and it is not enough to read its books, but we have to look at the scholars

13 Friedrich Max Müller, *The Upanishads I*, The Sacred Books of the East 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879), XLII.
14 Thomas Huxley, *Collected Essays,* 9 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1893–1895).
15 Andrew Lang, *The Edinburgh Critical Edition of the Selected Writings*, ed. Andrew Teverson, Alexandra Warwick, and Leigh Wilson, vol 1, Anthropology: Fairy Tale, Folklore, the Origins of Religion, Psychical Research (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 268.

who created it, their social and cultural background, their agendas, their careers, their desire for knowledge. What do we know about the personal hidden research agendas and belief systems of the relevant scholars? Do their letters and diaries make agendas visible that did not go into published studies? Tylor for example as a young man collected material on Spiritualism in which he never believed but which went into the ideas of *Primitive Culture*,[16] his major and most influential work. Wouter Hanegraaff in a study published in 1998 put some emphasis on this point in his discussion of Tylor's views on magic, which for Tylor at first glance is essentially superstition. Hanegraaff makes plausible that both Tylor's and Frazer's views on magic "have their origin in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, although their backgrounds are ultimately rooted in antiquity".[17] He demonstrates that categories and distinctions vital to both authors can be derived from writers as Agrippa, author of the most influential Renaissance treatise on magic.[18] An 1872 notebook of Tylor documents his interest and deep researches in spiritualism, even attending spiritist séances in London.[19] It is generally assumed he did not share any supernatural convictions, but this is not completely true: Tylor opens a crack in the door to occultism conceding there may be at least something in it:

> My judgment is in abeyance. I admit a prima facie case on evidence, & will not deny that there may be psychic forces causing raps, movements, levitations, etc. But it has not proved itself by evidence of my sense, and I distinctly think the case weaker than written documents led me to think.[20]

This is in some opposition to his attacks on superstition, and also clearly says his belief in the possibility of spiritualist phenomena to have been greater before he visited séances, i.e. when he wrote *Primitive Culture*. Even more interesting is the

16 Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, vol. 1, 6th ed. (London: John Murray, 1920) 141–143.

17 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The Emergence of the Academic Science of Magic: The Occult Philosophy in Tylor and Frazer," in *Religion in the Making: The Emergence of the Sciences of Religion*, ed. Arie L. Moldedijk et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 254.

18 Hanegraaf, "Emergence of the Academic Science," 266. Cf. Marco Frenschkowski, „Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim und seine „Okkulte Philosophie": Ein Vorwort," in Agrippa Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Die magischen Werke und weitere Renaissancetraktate*, ed. and introd. Marco Frenschkowski (Wiesbaden: Marixverlag, 2008), 23–45.

19 Published in: George W. Stocking, "Animism in Theory and Practice: E. B. Tylor's Unpublished Notes on Spiritualism," *Man* 6 (1971): 88–104.

20 Cited in Stocking, "Animism in Theory and Practice," 100.

choice of subjects in his Magnum opus. Magic and witchcraft are omnipresent.[21] Spiritualism, table-rapping, tales of possession are discussed as alleged survivals of primitive attitudes.[22] Stories about levitation are treated at much more length than the argument requires:[23] they clearly fascinated Tylor, as do the magical school of Salamanca, lycanthropy, incubi, demonology, vampires[24] and of course more generally all kinds of mythology, which he sees as a savage occupation of a quintessentially childlike mind.[25] This metaphor of magic and mythology as representing a "child phase" of human history is very common in Victorian ethnology.[26] Though there are many other subjects included in his survey of "primitive culture", the prevalence of occult and magical matters is significant (Adolf Bastian and Jacob Grimm being among his main sources for details). Tylor virtually identifies magic with "occult science".[27] Magic is "a contemptible superstition" and "one of the most pernicious delusions that ever vexed mankind".[28] But his statements on the relation between religion and magic are contradictory,[29] and a certain ambiguity between his judgements and his thematic preferences is observable.

Frazer used much more clear-cut terms, but the basic observation holds true for him also. Tylor's polemics against magic, and even more against ecstatic and visionary elements in religions[30] have an element of warding off, of an exorcism against irrationalism. But his fascination with magic looms up again when we learn he privately and passionately collected charms and amulets: at the Second International Folk-Lore Congress which met at the Society of Antiquaries in London (Burlington House) in Oct. 1–7, 1891 Tylor even put his collection on public exhibition, commenting on the subject:

> Though often written of, such objects are comparatively seldom seen so that it is still worthwhile to exhibit specimens of them to students of Folk-lore. [. . .] I have for years

21 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, 112–159; Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 2, 111–112. a.o.
22 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, 141–148; cf. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 2, 135 on exorcisms.
23 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, 149–152.
24 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, 85–86, 308–315; Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 2, 189–194 (vampires are also a favourite subject in theosophical literature).
25 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, 31, 176, 237, 284, 304, 368, 484 a.o.
26 Cf. e.g. Edward Clodd, *The Childhood of Religions: Embracing a Simple Account of the Birth and Growth of Myths and Legends* (London: Henry S. King, 1875) passim; John Fiske, *Myths and Myth-Makers: Old Tales and Superstitions Interpreted by Comparative Mythology* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company; Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1902), 295.
27 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, 128–129.
28 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, 112–113.
29 Noted already by Hanegraaff, "The Emergence of the Academic Science of Magic," 262–263.
30 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 2, 49, 132, 182, 410, 415, 421 a.o.

> endeavoured to prove that the main source of Mythology is also the main source of Magic. Down from our own level to that of the peasant and the savage, the process of sympathetic magic is to be traced to the same intelligible, but illogical, association of ideas which lies at the root of the apparently creative fancies of the myth-maker.[31]

Leland, the witchcraft scholar, was present at the exhibition and added comments that have been printed also. Now and then Tylor polemicizes against modern occultism, as e.g. when writing on snake cults, that indeed were a subject of much interest to Victorian occultists.[32] When dealing of the Fortunate Islands, he playfully elaborates on the idea Britain itself may be a kind of Island of the Dead, which may have led to its popular interest in ghosts.[33]

We have asked whether we can discern subjects that fascinated the early scholars of religion, perhaps hinting at hidden backgrounds in their research agendas, subjects or ideas that turn up again and again making plausible some subtle and so to say subterraneous aspects not too obvious in the leading theoretical framework. It is not too difficult to find evidence in this quest.

Edwin Sidney Hartland e.g., who had adopted the legal profession and worked as a solicitor and in local politics, but also was keenly interested in folklore and anthropology, wrote one the most remarkable books of the 1890s on religion and myth, the three-volume monumental *The Legend of Perseus*.[34] This indeed after *The Golden Bough* (first edition in two volumes 1890) has been the most influential book in the growing field between comparative religion, folklore studies and anthropology of the 1890s taking up Tylor's basic concepts and refining them, but it shared the fate of much pre-Frazerian works to fade in the light of Frazer's fame. Hartland still in the years around WWI wrote

31 Edward Burnett Tylor, "Exhibition of Charms and Amulets," in *The International Folk-Lore Congress 1892: Papers and Transactions*, ed. Joseph Jacobs, and Alfred Nutt (London: David Nutt, 1892), 387.

32 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 2, 233–242, particularly 239. On Leland see Marco Frenschkowski, "Charles Godfrey Leland (1824–1903) und die Ursprünge der Wicca-Religion," in *Faszination des Okkulten. Diskurse zum Übersinnlichen*, ed. Wolfgang Müller-Funk and Christa Agnes Tuczay (Tübingen: Francke 2008), 273–335.

33 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 2, 63–64. On the background of this idea cf. Marco Frenschkowski, "Fortunatae Insulae: Die Identifikation mythischer Inseln mit realen geographischen Gegebenheiten in der griechischen und römischen Antike," in *Konstruktionen mediterraner Insularitäten*, ed. Reinhard von Bendemann et al. (Paderborn: Fink/Schöningh, 2016), 43–73.

34 Edwin S. Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus: A Study of Tradition in Story, Custom, and Belief*, 3 vols. (London: David Nutt, 1894–1896).

important books in the field, as his *Primitive Paternity*.[35] Volume two of his *The Legend of Perseus* discusses the idea of the external soul, much captivating the imagination of the Victorians (Oscar Wilde's 1890–1891 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* being a well-known example). The soul in this anthropological approach is not simply the soul of psychology: it is a mythical combination of life soul, breath, shadow, double, heavenly archetype, blood soul, external soul and life token, with other mental and magical aspects as well. Can we with some plausibility see in this fascination with darker and less obvious and archaic complexities of the soul a connection to the complex theosophical models of inner man?

The fascination with archaic and complex concepts of soul is one such example of a hidden agenda, the overwhelming and far-reaching obsession with magic, sorcery, taboo complexes is a very obvious other one. This has been observed before, of course: "Tylor and Frazer are pioneers in the "emergence of the scientific study of religion", but my analysis implies that their work could with equal theoretical justification be referred to as a "scientific study of magic", Wouter Hanegraaff wrote.[36] Without exception all authors we have mentioned so far as scholars of religion in the years after Müller have extensively written on both European and non-European magic, perhaps more than on any other aspect of religion (though they usually saw magic in opposition to religion, a view since discredited). Indeed for the most emphatically rationalist writers of our group (Tylor and Frazer), it can plausibly be called their chosen main subject. On the level of public statements Frazer and Tylor were quite sceptical, seeing themselves in the tradition of Scottish enlightenment and rationalism with its pragmatic approach. And yet they spent their life researching magic. This observation curiously finds some kind of synchronicity in the renaissance of ceremonial magic in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn founded in 1888[37] and similar late nineteenth century by-ways of Victorian society. Ceremonial magic and scholarly fascination by magic are parallel stories not in any direct contact with each other (as far as we know), but they are equally connected to the spirit of the Victorian age as an aspect of its non-standard and non-mainstream underground. "The relations of religion and

35 Edwin S. Hartland, *Primitive Paternity: The Myth of Supernatural Birth in Relation to the History of the Family*, 2 vols. (London: David Nutt, 1909–1910).

36 Hanegraaff, "The Emergence of the Academic Science of Magic," 272–273.

37 For literature and sources see Marco Frenschkowski, *Die Geheimbünde: Eine kulturgeschichtliche Analyse*, 6th ed. (Wiesbaden: Marixverlag, 2016).

magic"[38] in some sense is the one main subject matter of early British cultural anthropology, struggling to become part of the academic mainstream. Frazer, as already mentioned, originally called his Magnum opus, still the best-known of British books on primitive religion, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (1890 edition), but he retitled it *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* in its second and third edition (1900 and 1906–1937).[39] Even the rationalist Edward Clodd, folklorist and friend of Frazer, was intrigued by ideas of magic words and their effectivity. His monograph *Tom Tit Tot*[40] is still a classic presentation on "words of power", charms, conjurations and taboo words in folk tales.[41]

In a more obvious sense Andrew Lang, who served at some time as president both of the Society for Psychical Research and of the Folklore Society, was an outspoken believer in psychic phenomena, though initially he was also quite critical of psychic research. His name has lost much of its prestige as his (later) theory on "savage high Gods" is particularly unpopular in later twentieth and twenty-first century religious studies (though it is often much misunderstood). How does this all influence his researches into primitive religion, filling many volumes?[42] A story well-known in Folklore history is the years-long conflict between Andrew Lang and Edward Clodd which strained the Folklore Society from 1895 on, when the medium Eusapia Palladino (1854–1918) was debunked at the Cambridge home of Frederic W. H. Myers, till about 1901. Can modern occult mediumistic phenomena help to understand ancient societies, their religions and the experiences expressed in their religious ideas? Lang defended this approach (*Cock Lane and Common-Sense*[43] passim; also in his

38 Edwin S. Hartland, "The Relations of Religion and Magic," in *Ritual and Belief: Studies in the History of Religion*, ed. Edwin S. Hartland (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914).

39 James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1890); James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 12 vols. + Aftermath, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1906–1937).

40 Edward Clodd, *Tom Tit Tot: An Essay on Savage Philosophy in Folk-tale* (London: Duckworth, 1898).

41 Cf. already Edward Burnett Tylor, "Images and Names," in *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*, new ed. (London: Routledge, 1994), 106–149.

42 Cf. e.g. Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900); Lang, *Myth, Ritual and Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1906); Lang, *Modern Mythology* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897); Lang, *Magic and Religion*; Lang, *Method in the Study of Totemism*, (Glasgow: Maclehose 1911) and others; cf. Roger L. Green, *Andrew Lang: A Critical Biography* (Leicester: Ward, 1946), 241–259.

43 Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common-Sense*, new ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896).

introduction to *Kirk's Secret Commonwealth*,[44] and in many other publications). The rationalist Clodd, the biographer of Darwin and Thomas Huxley, Chairman of the Rationalist Press Association from 1906 to 1913, vehemently denied such a possibility, and declared scholars who used modern occult and spiritualist parallels to understand ancient religions and magic as being obscurantist. His later book *The Question: A Brief History and Examination of Modern Spiritualism* (1917)[45] launches a frontal attack on all kinds of occult discourses. This whole discussion of course is not finally concluded even today. Frazer in a letter from 1917 addressed to Edward Clodd called it a scandal that some of the best scientific minds (which he concedes) should be advocates for the Society for Psychical Research, which for him meant: for occultism. Andrew Lang he saw more as a man of letters than of science, and that perhaps the most enduring of his works might prove to be his poems. This is a seriously insulting remark about a scholar who wrote many books on religion, ritual, magic and folk tradition, though Frazer speaks only in a private letter.[46] We sense the deep irritation the rationalist Frazer experiences by the work of scholars as Lang, or indeed by all scholarship that questioned his feeling of superiority towards religion as such and certainly towards magic.

Lang himself already in *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* (first edition 1894) had tried to bring folklore studies, psychic studies, anthropology and comparative religion into some productive dialogue. Lang can be seen as a central figure in our debate about the hidden agenda in early Religious Studies. In his essay "Anthropology and Religion" that became part of his later work *The Making of Religion* (second edition 1900) he wrote:

> Pleasantly enough, Anthropology has herself but recently emerged from that limbo of the un-recognised in which Psychical Research is pining. The British Association used to reject anthropological papers as 'vain dreams based on travellers' tales.' No doubt the British Association[47] would reject a paper on clairvoyance as a vain dream based on old wives' fables, or on hysterical imposture. Undeniably the study of such themes is hampered by fable and fraud, just as anthropology has to be ceaselessly on its guard against 'travellers' tales,' against European misunderstandings of savage ideas, and against

44 Andrew Lang, *Kirk's Secret Commonwealth: The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns & Fairies; A Study in Folk-lore & Psychical Research*. Text by R. Kirk, M.A., Minister of Aberfoyle, A.D. 1691, commented by A. Lang (London: Nutt, 1893).

45 Edward Clodd, *The Question: A Brief History and Examination of Modern Spiritualism* (London: Richards, 1917).

46 Robert Ackerman, *Selected Letters of Sir J.G. Frazer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 317, 351.

47 A British science institution that as it seems is mentioned here pars pro toto for any kind of official, institutionalized science.

> civilised notions and scientific theories unconsciously read into barbaric customs, rites, traditions, and usages. [. . .] For these sound reasons official science long looked askance on Anthropology. Her followers were not regarded as genuine scholars, and, perhaps as a result of this contempt, they were often 'broken men,' intellectual outlaws, people of one wild idea. To the scientific mind, anthropologists or ethnologists were a horde who darkly muttered of serpent worship, phallus worship, Arkite doctrines, and the Ten Lost Tribes that kept turning up in the most unexpected places. Anthropologists were said to gloat over dirty rites of dirty savages, and to seek reason where there was none. The exiled, the outcast, the pariah of Science, is, indeed, apt to find himself in odd company. [. . .] But there was found at last to be reason in the thing, and method in the madness. Evolution was in it.[48]

This passage from Lang allows for some interesting observations about outside perspectives on the new sciences of anthropology and comparative religion. The "anthropologists" we are talking about did not have clear cut academic careers, and they were seen by the academic public as moving in the vicinity of occult and "savage" believe systems. Tribal lore, magic, primitivism and atavism as fields of research made them suspicious. They were very far from being publicly recognized, and their occupation was always moving on the brink on being seen as a pseudo-science dealing in "dirty savages": exactly this is the context that brought Religious Studies into being, at least in Great Britain. Looking back after 150 years, it may have been to the best of the new science it could not stage its own authority, but had to struggle for respectability. In the first edition of *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* Lang wrote:

> When Anthropology first challenged the interpretation of myths given by philologists, we were told that Anthropology relied on mere travellers' tales. It was answered that the coincidence of report, in all ages and countries, and from all manner of independent observers, unaware of each other's existence, was a strong proof of general accuracy, while the statements of learned and scholarly men, like Codrington, Callaway, and many others, confirmed the strange stories of travellers like Herodotus, of missionaries, traders and adventurers. The same test of evidence, universally coincident, applies to many of the alleged phenomena in this book (Preface).

"Test of evidence" is what we might call experience-based science, which (as Lang of course was well aware of) cannot be interpreted without a theoretical reference frame. Müller also had written about the resistance against comparative religions and comparative language studies by those who feared it might result in "the risk of losing the firm grasp which we ought to have on the few [i.e. languages and religions] that are really important".[49]

48 Lang, *Making of Religion*, 39–40.

49 Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 8–9.

Analysing the comparative religion writers we have in view, we can easily discern two "types" or mental profiles: strict rationalists as Tylor, Frazer and Clodd, and writers with mystical and perhaps to some degree occult inclinations as Lang, James, Leland, who usually are also interested in psychic studies. Müller and Smith are a kind of middle case, personally connected to a philosophical religion with a Christian background, though Müller denied the idea of special revelation, and was inclined towards mysticism.[50] Andrew Lang is perhaps the most interesting scholar for our particular question. Some remarks about his inner biography will be illuminating. We happen to know exactly what he read as a student.[51] In St. Andrews University, where he had been immatriculated in 1861, he was fascinated by Paracelsus and Petrus of Abano, Cornelius Agrippa and the alchemists, and of course by Lord Bulwer-Lytton, the most important Victorian author of occult novels, and a main source of theosophical thinking. On the list of book he got from the library we find writers and titles as Iamblichus and Michael Scotus, Benvenuto Cellini, the Grimm brothers, the Mabinogion, Giambattista della Porta and books on alchemy. Particularly Agrippa seems to have fascinated him. He was disappointed by the grimoires he read, however. Now what does this prove? Does it prove anything? Andrew Lang is a pivotal figure in other areas also. He was by far the most successful author of the group we discuss (his fairy book collections were to be met in every Victorian household), and he was the main antagonist of Frazer. His *Magic and Religion* is a detailed discussion of *The Golden Bough*, and in his criticism he anticipates what later became commonplaces of post-Frazerian arguments, as for example with Jonathan Z. Smith (1938–2017), who wrote his thesis *The Glory, Jest and Riddle: James George Frazer and The Golden Bough*[52] much in the same vein. No other British Victorian mainstream writer on religion illustrates so clearly the deep connection between folklore studies, comparative religion and the occult underground as Andrew Lang.

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50 Cf. Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay, *The Science of Religion in Britain, 1860–1915* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 57.

51 Green, *Andrew Lang*, 20–21.

52 Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Glory, Jest and Riddle: James George Frazer and The Golden Bough," (PhD diss., University of Yale, 1969).

3 Basic Agendas I: The Unity of Religions, Past and Future

The pathos to find a common ground for religions or a basic unity of religions might be called another common endeavour between occultism and comparative religion. This basic idea has very different faces, of course. It can relate to a primordial wisdom religion in the background of more recent religions, which more or less pass it on, it can apply to a common denominator of religions as they actually are, or it may relate to concepts of a future unity between religions that can be prepared by interreligious dialogue. Both Theosophy and Müllerian science of religion want to develop a new religion in harmony with both science and philosophy though their approaches are completely different, and both believed that such a religion of the future would come when Western and Eastern ideas would go together. Even E. B. Tylor who was much more an agnostic than Müller concludes his work on *Primitive Culture* with some reluctant ideas about the future of religion, and the part science may play in bringing it to light. Like many Victorians he feared atavism, the backsliding of evolution. In atavism (i.e. anachronistic survival) magic and animism might come back with full force: survival becomes revival. The science of culture in such cases is a reformer's science.[53]

In occultism ideas on the underlying unity of religions also have an aspect of defining an agenda critical of present religions, particularly of Christianity. This attitude can take two forms: the Blavatsky variant where Buddhist and Hindu ideas (in a Westernized interpretation) give shape to the basic reference frame, and the Christian Theosophy variant, where the paradigm includes Neoplatonic, Christian and Hermetic elements. Occultist authors to some degree competing with Helena Blavatsky in their concepts of the unity of all religion (and of science and philosophy) have e.g. been Anna Kingsford (1846–1888), Christian mystic, some-time theosophist, animal rights activist and the second English woman to receive a degree in medicine, and also (with Edward Maitland) author of *The Perfect Way; or, the Finding of Christ*.[54] A second example even more clearly trying to bring all religions into one common paradigm is Marie Countess of Caithness, Duchess de Pomár, *The Mystery of the Ages Contained in*

53 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 2, 453.

54 Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland, *The Perfect Way; or, The Finding of Christ*, 7th ed. (London: Field & Tuer, 1882; Macoy: Publishing & Masonic Supply Company 1919).

the Secret Doctrine of all the Ages.[55] This encompasses a wide range of questions on religion, avoiding any too close contacts with Blavatskyan Theosophy, but shares with her a deep interest in Asiatic traditions. Lady Caithness explicitly refers to Müller and their shared appreciation of such interests, though her own "Wisdom-Religion" is something quite different than what Müller had in mind. Müller disagrees sharply with any mystification of older religions:

> Readers who have been led to believe that the Vedas of the ancient Brahmans, the Avesta of the Zoroastrians, the Tripitaka of the Buddhists, the Kings of Confucius, or the Koran of Mohammed are books full of primeval wisdom and religious enthusiasm, or at least of sound and simple moral teaching, will be disappointed on consulting these volumes. Looking at many of the books that have lately been published on the religions of the ancient world, I do not wonder that such a belief should have been raised; but I have long felt that it was high time to dispel such illusions, and to place the study of the ancient religions of the world on a more real and sound, on a more truly historical basis [. . .]. The time has come when the study of the ancient religions of mankind must be approached in a different, in a less enthusiastic, and more discriminating, in fact, in a more scholarlike spirit.[56]

We see here the common origin and also the parting of ways between Theosophy and comparative religion. Strangely in his *Theosophy, or Psychological Religion* with its philosophical ideas about the divine Logos in diverse religions Müller comes much nearer to Caithness and Blavatsky than he seems to have realized. He not just compares Indian Vedanta, Christian Logos theology and Muslim (Sufi) mysticism, he states their basic connectedness, and claims a basic common truth. As Madame Blavatsky he defines a higher religion which he sees as the foundation and future of all true religion. A detailed comparison of their approaches – not possible in this small study – might reveal more many more aspects of such unexpected agreement in some basic paradigms. Emma Hardinge Britten (1823–1899), the main historian of American spiritualism, might be mentioned as a further example of an occult approach facing comparative religion. She was a founding member of the Theosophical Society from its first days on, but after come conflict with Helena Blavatsky she left the Society in late 1877, though some contact remained. She saw Spiritualism as the new religion of mankind, and gave an extensive summary of its pre-history and varieties in the religions of the world in her large book *Nineteenth Century Miracles*.[57] A much less

55 Marie Countess of Caithness, Duchess de Pomár, *The Mystery of the Ages Contained in the Secret Doctrine of all the Ages* (London: Wallace, 1887).
56 Müller, *The Upanishads*, IX–XI.
57 Emma Hardinge Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles; or, Spirits and their Work in every Country of the Earth: A Complete Historical Compendium of the Great Movement Known as "Modern Spiritualism"* (Manchester: William Britten, 1883).

known, but even more ambitious work is her *The Faiths, Facts, and Frauds of Religious History*,[58] which tries to define an overall theory of the development of religions. Such works might be called an occult "comparative religion".

In Europe comparative religion and theosophical "wisdom-religion" to some degree almost are male and female variants of a common departure from Christian theological paradigms. This is over-simplified, of course, and has to be qualified with other differences between the discourses, but the tension between comparative religion and occultism has important gender aspects. It is certainly not methodology and perhaps also not so much some basic pattern of hermeneutics that religious studies have in common with these occult and philosophical systems (and of course they are divided by their fascination with "phenomena" and their esotericism). The common ground they nevertheless share can be seen primarily in the aspects of religion they choose as their objects of reflection, in their obsession with tradition, magic, and other elements allegedly archaic in religion, and secondly in their willingness to see all aspects of religion as part of one living organism that can be explained by common laws, i.e. to look for one true religion not in any "pure" or reformed variety of one specific religion, but in an extract from a multitude of religions. None of the writers we have discussed has ever shown much interest in the diversities of present-day religions: it is the primordial, be it archaic magic, be it "wisdom of the ages" that they are looking for. These are different agendas, but they are deeply related, and can be interpreted as different facets of the Victorian imagination of culture in so far as it pertains to religion. Can we say comparative religion competed with theosophy and similar systems for the hegemony of interpreting religion and defining its basic unity?

4 Basic Agendas II: The Concept of Comparison in Comparative Religion

Scientific analysis in late nineteenth century cultural and historical science essentially means comparison. Friedrich Max Müller had already written rather programmatically in 1870:

> All higher knowledge is acquired by comparison, and rests on comparison. If it is said that the character of scientific research in our age is pre-eminently comparative, this really means

58 Emma Hardinge Britten, *The Faiths, Facts, and Frauds of Religious History* (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1879).

> that our researches are now based on the widest evidence that can be obtained, on the broadest inductions that can be grasped by the human mind.[59]

Müller gives the indeed convincing examples that both biology and linguistics achieved its greatest triumphs in the nineteenth century by strict and methodic comparison. To understand religion meant for Müller, Tylor, Smith and without any exception all scholars we have been discussing: to define patterns of comparison. They concentrated on "Aryan" (Indo-Europaean) and Semitic Religions, with occasional sidelights on other religions as they became known. To some degree they looked for wisdom from the East: but not from the Holy Land, as former generations had done, but from sources farther east, "fetishizing the Vedas".[60]

In a similar vein the most important church historian of the early twentieth century, Adolf von Harnack, could write in 1905:

> Im 19. Jahrhundert ist die vergleichende Methode geradezu zur Herrscherin in der Wissenschaft geworden. Vergleichende Sprach-, Religions-, Rechts- und Verfassungswissenschaft usw. sind an die Spitze getreten, und keine einzige Disziplin vermag sich dieser Methode zu entziehen.[61]

In more recent historical and cultural sciences of course things have changed completely, and comparison has come under the general suspicion of looking with European and American glasses or perspectives at non-Western people. But it was different in the age we are speaking about. Both comparative religion and occult and theosophical discourses very much participated in this general pattern of the comparative method. *The Golden Bough* in its first 1890 edition was subtitled *A Study in Comparative Religion* (later retitled in the second edition: *A Study in Magic and Religion*). Even more explicit is a passage using a military metaphor contrasting religion and theology with the new science: "Yet sooner or later it is inevitable that the battery of the comparative method should breach these venerable walls, mantled over with the ivy and mosses and wild flowers of a thousand tender and sacred associations. At present we are only dragging the guns into position; they have hardly yet begun to speak".[62] This passage taking up the nineteenth century language of a "warfare" between science and religion (mostly directed against the Roman Catholic Church) Frazer did not repeat later,

59 Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 9–10.
60 Marchand, characterizing this scholarship in: Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 131.
61 Adolf von Harnack, "Gedanken über Wissenschaft und Leben (1905)," in *Wissenschaftspolitische Reden und Aufsätze*, ed. Bernhard Fabian (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 2001), 225; Fabian's edition strangely giving 1907 as date for the statement, which already in 1905 had been printed.
62 Frazer, *Golden Bough*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., XXI-XXII.

expressing himself with much more restraint.[63] A few years later Frazer's first biographer, taking down ideas from his almost daily contact with the scholar for many years, wrote: "The most important intellectual achievements of the nineteenth century, it might be maintained, arose not so much from the discoveries of new facts, though these were tremendous, as from the use of a new method of approaching and interpreting these facts. The new weapon was the Comparative Method".[64] How do the concepts of comparison by these scholars relate to the concept of synthesis as defined by the Theosophical Society? *The Secret Doctrine* famously was subtitled: *The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*.[65] But this is just a first suspicion if we may say so that these writers did not move in completely different agendas as accepted history of the humanities usually has taken for granted, and further discussion is needed.

5 The Science of Religion in a Social World of Competing Learned Societies

The new approach of comparative religion has a well-defined social aspect as well, which brings us to look at learned societies and patterns of competition. Such societies in Victorian Britain are a primary forum for discussion on academic or learned subjects. Most of them were not strictly academic in the sense of University affiliation, and membership was open to all interested men (rarely women) of scholarly inclinations. They were the academic and learned equivalent of the gentlemen's club as the (still very intellectual) Athenaeum Club founded in 1824.[66] The Royal Society, archetype of all such societies, certainly had much more public reputation, but as its membership was strictly qualified and restricted, it is only partially comparable to other learned societies. These also often had specific membership requirements, and quite high fees, which restricted them to upper middle-class and upper-class men. Membership numbers of one or two hundred are common (rarely more: even the Athenaeum Club originally was restricted to 400 members, later to 1000), and as we will

63 Cf. Timothy Larsen, *The Slain God: Anthropologists and the Christian Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
64 Angus R. Downie, *James George Frazer: The Portrait of a Scholar* (London: Watts, 1940), 9–10.
65 Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 2 vols. (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888).
66 Cf. Seth A. Thévoz, *Club Government: How the Early Victorian World was Ruled from London Clubs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

see, often the same people took part in different societies. Often membership included the receipt of the publications of the society, though there were also "publishing societies" specializing in making sources available as the Roxburghe Club, the Bannatyne Club, the Royal Historical Society and others. Some had a more oriental emphasis as the Royal Asiatic Society Oriental Translation Fund, established in 1828, a subscription printing club organized by the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, which itself was founded in 1823. Another medium of communication was the society conference: a form a scientific gathering differing markedly from the meetings of the older academies, and much more open to a wider public.

And they competed. Indeed who competes with whom in public standing is one of the most vital questions in the history of science as well as of religion, particularly in modernity, where such conflicts are often not too obvious: hidden agendas of competition in the science community and in wider society. This will be a basic consideration in this study. As an emerging science, with whom or with what did Religious Studies or comparative religion compete? Which prerogative of interpretation was at stake? Learned societies often came into being by competing ideas about certain subjects. The Anthropological Society of London e.g. was founded in 1863 by Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821–1890) and Dr. James Hunt (1833–1869), breaking away from the older Ethnological Society of London, founded in 1843. It clearly defined itself in opposition to the older society, dealing with physical as well as cultural aspects of mankind. A few years later, in 1871, with a much larger clientele and larger financial possibilities the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (RAI) was founded, open also to non-British members, and again with a much wider schedule of interests than the earlier anthropological societies could express. Its prestigious Huxley Memorial Medal and Lecture, established in 1900 in memory of Thomas Huxley, was given in 1907 to E. B. Tylor, in 1916 to Sir J. G. Frazer, and in 1923 to E. S. Hartland, the only recipients during these years that might be called scholars of religion.

The scientific community perhaps best comparable in its unfolding research and growing deeply inter-connected group of specialized scholars was the field of folklore studies. It will become immediately clear why we mention this here. Its agenda was that of a new science as well: "Folk-lore is a science by itself, with distinct work of its own to accomplish".[67] The Folk-Lore Society (later Folklore Society) was founded in 1878 in London to study traditional vernacular culture,

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67 Edwin S. Hartland et al., "Folk-Lore Terminology," *The Folk-Lore Journal* 2, no. 11 (Nov. 1884), 348.

folktales, customs etc., with many prominent members, almost all of them somehow also connected to comparative religion. Those scientifically active in the organization have been called the "great team" in Richard Dorson's noted and indispensable history of British folklore studies. These men were Andrew Lang (first non-titled president in 1888–1889), Edwin Sidney Hartland (president 1899–1901), Alfred Trübner Nutt (1856–1910), owner of a publishing house specializing in academic books on folklore and mythology and founder of the Society Journal, and also William Alexander Clouston (1843–1896), William Thoms (1803–1885), the founder and some-time editor of the journal *Notes and Queries*, who had coined the term "folk-lore" in 1846, Edward Clodd (1840–1930) and Sir George Lawrence Gomme (1853–1916), Sir John Lubbock (1834–1913), also a man quite critical of religion, General-Lieutenant Augustus Fox Pitt Rivers (1827–1900), founder of British archaeology and the driving force behind the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, Alfred Cort Haddon (1855–1940), and also – of lesser fame, but certainly as interesting – the Australian Jew Joseph Jacobs (1854–1916), who became also president of the Jewish Historical Society, and some others. Tylor, Gomme and Lang were also members of the first council of the Folk-Lore Society. Frazer himself was for many years a kind of inactive vice-president of the Folk-Lore Society, and the fields of British folklore studies and British comparative religion overlapped to such a degree that they became partially indistinguishable, particularly in their obsession with "survivals". This ended with the demise of Frazerian and Tylorian approaches as leading anthropological paradigms in the Edwardian era. A slight trace of provocation was not something foreign to these scholars: Gomme wrote a book *Folklore as an Historical Science*,[68] Hartland a book *The Science of Fairy Tales*,[69] both rather aggressively availing themselves of the word "science" in defence of the new science and its most famous statement: "Folklore is the science of tradition".[70] Indeed much of the literature on the science of tradition and its early history is of vital importance for the science of religion also; as we have stated they were initially twin sisters, and even *The Golden Bough* is as much a book on folklore as on magic and religion. Both sciences had a hold on the Victorian intellectual elite: but also both were far from being established in

68 George L. Gomme, *Folklore as an Historical Science* (London: Methuen, 1908); The leading scholars in the field for him are J. G. Frazer, Sir William Ridgeway, William Warde Fowler, Jane Ellen Harrison and Andrew Lang: *Folklore as an Historical Science*, 1.

69 Edwin S. Hartland, *The Science of Fairy Tales: An Inquiry into Fairy Mythology* (London: Scott, 1891).

70 Edwin S. Hartland, *Folklore: What Is It and What Is the Good of It?* (London: David Nutt, 1899), 7; cf. Richard M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1968), 243.

the academia.[71] We have already mentioned the deep divide in folklore studies about the acceptability of material from psychic research for the interpretation of folk tradition.

Many of the discussions about religion took place in these already existing Societies, and we can easily see how a science community primarily organized in the shape of learned Societies differed from a science community living mainly in a University world: a first remarkable point being almost all of the scholars just mentioned earned their livelihood outside of the University field, Tylor and Müller being exceptions, and even they had to wait a long time for appropriate University positions. British comparative religion only to a very limited degree is a product of the University (and we must not forget even Charles Darwin never held a University position, but was a private and independent scholar). Tylor only in 1896 was appointed the first Professor of Anthropology at Oxford University, when he was 64 years old. He had served as a lecturer, and was Keeper of the University Museum at Oxford from 1883. From 1884 to 1896 he held the modest title of Reader in Anthropology, though a world-famous scholar since his *Primitive Culture* from 1871. Müller after a quite poor youth for some years was a language teacher and editor before he received a chair at Oxford University. Frazer was a successful writer, but completely unable to teach, and he never had a financially secure position. These men only slowly became part of the regular University system. Today we may see these scholars as classic authorities of their sciences: in their own days this is far from being the case. Many of the scholars we have to consider worked as lawyers or literary editors, more rarely as businessmen. Herbert Spencer, the leading "public intellectual" of the Victorian age (particularly in the 1870s, when Frazer was an undergraduate), today best known for coining the term "survival of the fittest" in 1864, started his life as a civil engineer, later being able to support himself solely from the profit of book sales and the income from his contributions to Victorian periodicals, never holding a University chair. He as might be expected also wrote much on religion from an evolutionary point of view. Folklore studies, comparative religion and other new approaches have been "gentlemen sciences" for a long time, with only limited presence at the Universities (apart from the Gifford lectures, the Hibbert lectures and similar projects which are discussed in the longer version of this study).

71 Cf. also on "gypsy research" and the Gypsy Lore Society, founded in 1888, with the witchcraft scholar Charles Godfrey Leland as its first president, Frenschkowski, "Charles Godfrey Leland (1824–1903) und die Ursprünge der Wicca-Religion"; Deborah E. Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807–1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). It had virtually the same clientele as folklore studies and comparative religion.

Though often personally in a relation of friendly mutual interest, the scholars we have to consider also to some degree competed for public recognition with their different ideas on their new sciences. Rivalry effects a change in all participants: a scholar will not be the same with such a hidden agenda at his back, even if an open conflict never occurs. Comparative religion as is one of the basic assumptions of the present study can only be understood by taking into account such competition. What were its rivals and who already by this constellation influenced its agenda? This in some sense is both supplementary and in some opposition to the question put by Louis Henry Jordan (1855–1923), the first historiographer of the new science, in a study called *Comparative Religion: Its Adjuncts and Allies*.[72] The new science did not only have allies (as folklore studies): it had competing rivals, and as we will see the Theosophical Society has been one of its major rivals. The place of occult discourses and ideas in Victorian society has been a subject of many studies in recent years,[73] of course, but they have so far not been examined in relation to the early study of religion in an anthropological context.[74]

6 A Well-known Example of a Cain-Abel Conflict: Theosophical Society vs. S.P.R.

An evident example of this perspective looking for affinity and competition is the relation between the Theosophical Society of Madame Blavatsky (founded 1875) and her adherents and the Society for Psychical Research (S.P.R., founded 1882). We take a very short look at this conflict as it is the clearest and perhaps most well-known example of the kind of competitive constellation we are characterizing, covering or hiding a deeper affinity. Both Societies dealt with psychic "forces", with hidden abilities of man, with phenomena outside accepted knowledge. But otherwise they moved in completely different cultural milieus,

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72 Louis H. Jordan, *Comparative Religion: Its Adjuncts and Allies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1915).

73 Cf. e.g. Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004).

74 Owen, *Place of Enchantment*.; J. Jeffrey Franklin, *Spirit Matters: Occult Beliefs, Alternative Religions, and the Crisis of Faith in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018) and even the excellent study by Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) do only lightly touch on the question.

with different agendas and target audiences, and their final “parting of ways” is a classic disastrous Cain and Abel-conflict. The S.P.R. as is well-known avoided even the word “occult, occultism” in its early publications (though its library contained all the classics in the field). The chain of events was inaugurated by the so-called Hodgson Report of 1885. The relationship between the two Societies initially had not been unfriendly, and indeed the personal contacts between some of the leaders were quite open-minded. The perhaps most renowned member of the S.P. R., to give an example, had been Sir William Crookes (1832–1919), theoretical physicist and inventor of a prototype of the TV tube and fluorescent lightning, and some time President of the Royal Society (he was elected a member in 1863 for his discovery of a new chemical element, Thallium) as well as President of the S.P.R. (in 1897). In 1867 he also became interested in Spiritualism after the death of a brother. As is happens, William Crookes, his wife, and also Charles W. Leadbeater (later a leading theosophist) joined the Theosophical Society on the same day, November 20, 1883.[75] At this time both Societies were not in any kind of animosity. Crookes is mentioned a number of times in the Mahatma letters, and very often in the writings of Madame Blavatsky.[76] Crookes in 1884 even invited Olcott (co-founder of the Theosophical Society) and an Indian friend into his laboratory to visit his experiments.[77]

We will take a quick glance at some other members of the S.P.R. and their relation to Theosophy, before turning to the story of the parting of ways between both Societies. We gain the impression many people in the S.P.R. field, the anthropology and folklore research field and this means also the Religious Study fields were connected, often by private relationships. Well-known members of the S.P.R. have been its first President, Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900), Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge University. His wife, Eleanor Mildred Sidgwick, also a noted author on S.P.R. subjects (even more than her husband; also Principal of Newnham College 1892–1910 and first female president of the S.P.R. 1908–1909), was a sister to Arthur Balfour (1848–1930), Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1902 to 1905 and Foreign Secretary from 1916 to 1919 (famous for the Balfour Declaration in November 1917 on behalf of the cabinet) – and himself President of the S.P.R. from 1892–1894 (he also delivered the Gifford Lectures at the University of Glasgow in 1914). These connections

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75 Philip S. Harris et al., eds., *Theosophical Encyclopedia* (Quezon City, Philippines: Theosophical Publishing House, 2006), 179.

76 Cf. e.g. A. Trevor Barker, transc., *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett and other Miscellaneous Letters* (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1973), 224–229.

77 Henry St. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves* 3 (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1895–1935), 99; cf. 102–104.

well illustrate the academic and upper-class character of the S.P.R., though as a learned society it never gained the academic standing it tried to achieve. In contrast to Crookes, Myers, Podmore and others, Sidgwick is not known to have been interested in Theosophy. Sir Oliver Lodge (1851–1940), principal of the University of Birmingham 1900–1920 and as a physicist inventor of the radio wave detector, has been President of the S.P.R (1901–1903, and again in 1932), and was a devoted spiritualist in his later years. Andrew Lang, Frazer's most noted opponent, held the position of President of the S.P.R. in 1911. Another of the best-known researchers of the S.P.R., Frederick W. H. Myers (1843–1900), co-author with Frank Podmore and Edmund Gurney of *Phantasms of the Living*,[78] a bulky two-volume work on hallucinations, telepathy and similar phenomena, was not just a psychic researcher but also for some time a theosophist. He joined the Theosophical Society on June 3, 1883.[79] After the Hodgson report he changed his mind, and became increasingly disillusioned and bitter about Madame Blavatsky and Theosophy. The Hodgson Report may be seen as the crossroads where Theosophy and occultism became sub-cultural movements in Victorian culture, comparable to the manner the homosexual sub-culture became almost invisible in London for a few years after the court case against Oscar Wilde in 1895. Charles Robert Richet (1850–1935), though of French nationality, we may mention as a further example of the high social milieu of psychical research. In 1905 he has been President of the S.P.R., and he also was an avid spiritualist and theosophist, even writing articles for the German theosophical magazine *Sphinx*.[80] As a physiologist and psychologist he received the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1913.

The preliminary meetings and also some later meetings of the steering committee of the S.P.R. met at the personal home of Charles Carleton Massey (1838–1905), a lawyer and private scholar who also had translated writings of Paracelsus and Franz Hartmann into English. But Massey was also the chief organizer of the English branch of the Theosophical Society, the founding meeting of which on 27. Juni 1878 took place in 38 Great Russell Street, London, which as it happens also was the head quarter of the British National Spiritualist

78 Frank Podmore and Edmund Gurney, *Phantasms of the Living* (London: Trübner & Co., 1886).

79 Boris de Zirkoff, "Compiler's Note," in Helena P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, comp. Boris de Zirkoff, vol. 5 (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1966–1991), 264; cf. also Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 7, 319, 332.

80 Norbert Klatt, *Der Nachlaß von Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden in der Niedersächsischen Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen: Verzeichnis der Materialien und Korrespondenten mit bio-bibliographischen Angaben* (Göttingen: Klatt, 1996), 234.

Alliance, the first president of which Massey was.[81] Such connections are of the utmost importance to understand the intellectual milieu in which we are moving.

If we take a look from the other side, in 1884 the London Lodge of Theosophy had members as Archibald Keightley (1859–1930), the newspaper editor A. P. Sinnett (1840–1921), Dr. Anna Kingsford (1846–1888, most famous Christian esotericist of her days), William Kingsland (1855–1936, first president of the Blavatsky Lodge), William Crookes, Frank Podmore, F. W. H. Myers, Edmund Gurney (the last four also leading members of the S.P.R.) and Charles Massey.[82] They represented quite a substantial part of the London scene of scholars interested in alternative religion and psychic studies. Massey, a barrister, as we mentioned was a founding member both of the Theosophical Society and the S.P.R. (and of its Council 1882–1886), and as a near acquaintance of Madame Blavatsky also the first president of the British Theosophical Society, the first Branch outside the USA. His father had been Minister of Finances in India. William James (1842–1910), the most well-known psychologist of the USA, president of the S.P.R. in 1896, and co-founder of its American daughter society, was also for some time a member of the Theosophical Society,[83] quoting texts like Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence*.[84] We mention these names to exemplify the social and intellectual milieu we are dealing with. The member fluctuation between the Theosophical Society and the S.P.R. was already noted by contemporaries as Alfred Sinnett[85] and even by Madame Blavatsky herself.[86] The aspect of personal relations in such conflicts must never be overlooked. To mention just one example from many possible ones: Lady Emily Lutyens (1874–1964), wife of a famous architect. She had been active in social work for prostitutes, and fought for the

81 De Zirkoff, "Compiler's Note," in Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, 498.

82 Cf. for this short list Gregory J. Tillett, "Charles Webster Leadbeater 1854–1934: A Biographical Study" (PhD diss. University of Sidney 1986), 1065 n. 2.

83 Philip S. Harris et al., eds., *Theosophical Encyclopedia* (Quezon City, Philippines: Theosophical Publishing House, 2006), 327.

84 Helena P. Blavatsky, "The Voice of the Silence," in *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A study in Human Nature*, ed. Wiliam James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 379–380. His interest in psychic research has always been known (a collection of relevant texts is: Gardner Murphy and Robert O. Ballou, *William James on Psychical Research* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), but only in 2017 a study by Krister D. Knapp, *William James: Psychical Research and the Challenge of Modernity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017) making available new sources could demonstrate how central this subject in fact has been for James' research agenda.

85 Alfred P. Sinnett, *The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1922), 65.

86 Helena P. Blavatsky, *The People of the Blue Mountains* (Wheaton: Theosophical Press, 1930), 150–151.

female right to vote. Annie Besant converted her to Theosophy, and later she became a kind of second mother for Krishnamurti when he spent time in Britain. But she also was a born Lady Lytton and a grandchild of Bulwer-Lytton, the most important Victorian author on the occult, and she was a sister-in-law of Gerald Balfour, who as his brother Arthur had become president of the Society for Psychical Research, the first one in 1906/7, Arthur already in 1893. Now the sister of the Balfour Brothers, Nora, was married to Henry Sidgwick, the founding president of the S.P.R. The sister of Henry, Mary, was the wife of Edward White Benson and mother of the famous Robert Hugh Benson and the Benson brothers, and so on.

The friendly terms between both Societies changed completely in 1885, as is well known. A young lawyer, Richard Hodgson (1855–1909),[87] not yet 30 years old, was sent to India to collect evidence related to some articles accusing Helena Blavatsky of fraud. (The expenses of his voyage were paid for privately by Henry Sidgwick, as the members of the S.P.R. should not be burdened in case the investigation came to nothing). The later verdict of the Committee of the Council of the Society for Psychical Research was clear: Madame Blavatsky "has achieved a title to permanent remembrance as one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting impostors in history".[88] It is difficult today to get a clear scenario about the charges, particular as Blavatsky did not get any serious chance of self-defense. Hodgson for his career clearly needed a spectacular exposure, he never showed Madame Blavatsky the letters allegedly written by her, and he clearly behaved in a way regarded as highly offensive by the Indian native residents at Adyar.[89] The relation between the S.P.R. and the Theosophical Society itself is rather complex and can be seen as a kind of competitive Cain-Abel conflict. It perhaps should be interpreted as a competitive struggle for the prerogative of interpretation of psychic phenomena, of the unknown and not easily recognizable aspects of the soul.

87 Cf. for a biography Alexander T. Baird, *Richard Hodgson: The Story of a Psychical Researcher and his Times* (London: Psychical Press, 1949).

88 Richard Hodgson, "An Account of Personal Investigations in India and Discussion of the Authorship of the "Koot Hoomi" Letters": Together with: Report of The Committee Appointed to Investigate Phenomena Connected with the Theosophical Society, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 3 (1885), 201–400 (different authors and documents; Hodgson's own report is pp. 207–317), 207.

89 Cf. for full details from a forensic researcher: Vernon Harrison, *H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR: An Examination of the Hodgson Report of 1885* (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1997).

7 Madame Blavatsky and Max Müller: What the Competition Means

A similar conflict can be seen between comparative religion and the Theosophical Society and some affiliated groups. The subject of the argument of course is a different one, defining the underlying unity of religion, and by this perhaps even defining the future of religion. Who is the accepted interpreter of religion, when Christian theology is losing its monopoly status of interpreting religion? In the multi-voiced choir of emerging sciences and philosophies, who will be held responsible to understand and publicly explain "religion"? The battle for authority and public standing in the act of interpreting religion had just started in the late nineteenth century (it is very much going on even in the twenty-first century, of course).

A good example of this conflict is the argument between Madame Blavatsky and Friedrich Max Müller. This indeed is not so much an argument but a case of jealousy on both sides. Blavatsky often does not so much argue with Friedrich Max Müller, but writes with rather grudging disdain about the public recognition Müller had received. There is no scholar of religion she quotes more often than Müller. But we will have to look at Müller, as we are here concerned more with his side of the competition, and he is not free from jealousy about the public attention Theosophy receives, either. "The science of religion is only just beginning", Müller wrote in 1860,[90] and Madame Blavatsky quotes this passage in the introductory remarks of her "Theology"-volume in *Isis Unveiled*.[91] Indeed she quotes and mentions Müller more than eighty times in *Isis Unveiled* alone, and quite often even in her many smaller articles. Both share the conviction the religions of the world are a kind of very rich foreign continent just in the earliest days of its colonization. Both see themselves as explorers of new areas of knowledge: and as such they get into some rivalry. Blavatsky and Müller never met in person, though this seems to have been planned a number of times.[92]

Müller's own attitude is most clearly visible in his Gifford lectures from 1892, published 1893 as *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*. A bit smugly he chooses

90 Friedrich Max Müller, "Semitic Monotheism," in *Chips from a German Workshop*, 1st vol. new ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900–1907), 373.

91 Helena P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: J. W. Bouton/London: Bernard Quaritch, 1877).

92 Cf. Isaac Lubelsky, "Friedrich Max Müller vs. Madame Blavatsky: A Chronicle of a (very) Strange Relationship," in *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah, and the Transformation of Traditions*, ed. Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016), 85–86.

the word Theosophy, thereby clearly trying to repossess the time-honoured sobriquet in an academic context. In the preface he writes:

> I ought, perhaps, to explain why, to the title of Psychological Religion, originally chosen for this my final course of Gifford Lectures, I have added that of Theosophy. It seemed to me that this venerable name, so well-known among early Christian thinkers, as expressing the highest conception of God within the reach of the human mind, has of late been so greatly misappropriated that it was high time to restore it to its proper function. It should be known once for all that one may call oneself a theosophist, without being suspected of believing in spirit-rappings, table-turnings, or any other occult sciences and black arts.[93]

Müller defends himself against the suspicion of any affinity to occultism, and sees his lectures as a counter-project against an explicit rival: which is the Theosophical Society. Reading this his major book on religious philosophy with a 130 years distance we can clearly see, however, how much his schedule of preferred subjects is identical with that of the Theosophical Society though his ideas and his philosophical agenda were different. He is fascinated by ancient gnosticism, by Alexandrian logos theology, by Vedanta and Sufism, and by Christian mysticism far from public Victorian religion or church life. Though he never deals in new revelations, his mystic Christianity with its deep sympathy for Asian religions and its pathos of pure and unspoilt Aryan religion is not really so far from esotericism, something he of course would probably not have complied with.

Müller was both deeply interested in and irritated by Madame Blavatsky and commented quite often on her and her Indian connections. This has been documented a number of times and need not be repeated here.[94] Of course he was no sympathizer. He harshly denounced Madame Blavatsky e.g. in an 1893 article in the influential magazine *The Nineteenth Century*. He particularly denied any kind of esotericism in both Hindu and Buddhist earlier teachings,[95] and he severely criticized theosophists not only for the many misunderstandings of Hindu and Buddhist tradition and westernizing ideas about the secret doctrine, but most of all for the very idea about arcane teaching at the core of these religions. In the (only seemingly) simple question about the importance and existence of arcane teaching as a part of early Eastern tradition, however, Blavatsky perhaps was more right than Müller, though much of what she told

93 Friedrich Max Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1893), XVI; cf. Georgina A. Müller, ed., *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Müller*, vol. 2 (New York: Longmans, 1902), 304.

94 De Zirkoff in: Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol 5, 378–379; Lubelsky, “Friedrich Max Müller”.

95 Cf. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 13, 146; Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 14, 3–6, 446.

about it was her own invention. Müller clearly overdid his point when denying anything esoteric in Buddhism, even when considering early Buddhism, but much more when facing Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna.[96] Müller wanted to see Indian early religion much as a global philosophy, completely underrating other aspects. He at least praised the Theosophical Society for its impact on the endeavours to translate Indian books into English.[97] In this regard he competed with the Theosophical Society: his own counter-theosophy was as little a piece of Christian tradition as was Blavatskyan Theosophy, and both tried to bring East and West together. By this they both take up a basic end-nineteenth-century challenge ("Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" Rudyard Kipling, *The Ballad of East and West*, 1889). A quite personal document illustrating Müller's direct personal contact with theosophists is a letter Müller wrote to Olcott in 1893 after Madame Blavatsky had died, discussing the question of esotericism in Buddhism, and illuminating the quite personal and friendly tone of the latter should also be noted, Müller writing as an older German-British scholar to the nine years younger American Olcott.[98]

Both comparative religion and Theosophy were certainly rivalling to some degree Christian theology (mostly missionary theology), but even more importantly they were rivals with each other in defining a new approach to non-Christian traditions. This did not necessitate unrespectful relations, however. Blavatsky criticises at length a Sanskrit poem by F. Max Müller, though she says theosophists have for Müller "always had a profound respect".[99] In an earlier article she writes:

> And it is also due to the unremitting labours of such Orientalists as Sir W. Jones, Max Muller, Burnouf, Colebrooke, Haug, de Saint-Hilaire, and so many others, that the [Theosophical] Society, as a body, feels equal respect and veneration for Vedic, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, and other old religions of the world; and, a like brotherly feeling towards its Hindu, Sinhalese, Parsi, Jain, Hebrew, and Christian members as individual students of 'self,' of nature, and of the divine in nature.[100]

Madame Blavatsky even cites Müller approvingly whenever possible, as on a basic unity between Islam and Christianity.[101] She explicitly takes it for granted that simply every of her possible readers knows Müller's theories on religion.[102]

96 Cf. Müller, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, 309.
97 Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 12, 299.
98 Müller, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, 312–314.
99 Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 13, 104–110. Quotation: 104.
100 Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 104.
101 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, 41.
102 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, 31.

But there are other voices as well; in one case she even wrote to her sister: [I] "went deep into thought about a certain Sanskrit book which I thought would help me to make good fun of Max Muller in my magazine".[103] She insisted on the limitations of Western scholarly knowledge about the mysteries of Eastern faiths:

> The late Swami Dayanand Sarasvati, the greatest Sanskritist of his day in India, assured some members of the Theosophical Society of the same fact with regard to ancient Brahmanical works. When told that Professor Max Müller had declared to the audiences of his 'Lectures' that the theory. . .. 'that there was a prime magical preternatural revelation granted to the fathers of the human race, finds but few supporters at present,' – the holy and learned man laughed. His answer was suggestive. 'If Mr. Moksh Mooller, as he pronounced the name, 'were a Brahmin, and came with me, I might take him to a gupta cave (a secret crypt) near Okhee Math, in the Himalayas, where he would soon find out that what crossed the Kalapani (the black waters of the ocean) from India to Europe were only the bits of rejected copies of some passages from our sacred books. There was a 'primeval revelation', and it still exists; nor will it ever be lost to the world, but will reappear; though the Mlechchhas will of course have to wait.'[104]

Competition between Theosophy and Christian theology is obvious: but this more hidden competition on both sides between Müller and Blavatsky is a specimen of the more general agenda we suggest for the early days both of comparative religion and folklore studies. Charlotte S. Burne, a female scholar of folklore, in an 1887–1888 article explicitly discussed how the Folk-Lore Society should proceed to gain publicity and members in the same manner the S.P.R. and more generally spiritualism successfully do: "we ought to gain the attention of the newspapers. What the Psychical Society can do, surely the Folk-Lore Society can", she writes. She clearly saw the Folk-Lore Society in direct competition to the milieu of psychical research.[105]

Competition existed of course also in the occult and alternative spirituality field as such. Theosophy and spiritualism have been rivals from the beginning.[106] But also the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn competed with Theosophy, and Madame Blavatsky reacted to its appeal by the foundation of the Esoteric Section in London 1888, which she personally supervised. Golden Dawn's *Flying roll XX* (one of a set of occult teachings given only internally to

103 W. Q. Judge, "Letters of H. P. Blavatsky," Part 4, *The Path* (Dec. 1894–Dec. 1895).
104 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, XXX; Mlechchhas, today mostly written mleccha, being a Hinduist derogatory term for non-Indians as "barbarians".
105 Cf. Robert Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 101.
106 Cf. Marco Frenschkowski, "Theosophy, Magic and the Literary Imagination: Remarks on H. P. Blavatsky," in *Fictional Practice: Magic, Narration and the Power of Imagination* edited by Bernd-Christian Otto (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

members, for a certain fee) defines the difference: “This is why, in our system of Occultism we are contrary or converse to that taught by the Theosophical Society. The Theosophists apparently advise the student to commence with the study of the Universe, and while I quite agree that he may arrive at his end by that means, there is the danger of that thought-selfishness, and this is then reason why we study the Microcosm before the Macrocosm”.[107] This means Theosophy was accused of intellectual arrogance by the magicians of ceremonial magic: its megalomaniac world explanation was something different from the concentration on man as subject of occult practice in the Golden Dawn. Other differences may lurk in the background (as a male-female opposition in its respective leader figures).

8 Conclusion

A recent study, *The Science of Religion in Britain, 1860–1915*, by Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay, concentrates on six names that are characterized by her as essential and foundational personalities for what was to become Religious Studies. These are Friedrich Max Müller, Edward Burnett Tylor, Andrew Lang, William Robertson Smith, James George Frazer, and Jane Ellen Harrison. Unfortunately, Wheeler-Barclay pays little attention to occult and “fringe science” connections.[108] In a similar vein Udo Tworuschka in his concise *Einführung in die Geschichte der Religionswissenschaft*[109] mentions these and some other British examples as ancestors of the science of religion. A fuller analysis would have to consider other British writers often little known today but also searching for a basic unity of religions, conversant with Lang, Frazer, Tylor and others, and deeply interested in occultism as well. Examples would be William Scott-Elliot (1849–1919), the Tenth Laird of Arkleton, who (using the pen name William Williamson) e.g. wrote *The Great Law. A Study of Religious Origins and of the Unity Underlying them*.[110] Other persons deserving closer attention are Madame

107 S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy: Golden Dawn Material by S. L. MacGregor Mathers and Others* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1987), 148.

108 But cf. Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay, *The Science of Religion in Britain, 1860–1915* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 124–129 on Lang’s study of the comparative folklore of ghosts.

109 Udo Tworuschka, *Einführung in die Geschichte der Religionswissenschaft* (Darmstadt: WB, 2015).

110 William Williamson, *The Great Law: A Study of Religious Origins and of the Unity Underlying them* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1899).

Blavatsky's last secretary, George Robert Stow Mead (rarely written George Robert Stowe Mead, mostly abbreviated G.R.S. Mead, 1863–1933), a translator of gnostic and hermetic literature, Isabel Cooper-Oakley (1854–1914), India-born author of many books in the field, Alexander Wilder (1823–1908), the actual author of some parts of Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz (1878–1965), today mainly remembered for his later books on Tibetan Buddhism, but initially a scholar of Celtic religion in a comparative perspective, and also a theosophist, and the egyptologist E. A. Wallis Budge, a firm believer in a number of occult concepts. (All these are discussed in the fuller version of this study).

Occultism by its mere existence may have been a kind of catalyst. A catalyst in chemistry of course is a substance that causes or accelerates a chemical reaction without itself being affected, or changing the chemical composition of the substance it influences. Occultism and in particular Theosophy might have contributed to comparative religion by its very existence, not only by tangible ideas taken over. As a competing factor in Victorian society it forced to think about the unity of religions, about east and west, about the magical, arcane and esoteric side of religion. Both movements (comparative religion and occultism) share what today we perhaps might call an essentialist outlook on religion, but this is here a minor point.

We may mention one last aspect the early science of religion and the occult discourse of the late nineteenth century have in common. This is their bland, almost naïve optimism (though it can be combined with some cautious critical remarks about possible changes in the near future). We quote only one specimen:

> It is our happiness to live in one of those eventful periods of intellectual and moral history, when the oft-closed gates of discovery and reform stand open at their widest. How long these good days may last, we cannot tell. It may be that the increasing power and range of the scientific method, with its stringency of argument and constant check of fact, may start the world on a more steady and continuous course of progress than it has moved on heretofore. But if history is to repeat itself according to precedent, we must look forward to stiffer duller ages of traditionalists and commentators, when the great thinkers of our time will be appealed to as authorities by men who slavishly accept their tenets, yet cannot or dare not follow their methods through better evidence to higher ends. In either case, it is for those among us whose minds are set on the advancement of civilization, to make the most of present opportunities [. . .]. It is a harsher, and at times even painful, office of ethnography to expose the remains of crude old culture which have passed into harmful superstition, and to mark these out for destruction. Yet this work, if less genial, is not less urgently needful for the good of mankind. Thus, active at once in aiding progress and in removing hindrance, the science of culture is essentially a reformer's science.[111]

111 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, 452–453.

What does this prove? Eventually we will get a history of the Victorian and Edwardian encounter with religion as the "Other", as something strange and perhaps wild, but also as something to be researched with restraint and method. This might have been an aspect of the background that made the science of religion what it is: a field of unending fascination and discovery. Its sidetracks and hidden undergrounds in occult discourses, and the people behind it, are certainly worthy of further investigation, and may yet yield a number of surprises.

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Daniel Cyranka

Magnetism, Spiritualism, and the Academy: The Case of Nees von Esenbeck, President of the Academy of the Natural Sciences Leopoldina (1818–1858)

Abstract: Christian Gottfried Daniel Nees von Esenbeck (1776–1858) was the president of the Academy Leopoldina in Breslau from 1818 onwards. His professorship was prematurely terminated for political reasons in 1852. Nees von Esenbeck's interest in magnetism and vitalism can be traced back to his time lecturing in botany at the University of Erlangen. Within just four years (1817–1821) he published sixteen texts in the *Archiv für den thierischen Magnetismus*. In his later publications Nees points towards links between North American "spiritualism" and "vitalism", referring to both as phenomena that are excluded from the scientific system. The present paper examines continuities and discontinuities concerning magnetism, spiritualism, and the academy during Nees' presidentship of the Leopoldina (1818–1858). The role of "religion" and its study are also considered. For Nees, religion, spiritualism, Mesmerism, medicine, and science do not belong to different spheres but to one reality. The best examples of his viewpoints can be found in his "catechism" *Das Leben in der Religion* (1853) and his *Beobachtungen und Betrachtungen auf dem Gebiete des Lebens-Magnetismus oder Vitalismus* (1853). Ultimately, this paper asks what Nees' example means for the emergence of the academic study of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*). I argue that the academic interest in spirit and spirits shifted into the study of the exotic or foreign, and thus less dangerous "Other" and that the question of truth was thus separated into the scientific study of nature, on the one hand, and the exotic fields of religion(s), on the other hand.

1 Nees, Science, Revolution, and Spiritualism: Preliminary Remarks

Christian Gottfried Daniel Nees von Esenbeck (1776–1858) was a prominent member of the German Catholics Movement (*Deutschkatholiken*) and a professor of Botany at the University of Breslau. He was president of the Academy of the Natural Sciences Leopoldina – nowadays the National Academy in Germany –

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for forty years (1818–1858), a period that continued even after his professorship at Breslau was prematurely terminated in 1852.

Who owns Nees von Esenbeck? The history of the academy? The scientific history of botany, natural philosophy, and adjacent areas? The history of Mesmerism and medicine? The history of revolutions and the *Vormärz*? The historiography of ecclesiastical-religious dissidents? The modern history of theology and the church? The German Catholics Movement and its history? Research on esotericism and its interest in occultism and clandestine spiritualism? The reception history of Andrew Jackson Davis' *Harmonial Philosophy* and *Spiritualism*? From what point of view can a portrait of a figure like Nees von Esenbeck reasonably be drawn? It hardly seems possible to address all of the various aspects together that are connected or coalesce in such a prominent figure. Nevertheless, I make the attempt here as a historian of religion(s). My starting point in this context is an assertion: complex interconnections between various aspects of science, knowledge, politics, society, and religion, such as those found in Nees' career, are represented neither in the history of science nor in the history of theology or religion. It is almost impossible to articulate all that obviously coincides in Nees in a single sentence. On the one hand, the reasons for this lie in the complex, overlapping, and shifting debates of the (in many ways) revolutionary 19th century, with their mutually inclusive and exclusive dimensions. On the other hand, these overlapping fields tend to be represented in historiography as completely separate areas. It is no surprise that the main line of today's historiography repeats and entrenches this exclusion of complexity. Indeed, it is one of the motivations for engaging in new critical inquiries into the subject.

Alongside his active involvement in the German Catholics Movement in the years around the 1848 revolution, Nees von Esenbeck was also appointed the president of the Berlin Workers' Congress in 1848 and a delegate of the left faction of the Prussian National Assembly in Berlin in the same year. In the end, it was his association with the revolutionary *Arbeiter-Verbrüderung*, or Workers' Brotherhood, which the Prussian state had deemed Communist, that led to his ban from Berlin at the beginning of 1849. Three years later, in 1852, he was banished from the civil service without further pay and relegated to the status of private citizen, although he continued to serve as president of the Academy Leopoldina until his death in 1858.[1] I think Nees, and more generally his life

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1 Johanna Bohley, *Christian Gottfried Nees von Esenbeck: Ein Lebensbild* (Halle: Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina, 2003). More biographical information and previous considerations on this topic can be found in Daniel Cyranka, "Wofür steht das Jahr 1848? Religionsgeschichtliche Erkundungen im Kontext von Religion, Wissenschaft und Politik," *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 32 (2015): 289–318. and Daniel Cyranka, "Religious Revolutionaries

and career, serve as a prominent example of the kinds of developments that mark the historical shift from science *and* religion to the science *of* religion(s), to *Religionswissenschaft* as I call it in this paper. He stands in a prominent position in the preparatory phase.

The conference on which this volume is based considered the *Birth of the Science of Religion: Out of the Spirit of Occultism*. From this perspective, my interest lies in the debates on magnetism and science, religion and spiritualism, and their sectoral representations in research and beyond. The main aim of this paper is to situate Nees' interest in Mesmerism and spiritualism in the context of the ambivalent positioning of these subjects within the scientific community. By doing so, I aim to demonstrate a number of interesting continuities and discontinuities.[2] While I am only referring to small pieces of the wider puzzle in this study, my overarching concern is with the wider trend of the scientification of religion and the invention of *Religionswissenschaft* in Germany (and elsewhere). An important example for understanding this trend is a book published by Nees in 1853, *Das Leben in der Religion*, which occurs as a form of catechism. I intend to return to this book, and to many of Nees' other publications about religion, in future studies.

The origin of modern spiritualism is often sought in the Hydesville events of 1848 that gave prominence to the Fox sisters. This modern spiritualism is either distinguished from the older cultural strains of such historical phenomena or simply juxtaposed alongside multiple other examples. Almost invariably,

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and Spiritualism in Germany Around 1848," *Aries. Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 16 (2016): 13–48

2 While the rationale that concepts and practices emerged under different, or even divergent, conditions is valid, a line of inquiry centring on the theme of continuities is indispensable and cannot be circumvented, given that spiritualism and spiritism represent the focus of research on esotericism; cf. Michael Bergunder, "What is 'Esotericism'? Cultural Studies Approaches and the Problems of Definition in Religious Studies," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (2010): 9–36, esp. 30; and Diethard Sawicki, *Leben mit den Toten: Geisterglaube und die Entstehung des Spiritismus in Deutschland 1770–1900* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), esp. 268–281, where Sawicki, referring to Nees, already indicates the connection between the movement of the German Catholics, socialism, and spiritualism. Karl Baier. *Meditation und Moderne: Zur Genese eines Kernbereichs moderner Spiritualität in der Wechselwirkung zwischen Westeuropa, Nordamerika und Asien*, vol. 1. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 179–252 and 253–290, focuses on the continuities of Mesmerism and occultism. Ellenberger had already begun to address the subject of continuities at the start of the 1970s; cf. Henry F. Ellenberger, *Die Entdeckung des Unbewussten: Geschichte und Entwicklung der dynamischen Psychiatrie von den Anfängen bis zu Janet, Freud, Adler und Jung* (Zürich: Diogenes, 2005), 133. Here, Ellenberger considers Davis to be the link between Mesmerism and Spiritualism.

most authors focus their interest on figures such as Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), or Justinus Kerner (1786–1862).[3] A significant proportion of the scholarly works on spiritualism both from and concerned with these years make references to two central protagonists – Andrew Jackson Davis (1826–1910) and Allan Kardec (1804–1869) –, testifying the significant contributions made by these figures.[4] Yet Hydesville is not the objective starting point of spiritualism. Rather, it is a part of a narrative that marks the origin of spiritualism as a passing trend, a trend which, from this perspective, ended just a few years later in revelations of fraud or humbuggery.

2 Nees' Interest in Magnetism and Vitalism and His Early Academic Career

That Nees was preoccupied with animal magnetism and vitalism during his time in Erlangen and Bonn is not a matter of dispute.[5] However, the fine-grained details of that preoccupation and his related attitudes are less clear. The first thesis I will advance here is that Nees' preoccupation with animal magnetism did not impact negatively on his academic career. On the contrary, it seems to me that his open-minded way of thinking and studying was one of several reasons underlying his appointment to a professor in Erlangen in 1818, another in Bonn in 1819, and his election as president of the Academy Leopoldina in 1818.

The success of Nees' career serves, in itself, to show that he was not held back by adverse reactions to his interest in animal magnetism. However, after the revolution of 1848 and the beginning of the spiritualistic wave that entered

3 Peter Gerlitz, for instance, notes that while, from the perspective of intellectual history, spiritualism can be traced back to Swedenborg, Mesmer, and Kerner, the seemingly new spiritualist practices could also be traced back to the same source. Notwithstanding this analysis, 1848 is still regarded as the year of its genesis; cf. Peter Gerlitz, "Spiritismus," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Horst Balz et al., vol. 31, 695–701 (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000).

4 On Davis, cf., for instance, Catherine L Albanese, "On the Matter of Spirit: Andrew Jackson Davis and the Marriage of God and Nature," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60 (1992): 1–17. A short overview of the works of Allan Kardec can be found in an article by Christine Bergé, "Kardec, Allen [sic!]," in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 658 et seq. (Leiden: Brill, 2006). (However, in the text itself, he is referred to as "Allan Kardec").

5 Cyranka, "Wofür steht das Jahr 1848?" and Cyranka, "Religious Revolutionaries."

German society in 1853, a similar interest went unsupported and was more or less ignored or hidden by the academic community. Nees' later interest in spiritualism, and in the harmonial philosophy of Andrew Jackson Davis, was not appreciated by his peers. He was, on the one hand, still the president of the Academy and an respected academic thinker and public personage. On the other hand, his interest in spiritism and spiritualism was more or less completely concealed.[6] Although his successors as presidents of the Academy – Dietrich Georg Kieser (1779–1862) and Carl Gustav Carus (1789–1869) – were very interested in the question of the nature of the soul, as well as in the apparent phenomena of materialisation and divination, Nees' wide-ranging interests in spirits and, especially, in the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis were not discussed by the academic community, although his name was mentioned prominently in this thematic field (for example, in the announcement of the publication of Jackson Davis' writings in German, in which Nees was presented as a central figure).[7] The same is true for other propagators of Davis' works, such as Georg von Langsdorff (1822–1921) and Gregor Konstantin Wittig (1834–1908).[8] Both men were also involved in the 1848 revolution (Langsdorff in Freiburg/Br.)[9] and in the German Catholics Movement (Wittig in Breslau). Furthermore, they were eminent propagators of spiritualism in Germany.[10]

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6 Bohley, *Nees*.

7 Cf. Prospectus der von dem amerikanischen Seher und Verkündiger der "Harmonischen Philosophie" Andrew Jackson Davis in der Reihenfolge ihrer Veröffentlichung in Nord-Amerika erschienenen und mit Autorisation ihres Verfassers eines Theils von dem im Jahre 1858 verstorbenen Präsidenten der Kaiserlich Leopoldinisch-Carolinischen Akademie der Naturforscher zu Breslau, Professor Dr. Christian Gottfried Nees von Esenbeck, und andern Theils von dessen Mitarbeiter und Herausgeber Gregor Constantin Wittig, aus dem Englischen in's Deutsche übersetzten Werke, (Leipzig: Franz Wagner, 1867).

8 Wittig is portrayed here as a private scholar and a scholar of philosophy, philology, and psychology, as the founder and long-standing director of the journal, *Psychische Studien*, and as a researcher working on the poet Johann Christian Günther. As indicated here, he died on the 7th of September 1908 in Leipzig; cf. Biographisches Jahrbuch und Deutscher Nekrolog, vol. 13, 1908, quoted from: Deutsches Biographisches Archiv, part 2, microfiche no. 1419, 257. More detailed biographical notes will be prepared by Martin Emmrich, working within the research project "Spiritualism in Germany: The reception of the American Spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis in the long 19th century. From republicanism, to free religion, and science," funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG); see http://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/274348785?language=en, (22.10.2018).

9 Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 37–39.

10 Langsdorff, for instance, translated Davis' texts *Culturkampf*, *Tempel*, and *Penetralia*.

Nees' interest in magnetism dated back to his time in Erlangen and Bonn, where he lectured in botany. Within a matter of four years (1817–1821), he had published sixteen texts in the *Archiv für den Thierischen Magnetismus* (*Archive for Animal Magnetism*), the main German series for the academic discussion of Mesmerism in the early 19th century. Nees' contributions to the *Archiv* included a fragment on dream interpretation, as well as his university lectures in Erlangen on the *Entwickelungsgeschichte des magnetischen Schlafs und Traums*, which he republished separately soon after he took up his professorship in Bonn in 1820.[11] The fourteen lectures he gave at the University of Erlangen in the summer of 1818 focus on "magnetic sleep", or hypnosis in today's parlance (as it is widely known, the term "to mesmerise" has its roots in the temporal and cultural contexts in which animal magnetism and Mesmerism gained in importance). Two aspects of the fourteen lectures can be highlighted here. First, Nees conceives of vitalism as deriving from a life force or from soul, in order to postulate not a difference between organic and inorganic beings but their ultimate unity. Secondly, and this is a critical point, Nees' claims went far beyond these considerations when he referred to "guides", "good angels",[12] or "protective spirits",[13] and to the different stages of clairvoyance.[14] He maintained that the possibility of healing in a condition of magnetic sleep was "an expression of the *vis medicatrix* in the moment of its gaining awareness and becoming louder" – in other words, an expression of the healing power.[15]

Whilst Nees ultimately entered a very peculier area by invoking the power of "divination" in his penultimate lecture, the main focus across the lectures as a whole is on two basic states of human life, sleep and wakefulness, and, in particular, on their points of intersection and the shifting levels of awareness involved in the transition from one state to the other. Nees describes the condition of hypnosis, or "magnetic sleep", in terms of ascending phases, to which he ascribes different levels of speaking or speech: 1) general speech, 2) philosophical speech, 3) poetic speech, and 4) treatment procedure and instructions for the treatment, in effect, the speech involved in the Mesmerist or magnetic treatment. Nees then goes on to introduces a fifth and final level – that of divination – in order to

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11 Christian Gottfried Daniel Nees von Esenbeck, *Entwickelungsgeschichte des magnetischen Schlafs und Traums, in Vorlesungen von Dr. C.G. Nees von Esenbeck, Präsident der Kaiserlich-Leopoldinisch-Carolinischen Akademie der Naturforscher und Professor in Bonn* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1820).
12 Nees, *Entwickelungsgeschichte*, 93.
13 Nees, *Entwickelungsgeschichte*, 95–101.
14 Nees, *Entwickelungsgeschichte*, 102–104.
15 Nees, *Entwickelungsgeschichte*, 121.

describe the speech generated under the influence of magnetic or hypnotic sensory perception:

> But the mind that now has objectively grasped its own actions becomes completely free, released from the finite limits, and becomes, at the moment of its release, common spirit; it sees, hears etc. with the eyes and ears of humanity. Thus, even that which has for all practical purposes separated, seems coeval, i.e. timeless, and that brings forth the so-called divination.[16]

The german term "Divination" bears no relation to "prophecy" or "fortune telling" and Nees essentially uses this term to underscore the principle of "human freedom" and to point to the possibility of a proleptic consciousness of actions, events, and manifestations. As evidence for this, Nees refers to events that lie beyond the scope of human comprehension but within the earthly nexus of cause and effect in which, he claims, it is possible to perceive weather events in remote areas. But Nees' notion of divination extends further, to a level that involves "recognising such actions whose primary motivation is human freedom, and, in particular, an act of something that has not yet assumed physical reality and thus has not assumed the properties of objective causality".[17]

Divination, as Nees defines it here in this early lecture on *Entwickelungsges chichte des magnetischen Schlafs und Traums* (History of the Development of Magnetic Sleep and Dream), refers to purely intelligible, non-material processes that allow actions to be anticipated. In this lecture, given in Erlangen in 1818, he offered a precise description of these levels of consciousness, a description of a kind that Andrew Jackson Davis and others were later able to reclaim for themselves in the 1840s. According to this description, these levels of consciousness consisted in hypnotic or trance-like insights into higher levels that extended beyond causal chains, removed in space and time into the realm of freedom. That Nees was aware that he was transgressing boundaries in his writings is clear from his introduction to the second printed edition of this lecture, dated to 1820 when he just had been appointed professor at the new University of Bonn. He wrote there that:

> My intention was to find evidence for such wondrous epiphanies of animal magnetism, and, like a mariner who has to let the anchor fall overboard on the seas yet cannot find

16 Nees, *Entwickelungsgeschichte*, 146: „Aber der Sinn, der sein *eignes* Handeln *objectiv ergriffen hat*, wird ganz *frei*, wird der endlichen Schranke entbunden und *für den Moment* seiner Entbindung *Gemeinsinn*; er *sieht*, *hört etc*. mit den *Augen*, *Ohren* der *Menschheit*. So wird ihm auch das im Außeren *Geschiedene gleichzeitig*, *d. h. zeitlos*, und dadurch die sogenannte Divination möglich."

17 Nees, *Entwickelungsgeschichte*, 146–147: „Erkennen solcher Handlungen, deren erster Bewegungsgrund menschliche Freiheit ist, und zwar ein Act derselben, welcher noch nicht in die Erscheinungswelt getreten ist, und also noch keine objective Causalität gewonnen hat."

> out whether this is the best anchorage but must be content with locating the base or the ground, this is how I envisaged these sensorial activities, the norms and transformations of which were familiar to me through my longstanding involvement with the natural history of the dream, and sought access through it to the deeper world of dreams and the magnetic intuition.[18]

Nees' writings on protective spirits, and even on divination, might perhaps seem "unscientific" and thus depart from a history that aspires to be taken seriously. Unsurprisingly, they have, thus far, been given very little weight by those who have studied his life and works.[19] However, aside from the fact that Nees later (after 1853) published on magnetism in the Academy Leopoldina's journal, *Bonplandia*,[20] it is particularly remarkable that his early co-editors in the *Archiv für den thierischen Magnetismus* – Kieser, Eschenmayer, and Nasse – were keen to refer to their joint work on this topic as an anti-mystical project of reason. Their willingness to do so did not cast doubt on their reputations as scholars at that time. In the preface to the first issue of the *Archiv* the editors proclaim: "We hereby note only that, in our opinion, the existence of animal magnetism, in its highest forms and its mysterious shape, is beyond doubt [. . .]."[21]

This preface bears the signature of the three university professors – Eschenmayer (Tübingen), Kieser (Jena), and Nasse (Halle) – who edited the new journal along with Nees and several other naturalists with whom Nees had collaboratively published. Carl August von Eschenmayer (1768–1852) was first appointed extraordinarius for medicine and philosophy in 1811 and then, in 1818, professor ordinarius for philosophy at the University of Tübingen. Dietrich Georg Kieser (1779–1862), who had been inducted as a full member of the Academy Leopoldina in 1816, was appointed professor extraordinarius in 1812 and then, from 1824 onwards, professor ordinarius for medicine at the University of Jena.

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18 Nees, *Entwickelungsgeschichte*, 2: „Meine Absicht war, einen Anhaltspunct für die so wundersamen Erscheinungen des thierischen Magnetismus zu suchen, und wie ein Schiffer, wenn er auf der See die Anker fallen lassen *muß*, nicht forschen kann, ob dieß der *beste* Ankergrund sey, sondern schon zufrieden ist, wenn er nur *Grund* findet, so faßte ich die Sinnesthätigkeit, deren Normen und Wandlungen mir durch eine lange Beschäftigung mit der Naturgeschichte des Traums geläufig geworden waren, ins Auge und suchte durch sie einen Zugang zur tiefern Welt der Träume und der magnetischen Anschauungen."

19 Bohley, *Nees*.

20 Bohley, *Nees*, 156.

21 Archiv für den thierischen Magnetismus. In Verbindung mit mehreren Naturforschern herausgegeben von Dr. C. A. Eschenmayer, Professor zu Tübingen. Dr. D. G. Kieser, Professor zu Jena. Dr. Fr. Nasse, Professor zu Halle 1 (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1817), 8: „Wir bemerken hierbey nur noch, daß nach unserer Ansicht das Daseyn des thierischen Magnetismus in seinen höchsten Formen und seiner geheimnißvollen Gestalt außer allem Zweifel ist [. . .]."

Christian Friedrich Nasse (1778–1851) was appointed professor of internal medicine at the University of Halle in 1816 and at the University of Bonn in 1819. He was inducted into the Academy in 1818. Nees first began to lecture in botany at the University of Erlangen, where he was appointed professor in 1817, before, in 1818, being named professor of natural history and botany at the University of Bonn and appointed president of the Academy Leopoldina (8th August 1818). Nasse's appointment to the medical faculty in Bonn is attributed to Nees' efforts to bring him there.[22] When Nees moved from Bonn to Breslau in 1830, his interests broadened beyond the scope of general and special botany, forest botany, and natural philosophy to speculative philosophy and speculative anthropology. This orientation may have led to his alliance with German Catholics such as Johannes Ronge (1813–1887) and their political activities in the forefront of the revolution of 1848.[23] Even after 1852, when Nees' ongoing political activities prompted the Prussian government to dismiss him from university employment, whereupon he became a political and academic outcast, he remained president of the Leopoldina until his death in 1858.[24] During this early phase, he collaborated with his successor at the Leopoldina, Dietrich Georg Kieser, to found the journal *Archiv für Thierischen Magnetismus*. Carl Gustav Carus, his successor as president of the Academy, shared the interests and inclinations of both of his predecessors, as evidenced by his responses to such topics as Mesmerism.[25] Nees was thus by no means the sole, or even the last, president of the Academy to be intimately involved in debates on magnetism, Mesmerism, natural philosophy, and other, what are now called, border-regions of the sciences.

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22 Bohley, *Nees*, 62.

23 Gregor Constantin Wittig, "Vorwort des Uebersetzers," in Andrew Jackson Davis, *Der Arzt: Harmonische Philosophie über den Ursprung und die Bestimmung des Menschen, sowie über Gesundheit, Krankheit und Heilung*, trans. Gregor Constantin Wittig (Leipzig: Wagner, 1878), xxxii, note.

24 Bohley, *Nees*.

25 Carl Gustav Carus, "Lebensmagnetismus – Magie," In *Die Gegenwart: Eine enzyklopädische Darstellung der neuesten Zeitgeschichte für alle Stände*, vol. 10 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1855), 275–312 (Carus himself indicates in his preface that the year for the next title was 1854). An extended version of the entry that appeared in this Brockhaus Encyclopedia on vital magnetism appeared shortly thereafter: Carl Gustav Carus, *Über Lebensmagnetismus und über die magischen Wirkungen überhaupt*, Unverändert herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Christoph Bernoulli. (1857 repr., Basel: Benno Schwabe & Co., 1925). Cf. for that Peter-André Alt, *Der Schlaf der Vernunft: Literatur und Traum in der Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit* (München: Beck, 2002), 265–279, esp. 273–275, and Eva Johach, "Kollektiv der Psychographen: Trance und Medialität in den Experimentalpraktiken des Tischerückens," in *Trancemedien und neue Medien um 1900: Ein anderer Blick auf die Moderne*, ed. Marcus Hahn and Erhard Schüttpelz (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), 253–274, esp. 258.

3 Nees' Later Interest in Spiritualism

My second thesis is that Nees' various interests – in philosophy of nature, in science, in religion, and in social, political, and other reforms (and therefore in revolution) – culminated in his reading of Andrew Jackson Davis' harmonial philosophy. He therefore promoted the knowledge and study of both Davis' writings and the spiritualistic wave that spread through Germany from 1853.

One strand of the spiritualist movement in Germany, that which drew chiefly on the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis, is indelibly linked to Nees. In his early years, starting in 1820, he had played a significant role, along with his brother, in establishing the Institute of the Natural Sciences and the Botanical Garden of the University of Bonn. He then went on to accept a professorship in Breslau in 1830, where he became politically active in the German Catholics Movement alongside Johannes Ronge, as mentioned above.

Nees' eventful life, his academic accomplishments, and his wide-ranging political activities, can be addressed only briefly here.[26] However, suffice it to say that once he had moved from Bonn to Breslau he began, in the 1840s, to be perceived as a prominent dissenter by the state and the church authorities, in part owing to his involvement in the German Catholics Movement and the Silesian Vormärz. Consequently, his significant publications on religious, philosophical, political, and sociological topics, and even his scholarly preoccupation with Andrew Jackson Davis, tended to fade into the background.[27] At the beginning of the spiritualistic wave in Germany in 1853, when Nees became aware of Davis through his publications in English-language journals such as the *Spiritual Telegraph*, he published a short excerpt.[28]

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26 Bohley, *Nees* as well as Johanna Bohley, "Klopfzeichen. Experiment. Apparat: Geisterbefragungen im deutschen Spiritismus der 1850er Jahre," in *Pseudowissenschaft: Konzeptionen von Nichtwissenschaftlichkeit in der Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, ed. Dirk Rupnow, et al. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2008), 100–126. According to Bohley, Esenbeck belongs to a school of thought oriented towards natural philosophy. In a way, this reinscription removes him from the "rigid" natural sciences orientation of the discourse on progress. What positions does he represent and in what ways are his notion of "vitalism" inscribed into his religious worldview as a German Catholic? His catechism, published in 1853, might reveal more, for it was written before his intense preoccupation with Davis' works and thus allows the possibility of interrogating continuities even before Nees' reception of Davis.

27 Compare Treitel, *Science*, 38 et seq.

28 Nees, for instance, took the introduction from Davis' *The Present Age & Inner Life*, as he found it in the Spiritual Telegraph, in Ostdeutsches Athenäum, the addendum to the Neue Oder-Zeitung. He also published the reprint of the same text in Christian Gottfried Daniel

During this period, when German readers were fascinated by the phenomenon of table turning, Nees occasionally expressed his views on such topics. His response to the question of what value natural history might reap from the latest discoveries of table turning and spirit knockings, appearing in *Ostdeutsches Athenäum* on the 2nd of October 1853, reveals his cautious receptivity. Even as he conceded that their scientific potential had yet to be established and their discovery had not resulted in any tangible benefits, he also left open the possibility that benefits might accrue in the future. Similarly, while acknowledging the disciplinary demarcations between natural history and physiology, which had, by this time, been classified as distinct sciences, he averred that the domains that each occupied had "real links"[29] that were not immediately discernible. The links could be scientifically established only once this unity,

> would consciously rise to the pinnacle of all knowledge about nature and if it were possible, as a matter of principle, only to conceive of the unity of humankind and nature, or even better, perhaps of a unity of the so-called inorganic and organic nature within every human being than of a complete system of nature [. . .].[30]

This is how Nees describes the higher unity of nature and the higher unity of the human being within this complex. He further demands that one must,

> also consider humankind in its wholeness and only as such situate it in the context of the rest of nature, and, similarly, [consider] the entirety of nature as a living being manifested in human form with body and soul. Human life must not only be understood in theory in reference to the nature extrinsic to it; rather, conversely, the world as a whole must also be understood through the human source and, so to say, be constituted as a rational concept.[31]

According to Nees, natural history and physiology remained irredeemably distinct, with no points of intersection whatsoever,

Nees von Esenbeck, *Beobachtungen und Betrachtungen auf dem Gebiete des Lebens-Magnetismus oder Vitalismus*. (Bremen: Schünemann, 1853), 128 et seq.

29 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 131: "in der gesammten Naturerkenntnis mit Bewußtsein an die Spitze trete, und daß bei ihr principiell nur von einer Einheit des Menschen und der Natur, oder richtiger vielleicht, von einer Einheit der sogenannten unorganischen und organischen Natur im Menschen, als von einem vollständigen Systeme der Natur, die Rede sei [. . .]."

30 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 131: "auch den Menschen in seiner Ganzheit und nur als solchen, auf die ganze übrige Natur zu beziehen und so die ganze Natur als ein Lebendiges aus Leib und Seele in Menschengestalt zu betrachten. Das Leben des Menschen soll nicht blos nach der Natur außer ihm theoretisch, – sondern es soll auch umgekehrt das Ganze der Welt aus dem Menschen verstanden und in seiner Vernunftidee praktisch dargestellt werden."

31 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 131.

> because the appropriate point of contact is one that lacks an exterior. To tirelessly point to this is the aim of those who grasp in the trends and signs of our time discussed here the call to contribute to a holistic progress of reason and to its realisation in the scientific system, and who do not assume the responsibility of reducing this dynamic field and its latest findings to the theory of the physical abstract science, let alone grant it legitimacy so that they can be merged into their doctrines and propositions. Using the same laws, or, rather, owing to the same error, it would be wrong to demand of the categories of physics that they be reduced to the categories of Mesmerism.[32]

Nees begins by alluding to table turning as a form of "vitalism" that was "different, but already a rather well known concept that would endure".[33] He goes on to expound upon this idea, drawing on, as he puts it, the "ingenious work: The Present Age and Inner Life" by Andrew Jackson Davis.[34] The world, as Davis cast it, was still emerging from the darkness of ignorance and superstition. It was possible to see the past, the present, and to get a "glimpse of the latent future": "From this position, the mind's eye may not only take a comprehensive survey of the inferior Past as the vast background of the superior Present, but also, now and then, obtain a satisfying glimpse of the still unveiled Future".[35] For Nees, such matters lay within the bounds of the notion of progress, which his references to the evolution of knowledge affirm. Here he cites Andrew Jackson Davis:

> By scanning the fables of the past and comparing them with the realities of the present, we can see that what were considered miraculous and supernatural are now recognized

32 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 131 et seq.: "denn der *rechte* Berührungspunkt ist eben der, für den es kein Aeußeres mehr gibt. Auf diesen unermüdlich hinzuweisen, fühlen sich alle Diejenigen gedrungen, welche in den hier besprochenen Erscheinungen und Zeichen unserer Zeit zwar den Aufruf zu einem umfassenden Vernunftfortschritt und zu dessen Realisierung im System der Wissenschaft erblicken, keineswegs aber die Aufgabe, das vitale Gebiet mit seinen neuesten Resultaten auf die Theorie der physikalischen abstracten Wissenschaft zu reduciren oder gar nur so weit gelten zu lassen, als sie in den Lehrsätzen derselben aufgehen. Mit demselben Rechte oder vielmehr mit dem gleichen Irrthum würde man den Kategorien der Physik zumuthen, daß sie sich auf die Kategorien des Mesmerismus reduciren lassen sollten."

33 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 126.

34 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 128. The most recent study on religion and science between 1800 and 2000 that addresses the topic of "vitalism" makes no reference to Nees von Esenbeck or to Andrew Jackson Davis and almost no mention of Franz Anton Mesmer and Mesmerism. Allan Kardec, first name spelled as "Allen," appears only once. It might be important in this context to continue exploring further historical links; cf. Kocku von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion: An Historical Survey of Discursive Change: 1800–2000* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 64–70, 97.

35 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 126: "Von einem Standpunkt an der Spitze des Zeitalters aus könne das Auge des Geistes nicht nur einen vollständigen Überblick der *unteren* Vergangenheit und des weiteren Hintergrundes der *oberen* Gegenwart gewinnen, sondern auch hin und wieder einen Schimmer der noch unverhüllten Zukunft erblicken."

> as the 'matter-of-course' triumphs of progressive science – as things ordinary and natural to the constitution of matter and principles.[36]

In his 1853 publication on vital magnetism, entitled *Beobachtungen und Betrachtungen auf dem Gebiete des Lebens-Magnetismus oder Vitalismus*, Nees points to the links between North American "spiritualism" and "vitalism", referring to both as phenomena that are excluded from the scientific system. During a period that marked the beginning of the spiritualistic wave in Germany, Nees defended both concepts, notwithstanding the innumerable allegations of deception and the implication that they could be regarded as mere illusion or fallacy.[37] As he put it, it was clear in how science had approached the phenomena of table turning and rapping sounds that science had not evolved beyond the attitude towards Mesmerism or animal magnetism that it had adopted a hundred years earlier.[38] In its "attempts to fully comply with the dialectics of the world of reason, it had ended up digging itself an open grave right next to it. It was buried quietly, it took its morning nap and it was silenced to death by scholars".[39] And he points out, it had now been reawakened by the rooster crowing at dawn.

4 On the Positioning of Spiritualism in Nees' Biography

My third thesis is that Nees' later preoccupations with spiritualism and with the writings of Davis were not well-received, unlike his earlier dedication to animal magnetism. On the contrary, his work on these topics was ignored in the academic world of the 1850s. Nees derives his understanding of spiritualism from his interpretation of vitalism as a harmonial philosophy that postulates a principle of unity. A biography of Nees published in 2003, which describes his long tenure as president of the Leopoldina, interprets Nees' involvement with spiritualism as 'senile mysticism'[40] and 'ambivalent late work',[41] suggesting that,

36 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 128 et seq. (quotation from the translated German version): "'Bei Prüfung der Fabeln der Vergangenheit und Vergleichung derselben mit der Realität der Gegenwart erkennen wir, daß das, was für wunderbar und übernatürlich gehalten wurde, jetzt als eine einfache Folge des Fortschritts, die sich von selbst versteht, betrachtet wird.'"
37 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 122 et seq.
38 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 129 et seq.
39 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 130.
40 Bohley, *Nees*, 141.
41 Bohley, *Nees*, 149.

ultimately, 'infirmity' and decrepitude[42] had driven him to take refuge in a pseudo-science.[43] From this point of view, there is no continuity with the academic nature of his early preoccupation with Mesmerism, vitalism, and the like, which had, in turn, spurred on Wittig's engagement with Davis. Nees wanted to introduce Davis into the Leopoldina as a full member because of a medical description in Davis' *The Great Harmonia* that bore a stark similarity to a more recent contribution found in the journal of the Academy. As reported by his "last student", Wittig, whose writings form the basis for Nees' biography, only "external circumstances" had prevented the planned induction of Davis from coming to fruition.[44] It is of great significance that one of the so-called fathers of spiritualism came so close to a membership in the academy. From a later perspective, this would have seemed at least as great an improbability as Nees' preoccupation with Mesmerism, vitalism, and spiritualism.

Attributing Nees' positive reception of spiritualism's harmonial hypothesis, which he called vitalism, solely to the "lapse in judgment of a decrepit old man" necessarily, and implausibly, implies that Nees must have already begun to suffer from this condition at the young age of about forty. Rather than representing major departures from what was widely considered to be credible at the time, his attempt to link the spheres of science and otherworldly spirits mirrors contemporary debates, in particular those concerning the academic status of what is now generally considered pseudo- or para-science.

It is worth to re-emphasize that Nees, in his position as president of the Academy, wanted Davis to become member. With this in mind, we can ask who bears responsibility for investigating Davis as a spiritualist author and Nees' preoccupations with spiritualism and the German Catholics Movement around the time of the revolutions of 1848? It seems that this inquiry no longer falls under the purview of a historian of "the sciences" (in the hard sense) and/or of politics, or of any other of a range of related but narrowly delineated disciplines (see my preliminary remarks). It seems rather that this field is currently reserved for people who work as historians of religion and have no real expertise either in the history of the natural sciences or in political history. This question leads to my main and – perhaps rather radical – hypothesis. Representations of Nees alter from depicting him as a legitimate scientist to describing him as an old man who developed a taste for mysticism after the failed revolution in 1848: a picture that largely draws on his post-1853 interest in, and

42 Bohley, *Nees*, 159, also see note 788.
43 Bohley, *Nees*, 155; see also Bohley, "Klopfzeichen," 117.
44 Wittig, "Vorwort," in Davis, *Der Arzt*, xxiv–cliii, lxxii – lxxiii.

attempts to study, the spirit-rapping movement. Nees was fascinated by the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis and promoted them with considerable enthusiasm. His own social, moral, and political opinions (including his focus on workers' rights and education and health care for all), for example, in *Das Leben in der Religion* (1853), converge with ideas that appear in Davis' writings. But this much is clear: the topics "spirit(s)", "ghosts", "the occult", "divination", and "clairvoyance" ever since disappeared altogether from the recognised academic and scientific debate, with the erasure of Nees' interests serving as a very prominent example. It seems that these topics only returned later, as part of the exotic field of world(s) religion(s), and of *Religionswissenschaft*.

5 *Religionswissenschaft*, Science, and Spirit-Seeing

My fourth thesis is a response to a rather cautious question: Could it possibly be that *Religionswissenschaft* takes the scientifically delegitimised place of occultism and/or spiritualism in the second half of the 19th century? By moving the fields of investigation from the "humbuggery", or what was later to be called the "para-" or "pseudo-" science, of occultism, spiritualism, and table turning – even with regard to their ethical, social, and political dimensions –, and turning instead to exotic oriental or ancient landscapes situated in colonial settings, *Religionswissenschaft* re-established the interest in these fields within the halls of academia. Could it be that *Religionswissenschaft* managed to emerge as a (legitimate) academic field of study on the condition that it tacitly agreed not to disturb the ("hard") sciences in the way that occultists, spiritualists, or "borderliners" such as Nees did?

I suggest that the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 provides a very good example that allows us to see the framing of the upcoming field of *Religionswissenschaft* in such a manner, for here the scientific and exotic strands of the debates about religion(s) can be seen to overlap. When approaching the issue from such a perspective, it is worth noting that Davis' major work on *The Principles of Nature* harks back not only to Charles Fourier's writings but also to Swedenborg's cosmology, not least because of its indentification of spirits associated with six spheres while Davis also claims that it was only possible to communicate with those spirits that were in the closest proximity to the earth. This mapping of the cosmos in terms of spheres corresponds to a fundamental, indeed indispensable, concern with the principle of progress and with morality as its underlying condition. In *The Principles of*

Nature, Davis also recreates the old (Christian)-eschatological utopia of the Millennial Kingdom. In his later works, he calls this Golden Age the "Summer Land"[45] and his ideas in this area clearly have an eminently political dimension. On the surface, Davis' work lends itself to being classified along with that of the obscurantists, predominantly owing to its Mesmerist origins and relentless invocation of spirits. From this perspective, spiritualism can be pared down to the practice of spirit-seeing, which was brought into disrepute through the numerous allegations and revelations of trickery and deception attributed to spiritualists, which ultimately destroyed the perceived legitimacy of the field – intellectually, morally, and scientifically. The marginalisation of spiritualism is especially palpable in the extent to which the reception of Davis' work is intimately linked to the rapping-sounds movement of 1848.

This rather common, and damning, verdict on spiritualism has provided the rationale for either excluding it altogether from the history of religion or, as an aspect of a particular theory of esotericism as "forbidden knowledge" (W. Hanegraaff), for declaring it to be a (rejected) quintessence of religious history. In either case it is often regarded as a para- or pseudo-science. However, the handling of the same fields in the context of exotic, ancient, or simply non-european religion(s) emerged at approximately the same time and this was formed into the new *Religionswissenschaft*, with all its entanglements with the theosophical and other occult, spiritualistic, or comparably "esoteric" movements of the era, as well as with the political and cultural implications associated with these movements.

Comparisons and contrasts drawn between spiritualism and science, and between religion and politics, have only served to highlight the incommensurability and incompatibility of these pairings in the past. However, my main concern in the present paper is to uncover links forged between the aforementioned protagonists and the attendant debates in which they were engaged in order to bring to light the possible interrelations between these apparently incompatible fields in the context of 19th-century Germany.[46]

45 Andrew Jackson Davis, *A Stellar Key to the Summer Land*, vol. 1 (New York: Banner of Light Branch Office, 1867) This volume was reprinted in 1868 and 1873.

46 These issues are currently explored in the research project mentioned in n. 8 above.

6 Nees' Scientific Religion

My fifth thesis is that, after the failed revolution, Nees continued his religio-philosophic and his scientific work and combined the various strands in a political manner in his concept of scientific theology and/or religion. In this theology, outlined in such publications as *Das Leben in der Religion* (1853), he combines various interests which lead to topics such as other worlds, the supernatural as part of the one world, spirit and spirits, "divination" and clairvoyance, and Mesmeric healing. These topics are linked with religion, with social and political reform, with a philosophy of the whole nature, and with science. We can make three general points about the position advanced by Nees: 1) its basic philosophical presupposition and final scientific goal is the overcoming of the distinction between organic and inorganic; 2) its guise is catechism; 3) its aim is political.

The main question that needs to be answered is whether, and if so how, Nees claims to form a new scientific, philosophic, holistic, and non-confessional or non-denominational theology. A further issue is what name he gives to this theology. This new theology lacks the dogmatic (and "fundamental theological") aspects encompassed in concepts such as revelation or salvation. It is, rather, pure anthropology, cosmology, epistemology, ethics, and a theory of political (revolutionary) change in society. By approaching the issues in this way, Nees overwhelms the borders between materialism, spititualism, and religion. As far as I can tell, such theologies have, up to now, not been investigated in any great depth, but it is, I suggest, worth treating these texts as "contextual theologies".

A parallel and historical-critical reading of *Das Leben in der Religion* (1853) and *Beobachtungen und Betrachtungen auf dem Gebiete des Lebens-Magnetismus oder Vitalismus* (1853) makes clear that Nees is interested – in both texts – in the formation of a new scientific concept of religion. This understanding of religion forms part of a holistic, or, as he calls it, "harmonial", cosmological and empirical view of the world, nature, life, and God. His insistence on "harmonia", the importance of the organic as the real against the inorganic as mere illusion, the idea of vitalism, and other similar views, clearly show his openness to concepts such as those that appear in *The Great Harmonia* or the harmonial philosophy of Andrew Jackson Davis.

It quickly becomes apparent that Nees' conception of the one nature, his conception of religion, and his views on empiricism and Mesmerism converge in these texts. However, neither his conception of nature, nor his preoccupation with Mesmerism and, later, spiritualism, nor even his religious beliefs found a place in the academic world, for spiritualism was banished from the academy along with occultism and natural philosophy. Nees started his journey down this new theological path at the very same time as he first read Davis' writings, and his interest in

both, in harmonial philosophy and in practical spiritualism, emerged from this moment. Both aspects or developments, the new theological track and the interest in spiritualism, seem to be tightly interwoven with one another.

Clairvoyance – or "divination" – was a simple fact for the young Nees while, for the later Nees, the prophetical aspect became increasingly political through his engagement in the revolution. Interestingly, his religious views are not marked out as part of a separate and distinct field for him. He rather argues on the basis of harmonial philosophy, or, the philosophy of nature. His "prophecy" claims to be both rational and scientific.

The theological track taken by Nees and others led not only to spiritualism but also to the free religious movement that lay outside the field of academic theology and state-sanctioned religion. (It is worth noting that, in the historiography of religions, *Deutschkatholiken*/German Catholics Movement, *Lichtfreunde*, *Freireligiöse*, or *Weltanschauungsgemeinschaften* – in the German case – are all presented as lacking any link to spiritiualism or spiritism. The history of religion should, therefore, carefully reread and reinterpret this context.)[47] However, the closely interwoven nature of these contexts clearly shows that the narratives belong to a common framework, and Nees stands as a very prominent example in this historical setting. Although he is in some ways a unique figure, his example is also more broadly illustrative for the overlappings of Science, Revolution, Religion, and Politics, fields which are, I suggest, mutually dependent. The same is true for the historiography of socialism and occultism, as Julian Strube has recently shown with reference to the case of France.[48]

The scientific-natural-philosophical concept of religion was excluded from the framework of state-sanctioned religion and theology in the wake of the German Catholics Movement, which became a source for the free religious movement that was organised in the years following 1859. The academic interest in cosmological, anthropological, and speculative-mystical themes and practices

47 Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, *Die Politisierung des religiösen Bewußtseins: Die bürgerlichen Religionsparteien im deutschen Vormärz; Das Beispiel des Deutschkatholizismus* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1978) cf. also Jörn Brederlow, *"Lichfreunde" und "Freie Gemeinden": Religiöser Protest und Freiheitsbewegung im Vormärz und in der Revolution von 1848/49* (München: Oldenbourg 1976); Siegfried Schmidt, "Deutschkatholische Bewegung 1844–1859," in *Lexikon zur Parteiengeschichte: Die bürgerlichen und kleinbürgerlichen Parteien und Verbände in Deutschland*, ed. Dieter Fricke et al., vol. 2. (Leipzig: veb Bibliographisches Institut, 1984), 449–453. and Siegfried Schmidt, "Protestantische Lichtfreunde 1844–1859," in *Lexikon zur Parteiengeschichte: Die bürgerlichen und kleinbürgerlichen Parteien und Verbände in Deutschland*, ed. Dieter Fricke et al., vol. 3 (Leipzig: veb Bibliographisches Institut, 1984), 604–607.

48 Julian Strube, *Sozialismus, Katholizismus und Okkultismus im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts: Die Genealogie der Schriften von Eliphas Lévi*, Berlin/Bosten: De Gruyter, 2016.

shifted to the exotic "foreign" religions. These themes and practices were thus pushed out of the field of accepted and established knowledge by associating them with exoticised religious formations, which could then, as "foreign" rather than indigenous concerns, be treated as "non-dangerous" objects of academic research.

7 Science, Truth, and the Field of *Religionswissenschaft*

What might these observations and thoughts mean for the topic of a conference on the birth of the science of religion? I now turn back to the question of *Religionswissenschaft*. My sixth thesis therefore modifies Thesis 4: The emerging *Religionswissenschaft* became a new actor on the field of disputes between spiritualism, science, and religion in the political setting, with the new discipline dealing neither with traditional theology nor with the esoteric, occult, or other fringes, but with religion as a supra-cultural phenomenon of exotic shape and a relevance that is detached from science, which can be found, for example, in ancient sources and/or in the colonies. As such, *Religionswissenschaft* transcended the borders of the above-mentioned fields by pushing them to the outside and by othering the matter of interest.

As the academic field that deals with the exotic, *Religionswissenschaft* neither claims the (!) truth, as do occultists, spiritualists, or other supranaturalists in more or less "esoteric" manners. Nor is *Religionswissenschaft* in competition with contemporary theology (neither when it began nor today). *Religionswissenschaft* is "ours" (as European academics) and deals with "the Other". Battles such as those that Nees and others fought are now a thing of the past. The emerging *Religionswissenschaft* became, in the second half of the 19th century, the critical strand of occultism, insofar as it dealt with traditions and texts that philologists, theosophists, and others delivered from exotic Oriental settings such as India.

Religionswissenschaft stands for the "othering" of this "holistic" view, in which people like Nees tried to hold together combatant fields in a concept of *a single* reality, of *one* sort of truth and science rooted in society, politics, and revolution or – at least – reform. This "othering" through exoticism allowed *Religionswissenschaft* to combine fields that were (and are) strictly divided in German and other European settings: the fields of spirit(s), religion, mysticism, "inner experience", revelation, healing, social reform, gender issues, politics, etc.

The emerging field of *Religionswissenschaft* in the second half of the 19th century provided the discursive setting in which these otherwise divided fields could

continue to be considered together. The name of the discipline under which this remained possible is crucial: *Religionswissenschaft* at this time dealt more or less exclusively with the “non-Western” and, therefore, the “non-Enlightened”. In other words, it dealt with a *different* sort of truth. *Religionswissenschaft* shifts “the ghosts” into the distance and defines itself as non-theology with a broad historical and cultural perspective and a global horizon. Theology, on the other hand, deals more with the claim to truth of the (natural) sciences and thus makes it clear what falls outside its remit. A similar development began to take place within German Protestant theology around 1900, creating a sort of self-immunisation against the “hard” sciences.

This self-immunisation also applies to the relationship between theology and *Religionswissenschaft*: pre-Christian and non-Christian phenomena may appear as religion or religions from this perspectice but are not represented as competitors in the “market of truth(s)” at all, appearing instead as exotic or anachronisms that have been surpassed and consigned to the past. On the other hand, contemporary religious and/or esoteric currents are concealed or rejected within this framework by treating them as non-religion and non-scientific. This condition still prevails today, in part at least. Both the sciences and the theologies push the topics of mind/ghost and ghosts away as excluded others, which nevertheless have an eminent (indirect) influence on their own self-image.

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Boaz Huss

Academic Study of Kabbalah and Occultist Kabbalah

Abstract: The article examines the complex and ambivalent relations between Kabbalah scholarship and western esotericism. It shows that in the late 19 and early 20th century, several scholars of Kabbalah found interest in the occult and had connections with western esoteric movements. It analyses the complicated and nuanced attitude toward western esotericism of Gershom Scholem and shows that although he disparaged occult Kabbalists, he had a more positive appreciation of Christian Kabbalah and early modern western esoteric currents. Furthermore, the article argues that Kabbalah academic scholarship and western esoteric and occult circles share some significant terms, presuppositions, and theological perspectives. The article claims that Kabbalah scholarship and Occult Kabbalah have common genealogies, significant connections, and shared ideas and that the recognition, and study, of these complex relations, may contribute to a better and more nuanced understanding of both Kabbalah scholarship and modern western esotericism.

1 Introduction

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, two new types of discourse on Kabbalah became prevalent in the western world – academic scholarship of Kabbalah, and occult Kabbalah. These two approaches to Kabbalah differ both in their assumptions concerning the nature and significance of Kabbalah, as well as in the methods for its study. Academic scholars approach Kabbalah as a historical contingent religious phenomenon and use philological historical methods for its study. Occult Kabbalists perceive Kabbalah as an inspired, perennial teaching that cannot be understood only through detached academic studies, but rather, through experiential study and practice.

Many times, the two groups were antagonistic to each other. Occult Kabbalists did not accept the hostile view of some academic scholars to Kabbalah, as well as their assumptions concerning the later dating of the Kabbalah, and especially of the Zohar. Academic scholars of Kabbalah rejected the perennial ideas of occult Kabbalists, and disparaged their insufficient knowledge of primary Jewish Kabbalistic sources. The negative stance of academic scholars of Kabbalah comes to the fore in Gershom Scholem's depiction of occultists as charlatans and pseudo—kabbalists.

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Yet, the relations between Kabbalah scholarship and occult Kabbalah were more complex than seen at first sight. The works of academic scholars of Kabbalah were a major source for the knowledge and understanding of Kabbalah by many occult Kabbalists, and some of the occult Kabbalist used philological and historical methods in their writings. On the other hand, some of the academic scholars of Kabbalah were familiar with the writing of occult Kabbalists. Some of them had connections with western esoteric movements and did not see a contradiction between the scholarly and occult interest in Kabbalah. Furthermore, notwithstanding their different approaches and understanding of Kabbalah, academic scholars and occult Kabbalists shared several assumptions concerning the nature and significance of Kabbalah.

In this article, I would like to elaborate on the complex and ambivalent relations between Kabbalah scholarship and Western esotericism. I will show that in the late 19th and early 20th century, several scholars found interest in the occult and had connections with western esoteric movements. I will further demonstrate that Scholem's attitude toward Western esotericism was complicated and nuanced. Although he disparaged occult Kabbalists, he had a more positive appreciation of Christian Kabbalah and early modern western esoteric currents. Furthermore, I will argue that Kabbalah academic scholarship and western esoteric and occult circles share some significant terms, presuppositions, and theological perspectives.

Before turning to discuss the relations between Kabbalah scholarship and western esotericism, I will offer a short overview of the academic scholarship of Kabbalah, and of occult Kabbalah.

2 The Academic Study of Kabbalah and Occult Kabbalah

The academic approach to Kabbalah and occult interpretation and practice of Kabbalah became prevalent in the western world during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Both forms of discourse on Kabbalah had their roots in Hebraism and Christian Kabbalah.

Since the late 16th century, some Christian historians and Hebraists, such as Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629), Jean Morin (1591–1659) and Jacques Basnage (1653–1723), used historical and philological methods in their discussion of Kabbalah and the Zohar. Several Jewish scholars, such as Leon Modena

(1571–1648) and Jacob Emden (1697–1776), also used philological and historical arguments in the context of the controversy over the antiquity of the Zohar.[1]

During the 19th century, many Jewish scholars, most of them affiliated with the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (science of Judaism) movement, studied Kabbalah from a modern academic perspective, using historical and philological methods.[2] Some of these scholars researched Kabbalah from a critical, negative stance, which was prevalent in the Jewish enlightenment movement and amongst scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The negative stance towards Kabbalah was especially prominent in the scholarship of Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), the most important Jewish historian of the time, who described Kabbalah as "an ugly crust, a mushroom like structure, a fungus coating".[3] Other Jewish scholars, such as Adolphe Franck (1810–1893), Adolf Jellinek (1821–1893) and Meyer Heinrich Hirsch Landauer (1808–1841), expressed a more positive stance towards Kabbalah, and saw it as a legitimate and important trend in Jewish history. Since the late 19th century, under the impact of neo-romanticism, orientalism, and Jewish nationalism, a much more sympathetic and enthusiastic approach to Kabbalah and Hassidism emerged amongst western Jewish intellectuals and scholars, such as Samuel Abba Horodezky (1871–1957), Martin Buber (1878–1965), and Gershom Scholem (1897–1982).

Scholem, who was born in Berlin in 1882, became an enthusiastic Zionist, and decided at a young age to pursue the study of Kabbalah. After he submitted his PhD thesis to the Munich University in 1922, he immigrated to Palestine. In 1925, the newly established Institute of Jewish Studies of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem appointed him as a lecturer on Kabbalah. Gradually he established his status as the leading academic expert on Kabbalah and instituted the research of Jewish Mysticism as an academic discipline within the framework of Jewish Studies. Scholem rejected the negative stance of 19th century scholars to Kabbalah, and regarded Jewish Mysticism as a central component of Judaism, which enabled the national existence of the Jewish people during the exilic period.

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1 Boaz Huss, *The Zohar: Reception and Impact* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016), 255–257.

2 On Kabbalah scholarship in the 19th century, see David Biale, *Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), 13–32; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah, New Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 7–10; George Y. Kohler, *Kabbalah Research in the Wissenschaft des Judentums (1820–1880)* (Oldenburg: De Gruyter, 2019).

3 "einer häßlichen Kruste, einem pilzartigen Gebilde, einem Schimmelüberzug" Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 10 (Leipzig: Oscar Leiner, 1868), 124. See: Peter Schäfer, "'Adversum Cabbalam' oder: Heinrich Graetz und die Jüdische Mystik", in *Reuchlin und seine Erben: Forscher, Denker, Ideologen und Spinner* ed. Peter Schäfer and Irina Wandrey (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2005), 204; Kohler, *Kabbalah Research*, 202.

At the same period in which the academic study of Kabbalah developed in Western Europe, a new form of non–Jewish Kabbalah emerged within occult and western esoteric movements. This form of Kabbalah, described by Wouter Hanegraaff as "occultist Kabbalah",[4] is dependent to a large degree on Christian Kabbalah, which first appeared the late fifteenth–century. Christian Kabbalists, such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522), Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1636–1689), presented different interpretations to Kabbalah. Yet, common to all of them was the belief in the antiquity of the Kabbalah (especially, the Zohar), and the assumption that Kabbalah was part of the perennial wisdom that contained Christological doctrines. Many Christian Kabbalists aspired to use the Kabbalah for missionary purposes. Occult Kabbalah developed out of Christian Kabbalah. Yet, it did not emphasize so much the compatibility of Kabbalah with Christianity, but rather regarded Kabbalah as an ancient, universal mystical–magical secret doctrine.

The first prominent occult Kabbalist was Alphonse-Louis Constant (1810–1875), known by name Eliphas Lévi. His follower, Gérard Encausse (1865–1916), known as Papus, was also very much interested in Kabbalah. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), the founder of the Theosophical Society, was also interested in the Kabbalah, and claimed that the original, oriental Kabbalah, was distorted by Jewish and Christian Kabbalists. Kabbalah was central to the doctrines and practices of The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. One of the founders of the Order, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (1854–1918), translated parts of the Zohar into English, and another member of the Order, Arthur Edward Waite (1857–1942), wrote several works on Kabbalah and the Zohar. Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), as well as many other modern occultists offered innovative interpretations of Kabbalah. The occultist perceptions of Kabbalah as a perennial, universal magical and mystical doctrine, which is similar, compatible and essentially identical with other ancient mystical schools, was adopted by many New Age movements, as well as by some of the modern Jewish neo–Kabbalistic movements.

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4 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Jewish Influences V: Occultist Kabbalah," in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 644–647; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The Beginnings of Occultist Kabbalah: Adolph Franck and Eliphas Levi," in *Kabbalah and Modernity: Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, ed. Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi, and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 107–127.

3 Gershom Scholem's Rejection of Occultist Kabbalah

Gershom Scholem, the founder of the modern academic studies of Jewish Mysticism, was well acquainted with western esoteric and occultist writings, especially, those concerning Kabbalah. He has also met several contemporary occultists, such as the famous author and occultist, Gustav Meyrink and the Jewish occultist, Oskar Goldberg.[5] Scholem rejected and disparaged occultist and their writing on Kabbalah. In the entry Kabbalah, written for the Encyclopedia Judaica, Scholem summarized his opinion of western esoteric interpretations of Kabbalah:

> The many books written on the subject in the 19th and 20th centuries by various theosophists and mystics lacked any basic knowledge of the sources and very rarely contributed to the field, while at times they even hindered the development of a historical approach. Similarly, the activities of French and English occultists contributed nothing and only served to create considerable confusion between the teachings of the Kabbalah and their own totally unrelated inventions, such as the alleged kabbalistic origins of Tarot-cards. To this category of supreme charlatanism belong the many and widely read books of Eliphas Lévi (actually Alphonse Louis Constant; 1810–1875), Papus (Gérard Encausse; 1868–1919), and Frater Perdurabo (Aleister Crowley; 1875–1946), all of whom had an infinitesimal knowledge of Kabbalah that did not prevent them from drawing freely on their imaginations instead. The comprehensive works of A. E. Waite (The Holy Kabbalah, 1929) and P. Vulliaud, on the other hand, were essentially rather confused compilations made from secondhand sources.[6]

Many similar disparaging comments against occultists who were interested in Kabbalah can be found in Scholem's writings as well and in the comments he scribbled in the copies of western esoteric writers, which are found in his library, and in his references to writers interested in Western esotericism that he met.[7]

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5 Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memoires of My Youth* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), 129–130, 132–134, 146–149; Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship* (New York: New York Review Books, 2003), 117–121, 129, 132–133.

6 Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), 203.

7 Gershom Scholem, *Alchemie and Kabbala*, engl. ed., trans. Klaus Ottmann (1925 Putnam, Connecticut: Spring Publications, 2006), 8; Gershom Scholem, *Bibliographia Kabbalistica* (Leipzig: W. Drugulin 1927), xiii–xiv; Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1961), 2; Gershom Scholem, *Explication and Implications: Writings on Jewish Heritage and Renaissance*, vol. 2 [Od Davar] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1986), 319 [Hebrew]; Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 133; Scholem, *Walter Benjamin,* 120. On Scholem's negative attitude to occult Kabbalah, see: Konstantin Burmistrov, "Gershom Scholem und das Okkulte," *Gnostika* 33 (2006): 23–34; Hanegraaff, "Occultist Kabbalah," 108–109; Boaz Huss, "'Authorized Guardians': The Polemics of Academic Scholars of Jewish Mysticism against Kabbalah Practitioners," in

Scholem denigrated occult Kabbalist for their “supreme charlatanism”, and described their writings as presenting “pseudo–Kabbalah.” In his article “Alchemy and Kabbalah”, he wrote: “Many books that flaunt the word Kabbalah on their title page have nothing or practically nothing to do with it”.[8] As Wouter Hanegraaff observed: “[T]his final sentence . . . implies that there is such a thing as the true or correctly–understood Kabbalah and that it can be distinguished from a false or pseudo–kabbalah, which misunderstands, and therefore distorts the truth”.[9]

What were Scholem’s criteria for authentic Kabbalah? In his lecture “Kabbalah Research from Reuchlin up to the Present,” Scholem claimed that the writing of Eliphas Lévi, Papus and Crowley do not contain even an inkling of what characterizes “the religious historical phenomenon of Jewish Kabbalah.”[10] This indicates that Scholem denied the authenticity of occult Kabbalah primarily because it did not belong to a Jewish Kabbalistic tradition. Indeed, as far as I know Scholem used the term “pseudo–Kabbalah” only in reference to non–Jewish Kabbalists. Scholem criticized western esoteric Kabbalists also for their lack of sufficient knowledge of Kabbalistic sources and inadequate representations and interpretations of Kabbalah. In a passage cited above, he sneered at the occult Kabbalists “infinitesimal knowledge” of Kabbalah. In his introduction to *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism,* he referred to Eliphas Lévi’s “brilliant misrepresentations” of Kabbalah, and blamed him and his followers, as well as other occult Kabbalists, of presenting eccentric and fantastic statements, which are not “legitimate” interpretations of Kabbalah.[11]

Scholem criticized modern, occult Kabbalists because they do not belong to the Jewish Kabbalistic tradition, for their insufficient knowledge of the sources, and lack of philological-historical expertise. These traits, which the “charlatan”, “pseudo–kabbalists” lack, are exactly those that characterize the school of Kabbalah research that Scholem established. The academic research of Kabbalah, practiced by Scholem and his students, studied primary Jewish Kabbalistic texts, from a Jewish–national perspective, using historical–philological methods. Scholem perceived the school of Kabbalah scholarship that he established in the land of Israel, as the “authorized guardian” of Kabbalah, and

Polemical Encounters: Esoteric Discourse and its Others, ed. Olav Hammer and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 93–94

8 Scholem, *Alchemie and Kabbala,* 11.

9 Hanegraaff, “Occultist Kabbalah,” 108.

10 Scholem, *Explication and Implication,* 319.

11 Scholem, *Major Trends*, 2.

as the modern, authentic continuation of the Jewish Kabbalistic tradition.[12] The occult Kabbalist, on the other hand, represent the complete Other, or if you like, the *Sitra Achra*, of Scholem's school – a fake form of Kabbalah, practiced by non–Jews who were not familiar with primary Jewish Kabbalistic sources, and who lacked academic credentials and expertise.

Scholem became the most authoritative scholar of Kabbalah in the 20th century, and his disciples adopted his approach to occultist Kabbalah. Occult Kabbalah, as well as other forms of non–Jewish Kabbalah were excluded from the field of study of Jewish Mysticism that Scholem established.

Yet, some other Jewish scholars of Kabbalah, who were active before Scholem, and during his time, such as Adolph Franck (1810–1893), Moses Gaster (1856–1939), Joshua Abelson (1873–1940) and Ernst Müller (1880–1954), did not share Scholem`s dismissive attitude to occultism and to occultist Kabbalah, and were affiliated with western esoteric circles of their time. I would like to turn now and examine these scholars and their attitudes to Kabbalah and occultism.

4 Adolphe Franck

One of the first Jewish scholars, who researched Kabbalah within a modern, academic framework, was Adolphe Franck. Franck, who was born in Liocourt in 1810, first studied for the rabbinate, but then turned to academic studies, and studied Philosophy with the renowned French philosopher, Victor Cousin (1792–1867). He embarked on a very successful academic career: at the age of 36, he was elected to the *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, and later became a Professor of law at the *Institute de France*. Franck was also interested in Jewish Studies, and served as the president of the *Société des Etudes Juives*.[13] In 1843, he published *La Kabbale ou La Philosophie Religieuse des Hebreux*.[14] According to Moshe Idel, this book contributed to the knowledge of Kabbalah

12 Huss, "Authorized Guardians"; Andreas Kilcher, "Philology as Kabbalah," in *Kabbalah and Modernity: Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, ed. Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi and Kocku von Stuckrad. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 13–26.

13 See: Paul B. Fenton, "Qabbalah and Academia: The Critical Study of Jewish Mysticism in France," *Shofar*, 18(2) (2000): 49; Paul B. Fenton, "La Contribution d'Adolph Franck à l'etude de la Kabbale", in *Adolph Franck, Philosophe Juif, Spiritualiste et Libéral Dans La France Du XIX Siècle*, ed. Jean-Pierre Rothschild et Jérôme Grondeux (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 81–97; Hanegraaff, "Occultist Kabbalah", 111.

14 Adolphe Franck, *La Kabbale, ou La Philosophie Religieuse des Hébreux* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1843).

in modern Europe more than any other work prior to the studies of Gershom Scholem.[15] Although this may be somewhat exaggerated, there is no doubt that the book, which was translated into German a year after it publication, and later, to Hebrew and English,[16] had a great influence of modern knowledge and perception of Kabbalah amongst scholars and the wide public.

Franck based his knowledge of Kabbalah mostly on Christian Kabbalah, and on the scholarship of Christian Hebraists.[17] His knowledge of Jewish Kabbalistic sources was limited. Franck expressed a more positive attitude to Kabbalah than other Jewish scholars of his time did. He described it as the heart and soul ("la vie et la Coeur") of Judaism:

> We cannot possibly consider the Kabbalah as an isolated fact, accidental in Judaism; on the contrary, it is its heart and soul. For, while the Talmud took over all that relates to the outward practice and performance of the Law, the Kabbalah reserved for itself the domain if speculation and the most formidable problems of natural and revealed theology. It was able to arouse the veneration of the people [. . .] teaching them that their entire faith and religion rested upon a sublime mystery.[18]

Franck adopted the stance of Christian Kabbalists, who regarded Kabbalah as the positive, spiritual element of Judaism, which stands in opposition to the "dead letter" of Rabbinic Judaism. Kabbalah, according to Franck, is "a profoundly venerated science which could be distinguished from the Mishna, the Talmud and the Sacred Books – a mystic doctrine evidently engendered by the need for reflection and independence as well as philosophy".[19] Franck regarded the Zohar and Sefer Yetzira as the most important texts of Kabbalah, and dedicated most of his book to the antiquity and authenticity of these texts, and to an analysis of their doctrines. Although Franck dedicated the third part of his book to the resemblance of Kabbalah to the teachings of Plato, Neoplatonism, Philo and early Christianity, he denied the possibility that such teachings influenced Kabbalah. According to Franck, Kabbalah "necessarily must have its cradle in Asia. Judaism must have brought it forth through its own efforts; or, it

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15 Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah, New Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 8. See also Fenton, "Qabbalah and Academia", 48; Hanegraaff, "Occultist Kabbalah", 111.

16 Adolphe Franck, *Die Kabbalah, oder die Religions-Philosophie der Hebräer* (Leipzig: H. Hunger, 1844). Later, the book was published in English translation: *Adolph Franck, The Kabbalah or, The Religious Philosophy of the Hebrews* (New York: Kabbalah Publishing Company, 1926).

17 Fenton, "Qabbalah and Academia," 48; Fenton, "La Contribution d`Adolphe Franck", 87.

18 Franck, *The Kabbalah*, 219. (For the original French, see Franck, *La Kabbale*, 382).

19 Franck, *The Kabbalah*, 24.

must have sprung from some other Oriental religion".[20] In the last chapter of the book, Franck argues that the Kabbalah was derived from the Chaldean and Zoroastrian sources. Yet, he emphasized, the borrowing from the theology of the ancient Persians, did not destroy the originality of the Kabbalah.[21]

In the framework of his interest and positive regard of mysticism (which, following his teacher Victor Cousin, he regarded as one the four basic modes of human thought), Franck was also interested in non–Jewish western esoteric currents. In 1853, he gave a lecture on Parcelsus and 16th century Alchemy, and in 1866, he published a book on Martinez de Pasqually and Louis–Claude de Saint Martin.[22] As Wouter Hanegraaff has shown, towards the end of his life, Franck became interested in the current theosophical and occult circles, and applauded their interest in Kabbalah.[23] In the forward to the second addition of *La Kabbale ou La Philosophie Religieuse des Hébreux*, which was published in 1889, Franck mentions favorably that many people "turn toward the East, the cradle of religions, the original fatherland of mystical ideas, and among the doctrines that they try to bring back to honor, the Kabbalah in not forgotten."[24] As examples for the revival of interest in Kabbalah, Franck mentions the Theosophical Society (and especially, the French Theosophical Journals *Lotus* and *L'aurore*), the recent translation to French of *Sefer Yetzirah*, and the French occult review, *l'Initiation*, edited by Papus, whose first issue just appeared.[25] Franck befriended Papus, and wrote a preface to the latter *Traité méthodique de science occulte,* published in 1891. Franck praises Papus and his collaborators in the publication of the occult journal, *l'Initiation,* for "calling upon all kinds of mysticism, both from the East and from the West, from India and from Europe". He asserts that although these doctrines have their shadows and their dangers, he much prefers "these audacious speculations over the blindness of positivism, the nothingness of atheist science and the more or less hypocritical despair of pessimism. In my eyes they

20 Franck, *The Kabbalah*, 192.

21 Franck, *The Kabbalah*, 221–224. For further discussion of Franck's perception and depiction of Kabbalah, see: Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). 8; Fenton, "Qabbalah and Academia", 50; Fenton, "La Contribution d' Adolph Franck", 86–87; Hanegraaff, "Occultist Kabbalah," 114–118.

22 Adolphe Franck, "Paracelse et l'alchimie au XVIe siècle", in *Collections d'ouvrages relatifs aux sciences hermétiques*, ed. Jules Lermina (Paris: Charconac, 1889), 1–32. Adolphe Franck, *La philosophie mystique en France à la fin du XVIIIième siècle: Saint-Martin et son maître Martinès de Pasqually* (Paris: Germer Ballière, 1866). See Hanegraaff, "Occultist Kabbalah", 112.

23 See Hanegraaff, "Occultist Kabbalah", 112–114.

24 I follow Hanegraaff's translation, Hanegraaff, "Occultist Kabbalah", 113.

25 Adolphe Franck "Preface", in Papus, *Traité Méthodique de Science Occulte* (Paris: Geroges Carré 1891), ii–iv, See Hanegraaff, "Occultist Kabbalah", 113–114.

are like an energetic appeal to the seriousness of life, to the re–awakening of the sense of the divine."[26]

5 Moses Gaster

Another Jewish scholar of Kabbalah, who had connections with western esoteric circles, was Moses Gaster. Gaster, who was born in Bucharest in 1856, studied in Germany, at the Jewish seminary in Breslau and received a PhD from the University of Leipzig. After he returned to Romania, the University of Bucharest appointed him a lecturer of Romanian languages and literature. In 1885, the Romanian authorities expelled him from Romania because of his Jewish nationalist activities. He moved to England, where he was invited to give the Illchester lectures in Oxford. He was appointed the Hacham (chief rabbi), of the Sephardic and Portuguese Congregation and served as the head of the rabbinic training seminar, the Lady Judith Montefiore College. Gaster was active in the Zionist movement. The Balfour Declaration, that granted the Jews a national home in Palestine, was first drafted in his home, in February 1917. Gaster was a prominent scholar of Romanian Folklore and Jewish Studies, as well as a collector of books and manuscripts. He engaged in diverse fields of study, which included Romanian language and literature, Apocrypha and Pseudoepigrapha, Jewish magic, Samaritan studies, Karaism and Kabbalah.[27]

Gaster became interested in Kabbalah early in his career, and continued to be interested in it throughout his life. His publication on Kabbalah include a study about the origins and development of Kabbalah (published in Rumanian) in 1884, another article on the origins of the Kabbalah, published in the annual report of the Judith Montefiore College in 1894, an article on the *Zohar* published in *Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* in 1921, and the article "A Gnostic Fragment from the Zohar" published in 1923 in *The Quest*.[28] Apart from his studies of Kabbalah, Gaster published a study of the ancient Jewish text *The*

26 Franck "Preface", ix. I follow Hanegraaff's translation, "Occultist Kabbalah", 113.

27 On Gaster, see: Maria (Cioata) Haralambakis, "Representations of Moses Gaster (1856–1939) in Anglophone and Romanian Scholarship", *New Europe College Yearbook* 2012–2013: 90–91; Simon Rabinovitch, "Jews, Englishmen, and Folklorists: The Scholarship of Joseph Jacobs and Moses Gaster" in *The Jew in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture: Between the East End and East Africa*, ed. Eitan Bar-Yosef and Nadia Valman (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 121–122.

28 Moses Gaster, "Cabbala: origenea si dezvoltarea di" *Anuar Pentru Israeliti* 6 (1883/4): 25–36; Moses Gaster, "The Kabbalah" in *Judith Montefiore College, Report for the Year 1893–1894* (Ramsgate: The Judith Montefiore College, 1894), 15–28; Moses Gaster, "Zohar", in *Hastings*

measure of [God`s] Height, (*Shiur Komah)* and prepared an edition of the late antiquity Jewish magical text *The Sword of Moses*.[29]

Gaster was a student of Heinrich Graetz, and the views of the 19th century Jewish scholarship on Kabbalah shaped his attitude to the Kabbalah. Yet he presented some original (although not always consistent) theories and had a much more positive stance towards Kabbalah than his mentor, and other western Jewish scholars of his time.[30]

Gaster asserted that the Jewish mystical tradition originated in ancient times, in the land of Israel: "[O]lder schools and mystic circles [. . .] continued to flourish unobserved in the mountains and caverns of the Galilee, and also on the banks of the Jordan, where from immemorial times schools of prophets, of ascetics and recluses, of Essenes and Hasidim, have continued their mystical speculation and contemplative life."[31] He asserted the continuity of the "secret doctrine" and "theosophic speculations" of the oral mystic tradition of Kabbalah: ". . . the continuity was not broken and the secret doctrine was handed down from generation to generation as Kabbalah i.e., oral mystic tradition. Thus old and new were constantly blended; to old systems of theosophic speculations newer were added, until it was found necessary to fix them in writing".[32] Gaster rejected the position of Graetz and other scholars of his time that attributed the *Zohar* to the thirteenth–century Kabbalist Moses de Leon, and argued that the Zohar was based on an ancient, oriental Jewish source: "To my mind it is almost beyond doubt, that a mystical commentary composed in Babylon or elsewhere in the East, written in the language of that place and those times and ascribed to one of the heroes of the Mishna, may have reached also Spain and this commentary forms the basis of the *Zohar*".[33]

Similar to Franck, Gaster argued that Kabbalah was originally a "purely philosophical system".[34] Later, he claimed, a superstitious element crept it, and speculative Kabbalah deteriorated into practical magic.[35] Nonetheless, Gaster did not share the vehement rejection and disparagement of the Kabbalah, expressed by

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Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, 1908–1927. vol. 12, 858–862; Moses Gaster, "A Gnostic Fragment from the Zohar," *The Quest* XIV (1923): 452–469.

29 Moses Gaster, "Das Shiur Komah," *MGWJ* 37 (1893): 213–320; Moses Gaster, *The Sword of Moses* (London: D. Nutt, 1896).

30 Moshe Idel, "Moses Gaster, Jewish Mysticism and the Book of the Zohar", in *New Developments of Zohar Studies*, ed. Ronit Meroz (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2007), 118–123 [Hebrew].

31 Gaster, "Zohar", 861.

32 Gaster, "Zohar", 860.

33 Gaster, "The Kabbalah," 27.

34 Gaster, "The Kabbalah," 16.

35 Gaster, "The Kabbalah," 20.

his teacher Heinrich Graetz, and other Jewish scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. He claimed that that Kabbalah "obtained [. . .] paramount importance influencing deeply the religious life of our nation in more than one direction."[36] In his entry on the *Zohar* in the *Hastings Encyclopedia*, he described the influence of the Kabbalah on Jewish culture as a succession of light and shadow: "Through the influence of the *Zohar* and Kabbala, a new mystical force was developed among the Jews. A spiritual love, an immersion in the Divine, was taught by the founder of Hasidism to be of higher value, if possible, than the strict observance of the letter of the Law. Thus, light and shadow, action and reaction, have succeeded one another with the spread of Kabbala, and notably the *Zohar* and the *Zoharic* literature."[37]

Gaster regarded the Zohar and the Kabbalah not only as important spiritual forces within Jewish culture, but as an important element of universal occultism and Theosophy. In a review of the fourth edition of S.L. MacGregor Mathers's, *The Kabbalah Unveiled,* Gaster wrote:

> Still, for those who are students of the occult philosophy, the Zoharistic writings are of no mean importance. They belong to the category of the literature of the ancient mystics. There is an internal nexus between them, and the Zoharistic writings are an important link in that chain of occult and theosophic speculation that runs through the ages.[38]

In the last decades of his life, Gaster made connections with contemporary esoteric movements, and published several articles and reviews in journals of the Theosophical Society and the Quest Society. Since the early 1920's, Gaster became a close friend of the independent scholar and former Theosophist, G. R. S. Mead (1863–1933), who founded the Quest Society after he left the Theosophical Society.[39] in 1922, Mead invited Gaster to give a lecture on the "Gnostic piece in the *Zohar*" to the Quest Society.[40] Gaster accepted the invitation and his lecture was later published in *The Quest*. In 1924, Gaster gave another lecture on "Luria and his System of Kabbala."[41] In spring of 1925, Gaster delivered the

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36 Gaster, "The Kabbalah," 17.

37 Gaster, "Zohar", 861.

38 Moses Gaster, "Review of The Kabbalah Unveiled," *The Theosophical Review* (1926): 53.

39 Many letters from Mead to Gaster are preserved in Gaster's archives in the special collections at University College London. The first letter from Mead to Gaster found in Gaster's archives is dated October 1922, and the last is from June 1932, a few months before Mead passed away. The letters reveal the close friendship and shared interests of the two aging scholars. See Boaz Huss, "'The Quest Universal': Moses Gaster's interest in Kabbalah and Western Esotericism," *Kabbalah* 40 (2018): 255–266.

40 Gaster Papers, 36/392.

41 Gaster Papers, 123/416.

presidential address of the Quest Society, on the topic "The Quest Universal".[42] The surrealist painter and occultist Ithell Colquhoun (1906–1988), who became a member of the Quest Society in 1928, related in her memoires that there were "dark hints", and "whispers about black magic", concerning certain members of the Quest Society, including "Dr. Moses Gaster, the eminent Hebraist".[43] Moses Gaster's son, Theodor, wrote in his memoires: "I remember the regular visits of G. R. S. Mead, the Gnostic scholar, and how, towards the end of his life, he lumbered into psychic research and even inveigled my father into attending a couple of séances."[44] In 1932, Gaster delivered a lecture on Jews and spiritualism in the framework of the Jewish Society for Psychical Research.[45]

Gaster also had a connection with the Theosophical Society. Although Gaster never became a fellow of the Theosophical Society, he published several articles and reviews in the *Theosophical Review,* which his friend, the Anglo–Jewish author, Samuel Levi Bensusan (1872–1958), edited. These included articles on "The Divine Name and the Creative Word", and "The Alchemy of Alphabet", as well as a book review of S.L MacGregor Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, that was mentioned above. Gaster had connections with the Anglo–Jewish Lodge of Theosophists that was established in 1926,[46] and was invited by its president, Samuel I. Heiman, to lecture at the lodge.[47]

6 Joshua Abelson

Another Anglo–Jewish scholar, who studied Jewish Mysticism, and was affiliated with the Theosophical Society, was Joshua Abelson. Abelson, who was born in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales, in 1873, studied in UCL and was ordained as a Rabbi at

42 Gaster Papers, 97/422.
43 Ithell Colquhoun, *The Sword of Wisdom: MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn* (New York: Putnam 1975), 16.
44 Theodor Gaster "Prolegomenon" in Moses Gaster, *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Medieval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha and Samaritan Archaeology* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971), vol. 1, XXXVII.
45 *The Jewish Chronicle*, May 27 1932, 14. I am grateful to Sam Glauber, who informed me about Gaster's lecture.
46 Boaz Huss, "`Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews`: Jewish Theosophists and their Perceptions of Kabbalah," in: *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah, and the Transformation of Traditions*, ed. Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016), 142–144.
47 Gaster Papers, 56/459. A flyer for the Jewish lodge, announcing its winter 1928 activities, was attached to Heiman's letter. I do not know whether Gaster accepted the invitation.

Jews College in London. He served as a Rabbi in Cardiff, Bristol, and Leeds, and was the principal of the Rabbinical "Aria" College in Portsmouth (1907–1920).[48]

In 1912, Abelson published a book on *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature,* which was based on his PhD thesis.[49] A year later, he published, *Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction to the Kabbalah,* the first monograph in English to carry the term "Jewish Mysticism" in its title.[50] He is also the author of the introduction to the first comprehensive translation of the Zohar into English, by Maurice Simon, Harry Sperling and Paul. P Levertoff, which was published in 1931 by the Soncino press.[51]

Abelson followed Adolphe Franck's positive regard of Kabbalah, and rejected Heinrich Graetz's negative stance towards it: " . . . it is therefore totally wrong to follow Graetz in regarding Kabbalah as an unnatural child of the darkened intellects of the Jewish middle ages".[52] Abelson identifies Kabbalah as Jewish Mysticism, and asserts it antiquity and centrality in Jewish religion:

> The medieval Kabbalah is a direct descendant of the Talmudic Kabbalah . . . the Jewish heart has in all ages panted for union with the living God even as the heart panteth after the water streams . . . it is one and the same flowing stream emanating from one common source . . . Kabbalah is really the literature of Jewish mysticism from about the first pre–Christian century until almost recent times.[53]

Abelson was interested in occultism and its relation to Kabbalah, and had connections with contemporary esoteric movements. He published articles on "Swedenborg and the Zohar" and "Occult Thought in Jewish Literature",[54] as well as book reviews on Dion Fortune, *The Mystical Qabbalah* and Israel Regardie's *The Tree of Life*.[55] His *Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction to the Kabbalah* was the third volume in the Quest series of G. R. S. Mead, who wrote the introduction to the book. In 1905, Abelson published in the *Theosophical Review* an article about Talmud and Theosophy, which was based on a lecture he gave in the Bristol

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48 "Abelson, Joshua" in *The Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History*, ed. William D. Rubinstein (New York: Palgrave Maximillian, 2011); Benjamin J. Elton, "Conservative Judaism's British Trailblazers", *Conservative Judaism* 63(4) (2012): 64–65.

49 Joshua Abelson, *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1912).

50 Joshua Abelson, *Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction to the Kabbalah* (London: G. Bell & Son, 1913).

51 M. Simon, H. Sperling & P.P. Lavertoff, *The Zohar* (London: Soncino Press, 1931–1934). On the translation and Abelson introduction to it see Boaz Huss, "Translations of the Zohar: Historical Contexts and Ideological Frameworks" *Correspondences* 4 (2016): 108–109.

52 Abelson, *The Immanence of God,* 2.

53 Abelson, *The Immanence of God,* 2–3.

54 *The Jewish Chronicle Supplement* (January 1921): v–vi, (May 1924): vii.

55 *Jewish Chronicle* (12 May 1933), (24 May 1935).

lodge of the TS.[56] In the article that deals not only with the Talmud, but also with other Jewish sources, especially, Kabbalah, Abelson describes some ideas that he regards as shared by Judaism and Theosophy. In 1912, he published another article in the *Theosophical Review*, on Rabbinical Mysticism.[57] Abelson had connections with the English branch of the Association of Hebrew Theosophists, and in 1927, he gave a lecture to the Manchester group of the Association.[58]

7 Ernst Müller

Another scholar of Kabbalah, connected to Western esotericism, was Ernst Müller (1880–1954), a Zionist activist from Vienna, a Theosophist, and later, Anthroposophist who wrote two book about the Zohar, as well as a short history of Jewish Mysticism, published in 1946. *Müller* was born in Misslitz (now Miroslav, Czech Republic) in 1880, and later moved with his family to Vienna. Although his first intention was to become a Rabbi, he turned to academic studies, and studied philosophy, physics and mathematics. In 1897, he met Theodore Herzl, and became an active Zionist. In 1907, *Müller* traveled to Palestine, where he took a teaching position at the recently founded Hebrew Gymnasium in Jaffa, where he stayed for two years. After his return to Vienna, he found a position as the librarian of the Jewish community of Vienna. He worked there (with an interval during the First World War) until the library was closed by the Nazis. In 1939, he escaped to England and lived in London, in great poverty, until his death in 1954.[59]

Müller became interested in spiritualism and occultism as a student in Vienna, and joined the Theosophical Society after his return from Palestine. In 1910, he met Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), who made a strong impression on him.

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56 *Theosophical Review* 37 (September 1905): 9–27.

57 *Theosophical Review* 13 (May 1912): 503. The article was previously published in *The Hibbert Journal* (1912): 426–443.

58 *The Jewish Theosophist* 1(5) (December 1927): 7.

59 Andreas Kilcher, "Kabbalah and Anthroposophy: A Spiritual Alliance According to Ernst Müller", in *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah, and the Transformation of Traditions*, ed. Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016), 199–202; Gerold Necker, "Ernst Müller's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism and Gershom Scholem", *Kabbalah* 40 (2018): 203–224; Nathaneal Riemer, "Ein Wanderer Zwischen den Welten – Zum 50sten Todesjahr von Ernst Müller", *David*: *Jüdische Kulturzeitschrift* 62 (2004), available online at http://david.juden.at/kulturzeitschrift/61-65/62-Riemer.htm; Dianne Ritchey, "Guide to the Papers of Ernst Müller Biographical Note", *Ernst Müller Collection, Center For Jewish History*, http://findingaids.cjh.org/?pID=481725.

Following Steiner, Müller left the Theosophical Society and became active in the Anthroposophical Society.

Müller became very much interested in Kabbalah. In 1909, during his stay in Palestine, he visit the Kabbalistic town, Safed, together with the author Samuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970).[60] Later, during his stay in Prague in 1911, he started to study the Zohar, together with Hugo Bergman (1883–1975), the Jewish philosopher and Zionist activist, who had interest in the teaching of Steiner.[61] In 1913, Bergman and Müller published translations of Zohar excerpts in German in the volume *Vom Judentum*, which the Zionist student association in Prague published.[62] Müller published further translations of Zoharic articles in the journal *Der Jude*, between 1913 and 1920.[63] In 1920, he published a book about the Zohar and its teachings and in 1932, he published an anthology of Zoharic articles translated into German.[64] In 1946, when he lived in England, Müller published a book entitled *A History of Jewish Mysticism*.[65] The book, in which he presents his ideas concerning the history and nature of Jewish Mysticism, was written originally in German, and translated to English by Maurice Simon, the Anglo–Jewish scholar who took part in the publication of the Soncino English edition of the Zohar, together with Joshua Abelson. In his book (which was published five years after Gershom Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*), Müller defines Jewish Mysticism as: "that form of the Jewish religion which like the mysticisms of other religions, seeks especially to cultivate personal communion between the worshipper and God."[66] He discusses four major periods in the development of Jewish Mysticism: The biblical period, the period of old Jewish esoteric teaching, the period of Kabbalah, and Hassidism. The last chapter of his book is dedicated to "Cabbalistic tendencies outside of Judaism". Müller concludes his book with a short paragraph relating to the Anthroposophy:

> To a much greater extent, the Anthroposophy founded by Rudolf Steiner has in many circles turned attention to the hidden meaning of the biblical account of the creation, to

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60 Kilcher, "Kabbalah and Anthroposophy", 201.
61 Kilcher, "Kabbalah and Anthroposophy"*, 209*.
62 *Vom Judentum*: *Ein Sammelbuch* (Leipzig: K. Wolff, 1913), 274–284.
63 Eleonore Lappin, *Der Jude 1916–1928* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 362.
64 Ernst Müller, *Der Sohar und seine Lehre: Einleitung in die Gedankenwelt der Kabbalah* (Wien & Berlin: R. Löwit, 1920); Ernst Müller, *Der Sohar: Das Heilige Buch der Kabbalah. Nach dem Urtext* (Wien: Heinrich Glanz, 1932). See: *Kilcher,* "Kabbalah and Anthroposophy", 208–211. Huss, "Translations of the Zohar", 104. Müller also wrote a novel entitled A Kabbalist Master (*Ein kabbalistischer Lehrmeister)* about Isaac Luria, which he concluded in 1925, and was never published. See Kilcher, "Kabbalah and Anthroposophy", 207.
65 Ernst Müller, *History of Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford: East and West Library 1946).
66 Müller, *History of Jewish Mysticism*, 9.

> the occult element in the Hebrew language . . . to the historical relations of the Jewish Gnosis with early Christianity, to the connection of Rosicrucianism with the old mystical movements, and to the efforts to place the whole of knowledge on a new basis.[67]

In the introduction to *Der Sohar und seine Lehre,* published in 1920, Müller expressed his gratitude to three personalities who inspired his interest in the Zohar and Jewish Mysticism:

> With gratitude I mention specifically Rudolf Steiner, who made me aware of the hidden circumstance of an all-embracing occult science; Martin Buber, who made me suspect the concealed but living pulsation of an underground spiritual Judaism; and finally, Hugo Bergman, with whom, seven years ago, I dared to make the first attempts at reading the *Zohar*.[68]

Müller recognizes the two main sources of influence on his interest in and understanding of the Zohar: the Zionist approach of Martin Buber, and other Jewish thinkers of the period, who recognized Kabbalah as the vital spiritual power of the Jewish nation, and the Theosophical approach of Rudolf Steiner, who regarded Kabbalah as an expression of universal occult science.[69] Steiner's teaching had a very strong impact on Müller's interpretations of the Zohar an on his understanding of Jewish Mysticism. As Andreas Kilcher showed, Müller recounted in his memoirs that he consulted with Steiner about the truth-value of the Zohar and Kabbalah, and the later confirmed that their content agrees with that of the spiritual science.[70] Müller's integration between the Jewish national approach that emphasized the central role of Kabbalah in Judaism, and the Theosophical/Anthroposophical perception of Kabbalah as primordial universal esoteric nature, comes to the fore in his later account of his spiritual quest through Judaism and Christianity. In this autobiographical account, Müller asserts his commitment to an integration between ancient Jewish spirituality and anthroposophy, and says:

> And so, quite early, I recognized the *Zohar* text as a source of the Kabbalah, into which I gradually plunged myself. Here I saw – in an "occult revelation" – the primordial esoteric wisdom, however much transmitted in a confused way, but, nevertheless in constant connection with Jewish literature – half mystic, half popular, near-legendary – as well as with the occultism of other peoples and times.[71]

67 Müller, *History of Jewish Mysticism,* 158–159.

68 Müller, *Der Sohar und seine Lehre,* 3. I follow Kilcher's translation, "Kabbalah and Anthroposophy", 210.

69 Kilcher, "Kabbalah and Anthroposophy", 202–3, 211.

70 Kilcher, "Kabbalah and Anthroposophy", 207.

71 Ernst Müller, "Mein Weg durch Judentum und Christentum," *Judaica. Beiträge zum Verständnis des jüdischen Schicksals in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* 4 (8) (1952): 234–235 (and see also ibid., 243). I follow Kilcher's translation, "Kabbalah and Anthroposophy", 209–10, 214.

8 Gershom Scholem Revisited

As I have shown above, Gershom Scholem's attitude to Western esotericism and occultism was very different from that of Franck, Gaster, Abelson and Müller. Yet, I would like to show, that notwithstanding Scholem's explicit negative statements against occultists and their interpretation of Kabbalah, his attitude to Western esotericism was more complex and nuanced.

Scholem directed the disparaging attacks that I discussed above against Western esoteric circles of his time, and occult Kabbalists of the late 19th and early 20th century. Scholem's attitude to early modern western esoteric currents and to Christian Kabbalah was much more positive. Although Scholem did not regard Christian Kabbalah as authentic Kabbalah, he found much interest in it, and did not disparage Christian Kabbalists as he did the occult Kabbalists.[72] In a letter he sent to Joseph Blau, in 1945, he wrote: "The subject of Christian Cabalism has interested me for a long time and I have made long notes about it without having published so far anything about it."[73] In the following years, he published one article about Christian Kabbalah.[74] Scholem did not only find interest in Christian Kabbalah, but also felt an affinity to the early Christian Kabbalist and Hebraist Johann Reuchlin, and regarded him as the precursor of his approach to the study of Judaism and Kabbalah. In a lecture he gave in 1969 in Pforzheim, on the occasion of receiving the Reuchlin award,[75] he declared:

> If I would believe in metempsychosis, I could sometimes fancy myself to be, under the new conditions of research, a reincarnation of Johannes Reuchlin, the first explorer of Judaism, its language and its world, and especially of the Kabbalah, the man who, almost five hundred years ago founded the Science of Judaism in Europe.[76]

72 Saverio Campanini, "Some Notes on Gershom Scholem and Christian Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 21 (2007): 13–33.

73 Gerhard Scholem, *Briefe I: 1914–1947*, ed. Itta Shedletzky (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1994), 294.

74 Gershom Scholem, "Zur *Geschichte der Anfänge* der christlichen Kabbala", in *Essays Presented to Leo Baeck on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (London: East and West Library 1954), 158–193.

75 Gershom Scholem, *Die Erforschung der Kabbala von Reuchlin bis zur Gegenwart* (Pforzheim, 1969). The lecture was published in Hebrew translation in Gershom Scholem, *Explication and Implications: Writings on Jewish Heritage and Renaissance*, vol. 2 [Od Davar], (Tel Aviv: Am Oved [Hebrew]), 309–317.

76 I follow the translation of Campanini, "Some Notes on Gershom Scholem and Christian Kabbalah", 14.

Scholem acknowledged the influence of the Catholic Christian Kabbalist and Freemason of the romantic period, Franz Joseph Molitor (1779–1860), on his decision to study Jewish Mysticism. In a letter to Zalman Schocken from 1937, entitled; "A candid word about the true motives of my kabbalistic studies", Scholem wrote:

> At that time, however it was Molitor's curious book, Philosophie der Geschichte oder über die Tradition, which, falling into my hand at Poppelauer's, fascinated me greatly. As historically unfounded as it may have been, it gave an address where the secret life of Judaism, which I had pondered over in my mediations, seemed once to have dwelt.[77]

Notwithstanding Scholem's disparagement of occultist Kabbalah, he was well acquainted with western esoteric and occultist writings. He purchased, read, and commented on the works of many occultists, including Antoine Fabre d'Olivet, Eliphas Lévi, Stanislas de Guaita, Papus, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, A. E. Waite, Wynn Westcott, Samuel Liddell McGregor Mathers, Israel Regardie and many others.[78] He also had met several contemporary occultists, such as the famous author and occultist, Gustav Meyrink and the Jewish occultist, Oskar Goldberg,[79] and corresponded with the Jewish Theosophist and Sufi from California, Samuel Lewis, who later became known as Sufi Sam.[80] In Scholem's response to a letter that the Lewis sent him, he relates to the writing of Fabre d'Olivet, which he is familiar with, but says that he cannot estimate him as highly as Lewis does. He expresses his interest in the California esoteric circles Lewis was affiliated with, and their interest in Kabbalah, especially in the Jewish Theosophist–Kabbalist, Elias Gewurtz (without hiding his disdain for him).[81]

77 I follow the translation of Biale, *Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah and Counter-History*, 75 (the original letter, in German, is printed ibid., 215–6.

78 Burmistrov, "Gershom Scholem and das Okkulte", 25–9. It is interesting to note that Scholem had in his possession two rare documents of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn which were written by William Butler Yeats (The pamphlet "is the order of R.R & A.C to remain a magical order", and a machine typed postscript to the pamphlet). The documents are found in Scholem's Library, 10217.1. See: Amos Goldreich, *Automatic Writing in Zoharic Literature and Modernism* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press 2010), 350 [Hebrew].

79 Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 129–130, 132–4, 146–9; Scholem, *Walter Benjamin*, 117–21, 129, 132–3.

80 Gershom Scholem response to Lewis, dated April 5, 1948, is published in Scholem, Briefe, vol. 2, 1948–1970, ed. Thomas Sparr, München 1995, 5–6. Samuel Lewis letter to Gershom Scholem, dated 14 March 1948, is found in Gershom Scholem papers, The National library in Jerusalem, 4-[0]1599, file 234. I am grateful to Jonatan Meir who informed me of the letter and supplied me with a copy of it. On this correspondence, see Jonatan Meir, "The Beginning of Kabbalah in America: The Unpublished Manuscripts of R. Levi Isaac Krakowski", *Aries* 13 (2013): 268.

81 Scholem, *Briefe*, vol. 2, 5. Burmistrov, "Gershom Scholem und das Okkulte," 33–34.

Despite his disdain and criticism, Scholem found some merit in the approach of some occultists to Kabbalah. Thus, for instance, he wrote that the books of Arthur E. Waite (who was a member of many occult groups, including the Theosophical Society and the Order of the Golden Dawn) on Kabbalah, *The Doctrine and Literature of Kabbalah* and *The Secret Doctrine of the Kabbalah* "are some of the best books written on Kabbalah from a theosophical perspective."[82] In a review of Waite's *The Holy Kabbalah*, published in 1931, Scholem expressed his appreciation of Waite's intuition and his understanding of the central place of sexual symbolism in the Kabbalah.[83] In the first chapter of *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, he declared that Arthur E. Waite and Franz Molitor were the Christian scholars with mystic tendencies who revealed "real insight into the world of Kabbalism". Yet, he was disappointed that the "fine philosophical intuition and natural grasp" of Molitor and Waite, "lost their edge because they lacked all critical sense as to historical and philological data in this field".[84] Although Scholem dismissed the Theosophical Society as 'pseudo–religion'[85] and lamented the 'misuse or distortion' of kabbalah in the writings of Madame Blavatsky's circle,[86] in 1944 he wrote in a letter to Joseph Blau:

> You are certainly too harsh on Madame Blavatsky, it is surely too much to say that the meaning of cabala has been forgotten in the 'Secret Doctrine'. After all, the Lady has made a very thorough study of Knorr von Rosenroth in his English adaption, and of Franck's 'Cabale Juive'. She certainly knew more about cabalism than most of the other people you mention. She did, of course, use the term Cabala in a very large and depraved meaning, and includes Maimonides and the Mishna in the orbit of cabalism, adding a lot of phantastical stuff of her own [. . .] I think it might be rather interesting to investigate the cabalistical ideas in their theosophical development. There is, of course, a big lot of humbug and swindle [!], but, at least in Blavatsky's writings, yet something more.[87]

Although Scholem distanced himself from occult movements, he published in 1926 a translation of a passage from the Zohar, entitled *"Chiromancy in the Zohar"* in G. R. S. Mead's *The Quest* journal,[88] to which A. E. Waite, Evelyn Underhill, and other occultists and Theosophists, as well as scholars such as

82 Gerhard Scholem, *Bibliographia Kabbalistica* (Leipzig: W. Drugulin, 1927), 158.
83 Gerhard Scholem, "Review of 'Waite, A. E.: The Holy Kabbalah'," *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 7 (1931): 638.
84 Scholem, *Major Trends*, 2.
85 Scholem, *Major Trends*, 206.
86 Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 133.
87 Scholem, *Briefe*, 294; Burmistrov, 'Gershom Scholem und das Okkulte', 28–30.
88 Gershom Scholem, "*Chiromancy in the Zohar*" *The Quest 17* (1926): 255–56.

Moses Gaster, contributed articles. Robert Eisler (1882–1949), who was a regular contributor to *The Quest*, and who was the person who introduced Scholem to Gustave Myerink, made connection between Scholem and Mead.[89] As it is well known, Scholem also took part at the famous Eranos meetings in Ascona, and published several articles in the Eranos Yearbook. The wealthy Dutch woman Olga Fröbe–Kapteyn, who was interested in Theosophy and other esoteric currents, and became a close follower of Jung, organized the Eranos conferences. The conferences, who initially included esotericists, such as Alice Bailey, developed into a meeting place for scholars of religion with interest in the mysticism and the occult, including luminaries such as Mircea Eliade, Henry Corbin, Gilles Quispel, D. T. Suzuki, and many others.[90]

9 Theosophy and Mysticism

The ambivalent attitude of Kabbalah scholars to occult movements, and the complex connections between the academic and western esoteric perceptions of Kabbalah, come to the fore in the use and discussions of the term "Theosophy", a central term in Western esotericism, which became central in the modern academic study of Kabbalah.

Since the early modern period the term Theosophy referred to religious illumination and unmediated knowledge of divine matters. It became associated with the esoteric ideas of Christian theologians, especially in Germany, such as Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), Friedrich Christopher Oetinger (1702–1782) and Franz von Baader (1765–1841). In the late 19th century, the founders of the Theosophical Society chose the term to designate their nascent organization.

Christian theologians in the 18th century were the first to use the term theosophy in connection to Kabbalah. The connection between Kabbalah and

89 Goldreich, Automatic Writing, 348. In his introduction to Scholem's article, Mead relates that his translation from the Zohar, was taken from a collection of Zohar physiognomical passages, that Scholem sent to Eisler, for future publication in a series of Jewish mystical texts (see Scholem, "*Chiromancy in the Zohar*", 255). On Scholem's connection with Robert Eisler, see Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem,* 126–135.

90 On the Eranos Circle, and Scholem's participation in the conferences, see: Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religions after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy, Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 277–314; Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014).

theosophy comes to the fore in the title of Georg von Welling, *Opus mago–cabalisticum et theosophicum,* published in 1721. The Christian theologian and freemason, Franz Joseph Molitor adopted the understanding of Kabbalah as theosophy.[91] Several Jewish scholars of Kabbalah in the 19th century adopted the term and referred to Kabbalah as theosophy. Christian Ginsburg accepted the identification of Kabbalah as theosophy in *The Kabbalah: Its Doctrines, Development and Literature*, which was first published in London in 1865. Ginsburg, a prominent English scholar of Jewish Eastern European descent, who converted to Christianity, opened his book by defining Kabbalah as "a system of religious philosophy, or more properly of theosophy".[92]

Modern occult circles accepted the identification of Kabbalah as theosophy. Possibly, the founders of the Theosophical Society were influenced in the choice of the term by the identification of Kabbalah as Theosophy. It is interesting to note that Madame Blavatsky's first use of the term theosophy, which appeared in her letter to Hiram Corson, from February 1875, is a paraphrase of Christian David Ginsburg's description of Kabbalah as theosophy.[93]

Gershom Scholem and his followers adopted the identification of Kabbalah as a form of theosophy. In his magnum opus, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, published in 1941, Scholem suggested that the best way to characterize the book of the *Zohar*, the major text of Kabbalah, is "Jewish theosophy": "If I were asked to characterize in one word the essential traits of this world of Kabbalistic thought, those which set it apart from other forms of Jewish mysticism, I would say that the Zohar represents Jewish theosophy, i.e., Jewish form of theosophy".[94] Scholem identified theosophy as one of the two major elements in Kabbalah, alongside mysticism. According to his definition Kabbalistic theosophy "seeks to reveal the mysteries of the hidden life of God and the relationship between the divine life on the one hand and the life of man and creation on the other."[95] The term theosophy became a central term in the scholarship of Kabbalah, and today most scholars use it (sometime together with the term theurgy) to characterize the main forms of Kabbalah that are related to the theory of the Sefirot.

91 Koch, Katharina, *Franz Joseph Molitor und die jüdische Tradition: Studien zu den kabbalistischen Quellen der 'Philosophie der Geschichte',* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 76–8.
92 Ginsburg, Christian D., *The Kabbalah, its Doctrines, Development and Literature* (London: Routledge, 1865), 83.
93 See, Huss, "Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews", 160, note 4.
94 Scholem, *Major Trends*, 203–6.
95 Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), 4.

Scholem was aware of the centrality of the term theosophy in Western esotericism, and distinguished between his use of the term, and its "abuse" by the Theosophical Society:

> Before proceeding further, I should like to indicate in a few words what I am trying to express by using this much abused term *theosophy*. By theosophy I mean that which was generally meant before the term became a label for a modern pseudo-religion, i.e., theosophy signifies a mystical doctrine, or school of thought, which purports to perceive and to describe the mysterious workings of the Divinity perhaps also believing it possible to become absorbed in its contemplation . . . Theosophists in this sense were Jacob Boehme and William Blake, to mention two famous Christian Mystics.[96]

This short paragraph illustrates the complex relations between the academic study of Kabbalah and Western esotericism. On the one hand, Scholem conveys his contempt to the Theosophical Society – which, following René Guénon, he calls "pseudo religion".[97] Nonetheless, he chooses the term theosophy – a key term in early modern and modern Western esotericism, as the best term to characterize the Kabbalah. Furthermore, although Scholem disparages the Theosophical Society, he compares the Zohar to two early modern Christian western esotericists – Jacob Boheme and William Blake.

Finally, before concluding, I would like to mention another central notion, shared both by scholars of Kabbalah and modern occultists – the identification of Kabbalah as mysticism. Although today the identification of Kabbalah as a Jewish form of a universal mystical religious phenomenon is very prevalent, it should be noted that this notion first appeared only in the 19th century. The idea that Kabbalah is an expression of a universal mystical experience is not found amongst traditional Jewish Kabbalists, and it is still contested by many contemporary Kabbalists. As far as I know, the first to characterize Kabbala as Jewish Mysticism was the Christian Kabbalist and Freemason, Franz Molitor. This identification was later accepted both by Jewish scholars of Kabbalah and by western esoteric and occult circles.

The academic scholars of Kabbalah, and the late 19th and early 20th century occultists, used the term mysticism as it became to be understood during that period, that is, as a universal religious phenomenon of direct experience or union with the divine or transcendent reality. Several scholars of religion, some of them affiliated also with western esoteric circles – such as William James,

96 Scholem, *Major Trends*, 206.
97 René Guénon, *Le Théosophisme – Histoire d'une pseudo-religion* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie nationale, 1921).

Ralph Inge, and Evelyn Underhill, formulated this definition, which is still prevalent in religious studies.

The use of the term mysticism, and its application to Kabbalah, entails several presuppositions, which are shared, and central both to Kabbalah scholarship and modern occultists. The definition of Kabbalah as Jewish Mysticism identifies Kabbalah as a Jewish expression of perennial, universal, trans–historical religious phenomena. It is assumed that Kabbalah as a form of mysticism is similar, and essentially identical with mysticism in other cultures.

Furthermore, the understanding and interpretation of Kabbalah as a form of universal mysticism entails a certain theological stance, which is prevalent, and central to modern esoteric and New Age movements, Kabbalah scholarship, and religious studies. This modern, ecumenical theological stance postulates a divine or transcendent reality – usually perceived as a non–theistic impersonal metaphysical reality – which can be encountered and experienced by human beings in certain, unique states of consciousness.

Samuel Lewis, a.k.a. Sufi Sam, the Jewish occultist from California, who became one of the father figures of the New Age movements, recognized the essential affinity between Scholem's attitude to Jewish Mysticism, and his own, occultist approach. Praising Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, he wrote: "Your work seems both clear and self–explanatory and include what I think is most important – the validity of the inner experience itself." In his response, Scholem distanced himself from esotericism: "I must confess that I have never been initiated into any esoteric circle, and in interpreting Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism at all, I have been relying on my own intuition and that measure of understanding which a careful analysis of difficult texts on a philological basis may afford".[98]

Notwithstanding Scholem's reservations, it seems that Sufi Sam has indeed identified the existence of a fundamental common stance shared by both occult Kabbalists, and modern scholars of Kabbalah – the perception that Kabbalah, as well as practices designated as "mystical" from other cultures, are expressions of a universal mystical, inner, experience of the divine. This modern, liberal, ecumenical stance is prevalent in Kabbalah scholarship as well as in many other disciplines of religious studies. This modern theological stance is also central in occult and western esoteric movements, and stands at the core of New Age and contemporary spiritual movements.

98 Scholem, Briefe, vol. 2, 1948–1970, 5. See Burmistrov, "Gershom Scholem und das Okkultte," 33–34.

10 To Conclude

Gershom Scholem and his school of academic Kabbalah scholarship expressed a negative, disparaging attitude to the western esoteric and occult circles who studied and practiced Kabbalah. This negative attitude is dependent on the Jewish national perspective and the historical–philological approach of Scholem and his disciples. They denied the authenticity of occult Kabbalah because it was created outside a Jewish framework, and because its practitioners lacked academic expertise.

Yet, the relations between Kabbalah scholarship and Western esotericism are more complicated and nuanced. First, we should note that before Scholem, and during his time, there were other scholars, who found interest in the occult, and who had connections with western esoteric movements. Scholem's attitude to Western esotericism was also more complicated and nuanced. Although he disparaged occult Kabbalists, he had a more positive appreciation of Christian Kabbalah and early modern western esoteric currents. He regarded Johann Reuchlin as the forerunner of Kabbalah scholarship, and acknowledged the great impact that Franz Molitor had on his interest and understanding of Kabbalah. Furthermore, there are also significant terms, presuppositions and theological perspectives, which Kabbalah academic scholarship and western esoteric and occult circles share. These include the definition of Kabbalah as theosophy and mysticism, the recognition of Kabbalah as a Jewish expression of universal religious phenomena, and the modern, ecumenical belief in unmediated encounters of mystics from all cultures with a transcendent reality. Kabbalah scholarship and Occult Kabbalah have shared genealogies, significant connections, and common ideas. The recognition, and study, of these complex relations can contribute to a better and more nuanced understanding of both Kabbalah scholarship and modern Western esotericism.

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Julian Strube

Tantra as Experimental Science in the Works of John Woodroffe

Abstract: John Woodroffe (1865–1936) can be counted among the most influential authors on Indian religious traditions in the twentieth century. He is credited with almost single-handedly founding the academic study of Tantra, for which he served as a main reference well into the 1970s. Up to that point, it is practically impossible to divide his influence between esoteric and academic audiences – in fact, borders between them were almost non-existent. Woodroffe collaborated and exchanged thoughts with scholars such as Sylvain Lévi, Paul Masson-Oursel, Moriz Winternitz, or Walter Evans-Wentz. His works exerted a significant influence on, among many others, Heinrich Zimmer, Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, Mircea Eliade, Carl Gustav Jung, Agehananda Bharati or Lilian Silburn, as they did on a wide range of esotericists such as Julius Evola. In this light, it is remarkable that Woodroffe did not only distance himself from missionary and orientalist approaches to Tantra, but he also identified Tantra with Catholicism and occultism, introducing a universalist, traditionalist perspective.

This was not simply a "Western" perspective, since Woodroffe echoed Bengali intellectuals who praised Tantra as the most appropriate and authentic religious tradition of India. In doing so, they stressed the rational, empirical, scientific nature of Tantra that was allegedly based on practical spiritual experience. As Woodroffe would later do, they identified the practice of Tantra with New Thought, spiritualism, and occultism – sciences that were only re-discovering the ancient truths that had always formed an integral part of "Tantrik occultism." This chapter situates this claim within the context of global debates about modernity and religion, demonstrating how scholarly approaches to religion did not only parallel, but were inherently intertwined with, occultist discourses.

1 Introduction

The publications of John Woodroffe, some of which appeared under the pseudonym Arthur Avalon, are of major importance for the modern reception of Tantra. They remain a central resource for present-day esoteric and non-academic practitioners and were widely regarded as an authority within the academic study of

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religions until the 1970s. In fact, Woodroffe is viewed as the father of Tantric Studies, and by extension of the practice of Tantra in the West.[1] Even if his writings were criticised for their shortcomings, there is no doubt that they were instrumental for highlighting the importance of Tantra for Indian religious history and establishing it as an accepted subject of serious research.[2] That Woodroffe came to play such an important role is not least due to his remarkable life, over three decades of which he spent in colonial Bengal. A child of converts to Catholicism, he received an education at an unconventional liberal Catholic school and obtained a Bachelor in Law after studying in Oxford from 1884–1888. From 1890, he served as a barrister at the High Court of Calcutta and taught as the Tagore Law Professor of Calcutta University. In 1904, he was promoted to the judiciary and served at the High Court until 1922, when he returned to England and taught Indian Law at Oxford University until 1930. He retired to Southern France and lived in Beausoleil, near Monaco, until his death.

This glimpse into Woodroffe's life already indicates that his activities can serve as an outstanding example of a global religious history. What Woodroffe presented to his many readers as "Tantra" was the outcome of a complex tangle of exchanges between different South Asian (especially Bengali) intellectuals, Western orientalists, missionaries, esotericists, and other participants in the struggle about the meaning of, and the relationship between, religion, science, philosophy, and national identity. It is well known that it was not Woodroffe alone who stood behind Arthur Avalon, but that this name represented a collaboration between him and several learned Indians, a fact which he openly admitted himself.[3] Thanks to a careful study by Kathleen Taylor, we know that Woodroffe's chief partner was Aṭal Bihāri Ghoṣ,[4] one of several scholars without whose knowledge

1 David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini: 'Tantric Sex' in its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), xi; Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy Politics, and Power in the Study of Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 136; André Padoux, *The Hindu Tantric World: An Overview* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 6.

2 See, e.g., Chintaharan Chakravarti, *Tantras: Studies on their Religion and Literature* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1963), v; Sanjukta Gupta, Dirk Jan Hoens, and Teun Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 4; or the references in Sures Chandra Banerji, *Tantra in Bengal: A Study in its Origin, Development, and Influence*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1992).

3 E.g., in John Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta: Essays and Addresses on the Shakta Tantrashastra* (London: Luzac & Co., 1918), i.

4 The names of historical actors and the titles of publications will be romanised in this article according to the Bangla Academy standard. Exempt are place names and some Sanskrit terms that have entered the English language.

and linguistic skills the Woodroffe/Avalon publications would not have been possible.[5] This demonstrates the complexity of the exchanges behind these publications, which reflected a controversial discourse about Tantra that had gained new momentum in Bengal towards the end of the nineteenth century. These controversies had emerged since the beginning of the nineteenth century within a global context of exchanges between Westerners and Indians.

What we find in the writings of Woodroffe/Avalon is a "reformed" Tantra, in the words of Hugh Urban and David Gordon White, whose proponents sought to actively engage with contemporary learned debates. In contrast to the accounts of missionaries, orientalists, and colonial administrators, who had regarded Tantra as superstition and idolatry at best, if not as outright sexual perversion and black magic, these "reformers" presented a form of "deodorized," "cosmeticized," or "semanticized" Tantra whose more transgressive or controversial elements were depicted in a highly philosophised fashion.[6] As Sanjukta Gupta, Dirk Jan Hoens, and Teun Goudriaan have pointed out, Woodroffe/Avalon's depiction of Tantra was "motivated by the desire to propagate [the specific current of] Śākta Tantrism and to apologize against orthodox Hindus and Victorian missionaries."[7] While these assessments are certainly true, there is a dimension to this depiction of Tantra that deserves further scrutiny. Woodroffe/Avalon, and the numerous Bengali intellectuals who propagated similar ideas, did not regard themselves as reformists. Quite the contrary: they were staunchly opposed to so-called "reformers" and propagated, time and again, the revival and defence of a traditional "orthodoxy" that had allegedly been corrupted by foreign education and the degeneration of the Indian socio-religious fabric.

This notion put the Bengali discourse about Tantra at the heart of the struggle for religious and national identity in colonial India. Tantra would invigorate the oppressed Hindus, not only by reviving their authentic religious tradition, but also by proving the scientific and rational character of this tradition. This would

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5 In what follows, "Woodroffe/Avalon" will be used to refer to the writings published under both names. Woodroffe also started publishing under his given name, while "Arthur Avalon" continued to be used for the collaborative *Tantrik Texts*, a series of editions. Some writings that were first published under the name of Arthur Avalon were later published under the name of Woodroffe.

6 Urban, *Tantra*, 135–137; David Gordon White, "Introduction," in *Tantra in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 17; Alexis Sanderson, "Meaning in Tantric Ritual," in *Essais sur le Rituel III: Colloque du Centenaire de la Section des Sciences religieuses de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études*, ed. Anne-Marie Blondeau and Kristofer Schipper (Louvain-Paris: Peeters, 1995), 87; cf. White, *Kiss*, xii.

7 Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism*, 4.

not only serve as an antidote to colonial oppression, but also to the materialistic and sectarian ailments of modernity as a whole. This "scientific spirituality" had a decidedly universalistic thrust, which implied that it was the West that should learn from India, rather than vice versa. In what follows, two aspects of these ideas will be discussed: this is, first, the arguably very modern focus on science and rationality that seems to contradict the fierce anti-modernism of its proponents. And second, the proclaimed universalism of a tradition that was presented as the authentic core of Hindu identity. These two points are of special interest because they provided structural analogies and actual points of contact with both "Western esotericism" and contemporary orientalist scholarship. It will be argued that this is among the main reasons why the borders between esoteric and academic recipients of Woodroffe's/Avalon's writings were fluid and often non-existent well into the second half of the twentieth century.

2 The Exchange between Bengali Intellectuals and Theosophists

As indicated above, the activities of Woodroffe/Avalon emerged from a Bengali discourse that had gained momentum towards the end of the nineteenth century. In that respect, it is significant that the first two major books published by Arthur Avalon were *The Great Liberation* (1913) and the *Principles of Tantra* (1914).[8] Both titles were later published under Woodroffe's name and saw many editions up to the present day. *The Great Liberation* was a translation of the *Mahānirvāṇatantra*, a highly influential text that was probably composed by a Bengali pandit at the end of the eighteenth century.[9] While the provenance of the text is still unclear, it was evidently popular among reform-oriented Hindus who had received a Western education and thus played a central role for nineteenth-century understandings of Tantra. Avalon wrote a lengthy introduction to the translation, which was later published as

8 The years 1913 and 1914 also saw the beginning of the *Tantrik Texts* series. Edited by Tārānātha Vidyāratna, the three Sanskrit texts that were published then were the *Tantrābhidhāna*, the *Ṣaṭ-Cakra-Nirūpaṇa*, and the *Prapañcasāra*. This selection is very significant but cannot be further discussed in the present context.

9 John D.M. Derrett, "A Juridical Fabrication of Early British India: The Mahānirvāṇa-Tantra," *Zeitschrift für Rechtswissenschaft* 69, no. 2 (1968); Teun Goudriaan and Sanjukta Gupta, *Hindu Tantric and Sākta Literature* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1981), 98–99; Banerji, *Tantra in Bengal*, 104–111; Urban, *Tantra*, 64–70.

Introduction to Tantra Shastra and, despite its flaws, is still appreciated by scholars as a remarkably nuanced and well-informed pioneering piece. The two volumes of *Principles of Tantra* were a translation of the *Tantratattva*, a text by the charismatic guru Śivacandra Vidyārṇava (1861–1914) that had been published in Bengali in 1893. The *Principles of Tantra* were a collaborative effort between Arthur Avalon, who wrote the Preface and Introduction to the first volume, and two Bengali scholars: Jñānendralāl Majumdār, who had been mainly responsible for the translation, and Baradā Kānta Majumdār, who wrote the Introduction to the second volume. The lives and works of these learned Bengalis are still largely unknown. In the present context, the discussion will have to be limited to the question of how they presented Tantra as an experimental, rational science.

The works of Arthur Avalon were the climax of a long effort by Bengali intellectuals to reshape the perception of Tantra and establish it as the true, esoteric core of Hindu religion – and, by extension, of religion in general. It is highly remarkable that the effort to communicate these ideas in English to an international readership was initiated in the leading Theosophical periodical, *The Theosophist*. Beginning in its very first volume of 1880, we can observe a lively exchange about Tantra between Indian, European, and US-American authors that would last until 1891. It was only in 1913 that the topic was taken up again within the pages of *The Theosophist*: by a "Hymn to Durga (from the Siddheshvara Tantra)," penned by none other than Arthur Avalon. This is no coincidence, because the group of authors from the 1880s represented the very same milieu that would later inform Woodroffe.

As Karl Baier has observed with regard to discussions about Yogic practices, the discussion of Tantra in *The Theosophist* was initiated by an inquiry from a "Truth Seeker" in January 1880.[10] This "European Theosophist" was fascinated by a series of papers in the Dublin University Magazine from 1853 and 1854, which discussed Yogic practices. Those were linked to a "Power" that was explained as the Kundalini, and that was supposedly described in "that most mystic of all mystic books, the *Dnyaneshvari*."[11] The Truth Seeker compared

10 This was first observed by Karl Baier, *Meditation und Moderne: Zur Genese eines Kernbereichs moderner Spiritualität in der Wechselwirkung zwischen Westeuropa, Nordamerika und Asien*, vol. 1 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 324–329; cf. Karl Baier, "Mesmeric Yoga and the Development of Meditation within the Theosophical Society," *Theosophical History* 16, no. 3–4 (2012) and Karl Baier, "Theosophical Orientalism and the Structures of Intercultural Transfer: Annotations on the Appropriation of the Cakras in Early Theosophy," in *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah, and the Transformation of Traditions*, ed. Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016).

11 This is the *Jñāneśvarī*, a famous thirteenth-century Marathi rendering of the *Bhagavadgītā*.

these practices to those of the *Oupnek'hat*[12] as well as to the mystical experience described in Thomas Vaughan's *Anima Magica Abscondita*. He wondered if "any of the correspondents" of the *Theosophist* could provide more information, and if Dayānanda Saraswatī "would give the world a translation of this work, and also of Patanjali's *Yoga Sastra* . . . " He concluded: "We Western Theosophists earnestly desire information as to all the best modes of soul-emancipation and will-culture, and turn to the East for Light."[13]

In a note in the February issue of *The Theosophist*, "a Bengali friend" responded that Swāmī Dayānanda "was in error when he condemned the *Tantras*. He has evidently seen the *black* Tantra and rejected all in disgust. But the Tantras alone contain all that has been discovered regarding the mysteries of our nature. They contain more than the Veds, Patanjali, Sankhya and other ancient works on Yoga philosophy." Since they were in Bengali character, they were inaccessible to English audiences, which is why the author urged those in Bengal who "care enough for truth and science" to provide English translations.[14] The Bengali friend's remark about the "error" of Dayānanda reflected an enduring Indian debate. Swāmī Dayānanda Saraswatī (1824–1883) had founded the reform-oriented Ārya Samāj in 1875 in Mumbai (then Bombay) and was briefly affiliated with the Theosophical Society, which had even renamed itself "The Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of India" in May 1877. Dayānanda was a harsh critic of Tantra, which he regarded as a superstitious and obscene degeneration of Indian tradition that was opposed to the Vedas. Reflecting the stereotypes of Christian missionary literature – and using the language of Protestant polemics when he referred to "the trickery of these stupid *popes*" – he did indeed regard the Tantras as a vicious genre of "disgusting literature."[15] Similarly, many followers of the Brāhma Samāj, founded 1828 in Kolkata (then Calcutta), had looked down upon Tantra, although the role of Tantra for their society was more ambivalent, as will be seen below. In his note, the Bengali friend took a stance that was diametrically opposed to such polemics. Despite its briefness, it contained two central arguments that were often leveled against attacks on Tantra: first, that it was not only part of the Vedic tradition, but that it even "contain[ed] more than the Veds"; second, that one must differentiate between "black" and "white" Tantra. The latter aspect introduced Tantra into the "Western esoteric"

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12 The first Latin translation by Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1801/02) of the Persian rendering of the Upanishads (1657).

13 Truth Seeker, "Yoga Philosophy," *The Theosophist* 1, no. 4 (1880): 87.

14 *The Theosophist* 1, no. 5 (1880): 113.

15 Urban, *Tantra*, 60.

discourse on black versus white magic. While Western Theosophists, so far informed by writings such as those by orientalists, missionaries, or reformers like Dayānanda, had regarded Tantra as black magic plain and simple, they now came under the influence of a learned discourse that attempted to elevate Tantra in its "white" variety to the status of "Indian esotericism" in its pu-rest and noblest form. Some decades later, this was the view that would be popula-rized and established as the standard by Woodroffe/Avalon.

3 The Indian Occultism of Baradā Kānta Majumdār

The link between these encounters in the *Theosophist* and the publications of Woodroffe/Avalon could not be more direct: the first Bengali scholar who reacted to the requests was Baradā Kānta Majumdār, the afore-mentioned collaborator on *Principles of Tantra*. He wrote a series of articles about "Tantric Philosophy" and "A Glimpse of Tantric Occultism" from April to October 1880. Therein he explained that the Tantras were the most comprehensive and profound compendium of knowledge, but that they were often misunderstood and denounced because of their esoteric character: "The Tantriks like the Freemasons and Rosicrucians studiously hide their books and secrets from the outside world." By explaining some of its esoteric contents, Majumdār wished to "disabuse the minds of the Tantra-haters of their misconception about this very instructive and interesting branch of Hindu literature."[16] For this, Majumdār's authority was the *Mahānirvāṇatantra*, which, as the reader might recall, was later published by Arthur Avalon as *The Great Liberation*. Majumdār's references to the *Mahānirvāṇatantra* are fascinating from several perspectives; in the present context, his focus on *kuṇḍalinī* and *śakti* are especially relevant since they highlight his concern to prove the authority of Tantra on the basis of recent scientific findings. He argued, for instance: "Modern science also teaches us that heat, light, electricity, magnetism, &c., are but the modifications of one great force." These forces, Majumdār explained, are but different manifestations of the Kundalini and thus only aspects of one all-pervading unity.[17] Majumdār's implication here is that modern science was only starting to re-discover what ancient Tantric doctrines had always taught, and it is highly relevant that he

16 Baradā Kānta Majumdār, "Tantric Philosophy," *The Theosophist* 1, no. 7 (1880): 173.
17 Majumdār, "Tantric Philosophy," 173.

referred to this, in his next articles, as "Tantric Occultism." There he argues for the inferiority of modern science in comparison to the teachings of Tantra:

> There is a point beyond which experimental science cannot go; and that is the point which divides the empire of what is called matter from the empire of force. Certainly the physicist is acquainted with the nature and laws of certain forces, or more correctly, certain modifications of some mysterious force, but beyond this every thing is in darkness. To the modern scientist the land of mystery is sealed with seven seals. His instruments and machines, his scalpel and retort serve him ill to solve the grand problem of existence. Is there no hope then? Are there no means by which the occultism of nature may be revealed to man? Aryan philosophy says there are.[18]

As familiar as this line of argumentation will be to experts on esotericism, the relevant fact here is that a Bengali author chose to adopt it for his defence of Tantra. To put it differently: it is highly remarkable that this defence of Tantra was first taken up within the pages of an esoteric journal, using an esoteric language, and comparing Tantric practices to those of contemporary "Western esotericism" – going as far as to label the very subject of the argument "Tantric Occultism." Some historical explanations for this shall be indicated here: for instance, Tantra had been regarded as "black magic" by missionaries and Indian reformers from an early point on, a fact that, as has been seen, resurfaced in *The Theosophist* and enabled Western esotericists and Indian intellectuals to engage in a conversation about the legitimacy of magic that had been essential to the emergence of modern esotericism. In this context, notions of an all-pervading force were commonplace among Western esotericists since the popularity of Mesmerism and spiritualism; just like esotericists in the West, Majumdār linked these theories to contemporary theories of matter and energy, to which his notion of *śakti* was highly compatible. Third, his emphasis on "Aryan philosophy" leads back to the orientalist notion of a religious and cultural origin in "the East" that was essential to the emergence of Theosophy and, as is well known, responsible for the activities of the Theosophical Society in India in the first place.

In short, Majumdār actively engaged with the Western Theosophists' "earnest desire for information" and their eagerness to "turn to the East for Light," to use the words of the Truth Seeker. Majumdār clearly regarded the Theosophists as allies against missionaries or reformers such as those of the Ārya Samāj or the Brāhma Samāj and their joint attack on superstition, idolatry, and black magic.

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18 Baradā Kānta Majumdār, "A Glimpse of Tantrik Occultism 1," *The Theosophist* 1, no. 10 (1880): 244.

He joined the Theosophical Society on 26 July 1880, while writing his "Glimpse of Tantric Occultism."[19] He was one of the contributors to the well-noted *Guide to Theosophy* from 1887, edited by Tukaram Tatya (1836–1898) who had joined the Theosophical Society on 2 May 1880. Majumdār's entry about "The Occult Sciences" underlines his familiarity, and will to engage, with Western occultism. Following an epigraph by Paracelsus, Majumdār denounced the "sectarian narrowness and blind prejudice" that was noticeable "in this boastful nineteenth century of intellectual scientists and philosophers." Praising the wisdom of the Indian Yogis, he maintained that "[t]he occult sciences of India are the monuments of her ancient greatness," to which, it is implied; those who have received "fair education in Western science and philosophy" have to look for answers. He defined these occult sciences as follows:

> I beg in the first place to promise that they contain nothing in them that may be considered supernatural. On the other hand all the occult sciences are based upon natural laws and forces and are the result of investigation and experiment. The end and aim of these sciences is to discover and develop certain powers in man, which, for want of proper culture, lie dormant and useless, but which, if properly brought to action, can truly give him the name of the 'Lord of creation.'[20]

Majumdār drew explicit comparisons with the history of "Western esotericism" when he maintained that, in their efforts to explain the subtle forces of nature, the investigations of the Indian ascetics paralleled those of Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), Karl von Reichenbach (1788–1869), and Jules Denis du Potet de Sennevoy (1796–1881). After providing a long quote from Ebenezer Sibly (1751–1799), an early follower of Mesmer's theories, Majumdār referred the curious reader "to the Tantrik works in Sanskrit and to the English works of Mr. Sebly [sic], Dr. Dee, &c." He concluded his entry with the following passage:

> The science of mesmerism in all its branches has thrown a flood of light on Indian occultism, which may now be read and intelligently understood by any average reader who has but a slight knowledge of mesmerism. But Western mesmerism is yet in its infancy; and it is hoped that with the help of Indian occultism it will fast gain the position which other sciences now occupy. There is, however, one great distinction between Indian occultism and European mesmerism; viz., that while the latter depends upon secondary sources (subjects mesmerised) for the discovery of its truths, the former only treats of self mesmerisation. In the one case the operator has to rely upon the evidence of his patient, but

19 The second part of which was completed on 2 August 1880.
20 Baradā Kānta Majumdār, "The Occult Sciences," in *A Guide to Theosophy*, ed. Tukaram Tatya (Bombay: The Bombay Theosophical Publication Fund, 1887), 206.

> in the other the self-mesmerised philosopher observes phenomena by the aid of himself alone, in an ordinary conscious state.[21]

Similar to the established modern sciences, Western Mesmerism was only beginning to discover and explain things that Indian occultism had long understood and practiced. Hence it was the Westerners who could benefit from Indian teachings, not the other way around. Majumdār's argument for the practical superiority of Indian occultism is remarkable in itself, although he seemed to be unaware of the fact that occultists, beginning with Eliphas Lévi (i.e., Alphonse-Louis Constant, 1810–1875), had long levelled the technique of "self-magnetisation" against the supposedly inferior practitioners of Mesmerism and spiritualism.[22] Be that as it may, the point here is that Majumdār is among the first Indian authors who entered a dialogue with Western occultists and developed the notion of Indian occultism with the tradition of Tantra at its core, employing a language and narrative that clearly (and, most likely, intentionally) paralleled "Western esoteric" discourse.

4 Woodroffe/Avalon and "Western Esotericism"

In light of this exchange, it is a significant but often overlooked fact that Arthur Avalon himself actively reached out to Theosophists when he entered the stage. Two translated hymns were published in *The Theosophist* in October 1913 and June 1914, as a result of the book *Hymns to the Goddess*, which was co-published in 1913 with "Ellen Avalon," Woodroffe's wife. In fact, Ellen was a member of the Theosophical Society and well acquainted with Annie Besant.[23] John never became a member himself, but he published in journals such as the *Theosophist*, *Theosophical Review*, or *Occult Review*, and he frequently quoted from publications such as *The Quest*. He gave lectures to the Theosophical Society, and his books were published by Theosophical publishers such as Ganesh & Co. in Chennai (then Madras).

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21 Majumdār, "The Occult Sciences," 209.

22 Julian Strube, *Sozialismus, Katholizismus und Okkultismus im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts: Die Genealogie der Schriften von Eliphas Lévi*, Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 529. The concept of self-magnetisation had also been proposed by Du Potet, among others.

23 Kathleen Taylor, *Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal: An Indian Soul in a European Body?* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 44, 148.

At the same time, he was critical of the Theosophical ideas that he frequently referred to, openly criticising, for instance, Charles Webster Leadbeater.[24] Similarly, Baradā Kānta Majumdār pointed out what he regarded as Theosophical misconceptions of Indian concepts.[25] This suggests that Woodroffe and his Indian collaborators were well aware of what the former called "substantial points of difference" between Theosophical writings and what was perceived as more authentic Indian teachings. However, Woodroffe was "aware that the Theosophical Society has no official doctrine,"[26] and it is evident that he regarded Theosophists as dialogue partners in his efforts to spread knowledge about the value of Indian teachings. This appreciation is made explicit as early as in the first volume of *Principles of Tantra*, where it is pointed out that "[t]he spread of Theosophical ideas first renewed an interest in the teachings of India's great past, and an awakening national spirit has done the rest."[27] The Indian-British team behind Arthur Avalon seems to have been well aware of the role of Theosophy as a platform of dialogue between India and the West, which is also expressed in a statement by Woodroffe in 1922: "The debt of Theosophy to India is well known as also (though in another sense) of India to Theosophy which re-called to the Indian the value of his cultural inheritance."[28]

This echoes the sentiment of many Indian authors who, even if they might have been critical of Theosophical ideas and, as Dayānanda had done, eventually turned their back on them, recognized the platform that the Theosophical Society offered them. Through journals such as the *Theosophist*, a significant part of the Indian intelligentsia was enabled to communicate with an international readership that was highly sympathetic to their ideas. Theosophical publishers vigorously reached out to Indians to publish in English, provide translations, or edit vernacular sources that were previously inaccessible to most readers. Theosophical concepts exerted a significant influence on Indian intellectual discourse that becomes tangible in the ideas of thinkers as prominent as Mahatma Gandhi.[29] Moreover, the Theosophical Society was an open arena for social reform and soon established itself as a recognizable force in

24 John Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power: Being the Shat-Chakra-Nirupana and Paduka-Panchaka* (Madras: Ganseh & Co., 1924), 6–7, 12–15. Cf. Taylor, *Woodroffe*, 149.
25 E.g., in John Woodroffe, *Principles of Tantra*, vol. 2 (London: Luzac & Co., 1914), xix.
26 Woodroffe, *Serpent Power*, 14–15.
27 John Woodroffe, *Principles of Tantra*, vol. 1 (London: Luzac & Co., 1914), x.
28 John Woodroffe, *The World as Power: Power as Life* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1922), xxi–xxii.
29 Michael Bergunder, "Experiments with Theosophical Truth: Gandhi, Esotericism, and Global Religious History," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82 (2014).

the socio-political landscape of India – a fact that culminated in Annie Besant's presidency of the Indian National Congress in 1917.[30]

It is against this background that Woodroffe's/Avalon's engagement with Theosophy has to be viewed. Similar to their Western interlocutors, many Indian authors propagated religious universalism, rejected modern materialism and scepticism, and pointed to an idealised past whose secret wisdom had to be revived. The notion of "Indian occultism," with Tantra at its core, would play a central role in these debates. Given the fact that Majumdār would later collaborate with Arthur Avalon, it is not surprising that the same ideas would resurface, not only in the introductions and commentaries to *The Great Liberation* and the *Principles of Tantra*, but also in prominent works such as *The Serpent Power* or *Shakti and Shakta* (both 1918) that decisively informed a global academic and non-academic readership. In these writings, Indian occultism is presented as decidedly scientific, rational, and based on the empirical experience of a religious practice that is executed with the precision of a scientific experiment. In *Shakti and Shakta*, we read: "The Tantras both in India and Tibet are the expression of principles which are of universal application. The mere statement of religious truths avails not. What is necessary for all is a practical method of realization. This too the occultist needs."[31] And, some pages later:

> Over and above the fact that the Shastra [i.e., the doctrine of Tantra] is an historical fact, it possesses, in some respects, an intrinsic value which justifies its study. Thus it is the storehouse of Indian occultism. This occult side of the Tantras is of scientific importance, the more particularly having regard to the present revived interest in occultist study in the West. "New thought" as it is called and kindred movements are a form of Mantravidyā. Vashīkaraṇam is hypnotism, fascination. There is "Spiritualism" and "Powers" in the Tantras and so forth.[32]

30 Catherine L. Wessinger, *Annie Besant and Progressive Messianism*, Studies in Women and Religion (Lewiston: Mellen, 1988); Mark Bevir, "In Opposition to the Raj," *History of Political Thought* 19 (1998); Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 177–207; Mark Bevir, "Theosophy as a Political Movement," in *Gurus and Their Followers*, ed. Antony Copley (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 55–82; Mark Bevir, "Theosophy and the Origins of the Indian National Congress," *International Journal for Hindu Studies* 7, no. 1/3 (2003); Isaac Lubelsky, *Celestial India: Madame Blavatsky and the Birth of Indian Nationalism* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012).

31 John Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta: Essays and Addresses on the Shakta Tantrashastra*, 3rd ed. (Madras/London: Ganesh & Co./Luzac & Co., 1929), 62.

32 Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta*, 73–74.

Like Majumdār and other Indian authors before him, Woodroffe emphasised that recent scientific findings would confirm the occult teachings of the Tantras, and just like them he saw esoteric movements at the vanguard of this scientific progress. At the same time, he made it clear that these discoveries were incomplete and infantile in comparison to what Indian sages had already been practising for millennia. This opens up a historical and socio-political dimension of Woodroffe's/Avalon's "Tantra Shastra" that actively sought confrontation with contemporary orientalist, missionary, and scientific opinions. Their failure, we read in *Shakti and Shakta*, was not only to reject Tantra, but also occultism in the West. Both being an expression of "principles which are of universal application," their acknowledgement would open up the path to a proper understanding of a universal "orthodoxy":

> Those familiar with the Western presentment of similar matters will more readily understand than others who, like the Orientalist and Missionary, as a rule know nothing of occultism and regard it as superstition. For this reason their presentment of Indian teaching is so often ignorant and absurd. The occultist, however, will understand the Indian doctrine. . .[33]

In the second edition of *The Serpent Power*, this remark is echoed emphatically: "It is because the Orientalist and missionary know nothing of occultism, and regard it as superstition, that their presentment of Indian teaching is so often ignorant and absurd."[34] In other words, only someone who is familiar with occultism will be able to comprehend the wisdom of India. It would be an overstatement to say that Woodroffe was an occultist; rather, the point is that his approach to Tantra was informed by ideas that had been expressed by learned Bengalis decades earlier in exchange with Theosophists. As Kathleen Taylor has shown, Woodroffe actively engaged with contemporary theories from diverse fields such as physics, psychology, Theosophy, or New Thought, without being an adherent of any particular movement.[35] It must be stressed, however, that this was hardly an innovation for the discourse about Tantra that had been going on among Indian intellectuals in the preceding decades.

33 Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta*, 464.
34 Woodroffe, *Serpent Power*, 86.
35 E.g., Taylor, *Woodroffe*, 194–202.

5 The "Orthodoxy" of Śivacandra Vidyārṇava

A nodal point of the ambitions to defend Tantra against its critics and establish it as an Indian "orthodoxy" are the activities of the afore-mentioned Śivacandra Vidyārṇava. Several of Woodroffe's main collaborators were disciples of this remarkable Tantric guru, and it appears that Woodroffe had received Tantric initiation (*dīkṣā*) from him.[36] Śivacandra Bhaṭṭācārya was born in the village Kumarkhali in the Nadiya district, today part of Bangladesh.[37] The region was populated by several outstanding figures of Indian religious, artistic, and political life, including Lālan Fakir, with whom Śivacandra was apparently acquainted. Śivacandra's family proudly looked back on a long tradition of renowned tāntrikas, and his descendants are still active in Haora, taking care of the temple of Śivacandra's *iṣṭa-devī* Sarvamaṅgalā, his preferred Goddess of worship.[38] From an early point on, his life reflects a struggle against the influence of Western education and the fading of Indian tradition. Reportedly, his father had been outraged when his son had to read the story of Valentine Duval as a pupil and decided not to send him to school from that day on.[39] Later, when Śivacandra was offered to study at the Sanskrit College, his father and grandfather denied him the permission because of the influence of English at the College.[40] Nevertheless, Śivacandra received a comprehensive Sanskritic education. Having completed the Vidyāsāgar exam, he rejected the title because of his respect for the renowned scholar and editor Jīvānanda Vidyāsāgar, adopting instead the title Vidyārṇava.

36 Taylor, *Woodroffe*, 98–108.
37 The most comprehensive biography is still Vasanta Kumār Pāl, *Tantrācārya Śibcandra Bidyārnab* (Kucbihār: Tribr̥tta Prakāśana, 1972), cf. Śankarnāth Rāy, *Bhārater Sādhak*, vol. 11 (Kolkata: Karuṇā Prakāśanī, 1958), which largely relies on it. For a recent study, see Kāśīnāth Cāklādār, *Mahāsādhak tantrācārya Śibcandra Bidyārṇab* (Kolkata: Pustaka Bipaṇi, 2006).
38 Cāklādār, *Mahāsādhak*, 17. The temple is located at Baksara Borojmath.
39 Rāy, *Bhārater Sādhak* 11, 114. The story of Duval, a shepherd boy who rose to the rank of a famous historian, was one of several stories about European scholars and explorers that were taught at Western-oriented schools instead of those of traditional Indian heroes, saints, or divinities. Many Indians saw this as prime example of how local traditions should be replaced by Western culture. See Nandini Bhattacharya, "Anglicized–Sanskritized–Vernacularized: Translational Politics of Primer Writing in Colonial Bengal," in *Language Policy and Education in India: Documents, Contexts and Debates* (Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2017), 167–168.
40 Rāy, *Bhārater Sādhak* 11, 119.

In his adult life, Śivacandra pursued two main goals: to reconcile Śākta and Vaiṣṇava worship[41]; and second, to protect traditional culture against the influx of materialistic Western civilization. He had been a close disciple of Kāngāl Harināth (1833–1896), the famous author and Bāul singer whose disciples included several prominent artists and political or religious leaders.[42] Despite his restless promulgation of "orthodoxy," Śivacandra was far from being a narrow-minded reactionary.[43] He emphasised that Tantric *sādhanā* (practice) was open to all castes and women, and he sought to create harmony between Hindus and Muslims. An active supporter of the anti-colonial Swadeshi movement, he was a strong proponent of an Indian national identity.[44] He established himself as a renowned orator and enthralled an audience of thousands when he gave a thundering speech after the Partition of Bengal in 1905 (in contrast to his famous fellow orator Surendranāth Bandyopādhyāy, who spoke in English, he gave the speech in Bengali). His praise of *mā* as the Mother of India resonated with the popular image that had inspired Indian nationalists since Bankim Candra Chatterji's famous poem "Bande Mātaram," which was included in his famous novel *Ānandamaṭh* from 1881 and would later become the "national song" of the Republic of India. Śivacandra took part in this larger movement that strived for national and religious identity. The revival of Tantra was his chief instrument in establishing the national and religious unity he wished for, first and foremost by freeing it of misconceptions and corruptions. To this end, he founded the Sarvamaṅgalā Sabhā that set up its headquarters in Varanasi and branched out into the whole country.

Śivacandra's two-volume *Tantratattva* from 1893 can be seen as a culmination of these efforts, and its English translation and dissemination by Arthur Avalon as one of the most significant successes of the guru's "anti-reformist reform." In this sometimes quite polemical yet witty work, Śivacandra mainly wanted to repel the disrespect and unbelief of the modern, Western educated Bengali class, the so-called *bhadralok*. He proclaimed the antiquity, greatness, purity, and authenticity of the doctrine of Tantra – the *tantraśāstra* – and argued that there is no conflict between Tantric, Vedic, and Puranic teachings. Moreover, he claimed that the Tantra, Vedānta, and Vaishnava *śāstras* all reflected the great *tattva*, or principle, of one "Hindu sādhanā." These arguments were backed up

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41 Simply put, Vaiṣṇavas focus on the worship of Viṣṇu, while Śaivas focus on Śiva. Śāktas, as part of Śaiva traditions, focus on the worship of Devī as Supreme Goddess, particularly in her manifestation as all-pervading Śakti.

42 Cāklādār, *Mahāsādhak*, 29–30.

43 Cf. Taylor, *Woodroffe*, 100.

44 Rāy, *Bhārater Sādhak* 11, 136–138, 66–67.

by a vast body of references to traditional writings, among which those of the Kaula tradition, especially the *Kulārṇavatantra*, stand out.[45] However, it was especially the *Mahānirvāṇatantra* that Śivacandra relied on when he explained the relevance of Tantra for present-day developments, including the openness of the *śāstra* to all castes and both sexes.

This importance of the *Mahānirvāṇatantra* highlights the ambiguous relationship between Śivacandra's "orthodoxy" and the "Protestant reformers" who he so vehemently opposed. The text had first been published by the Ādi Brāhma Samāj, which, in the eyes of Śivacandra, embodied the corrupting Western-influenced "reform" more than anything else. Two of the *Mahānirvāṇatantra*'s earliest manuscripts were part of the library of Rām Mohan Rāy (1772–1833), the founder of the Brāhma Samāj, whose Tantric guru Hariharānanda Bhāratī wrote the first well-known commentary to it. In contrast to traditional Tantras, the *Mahānirvāṇatantra* did not focus on Śiva, Śakti, or Kālī, but on an abstract, omnipresent Brahman. It emphasized that the Tantric *sādhanā* was the appropriate one for the present Kali Yuga. As Hugh Urban has highlighted, its modern, reformist aspects were especially attractive because of their claim to represent ancient wisdom that had been handed down in secret throughout the ages and was now revealed to meet the needs of the modern age.[46] The disciples of the Brāhma Samāj, Śivacandra, and many other intellectuals took place in controversial debates about the meaning of these revelations, trying to renegotiate the meaning of Tantra an its role for Indian society. In Śivacandra's eyes, the Brāhma Samāj was a prime example of how the proper understanding of Tantra had been lost due to the influence of Christian teachings, which had led its members astray. In the 1890s, he became widely renowned for a traditionalist yet reformist perspective that claimed the *tantraśāstra*'s superiority over the Western education that threatened to replace Indian tradition in the same way that Duval had been supposed to replace Kṛṣṇa.

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45 Kaula practices were compiled and integrated into a complex ritual and philosophical system between the eighth and eleventh centuries. Kashmir emerged as a centre of this systematisation, with Abhinavagupta (ca. 960–1020) as its most famed and influential proponent. Kashmiri Śaivism, as it was represented in works such as Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka*, was nondualistic and developed a highly complex philosophical reflection on *śakti*. See, e.g., Alexis Sanderson, "Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions," in *The World's Religions*, ed. Stewart Sutherland, et al. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988) or Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva: Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-dual Śaivism of Kashmir* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

46 Urban, *Tantra*, 70.

6 Tantra as Experimental Science

One of the central arguments that Śivacandra levelled against the critics of Tantra, and by extension against the corruptions of Western education, is the "practical," "scientific," and "experiential" character of Tantric *sādhanā*. Time and again, his *Tantratattva* emphasises that it is not blind faith that binds the Tantric practitioner to his *sādhanā*, but the experience of actual, tangible results. In their introductions and commentaries, Arthur Avalon repeatedly stressed this aspect. In the Introduction to volume one, we read: "For the understanding of the Tantrik, or, indeed, any other beliefs and practices, the usual dry-as-dust investigation of the savant is insufficient. In the first place a call should be made upon actual present experience."[47] This argument is extended to the valuation of religion in general – that is, religion in its orthodox form, free from reformist corruption:

> It is Sadhana which alone in any system, whether Hindu or otherwise, is really fruitful. The Tantra claims to be practical [. . .] in that it affords the direct proof of experience. [. . .] The Tantra further claims not only to be practical and to contain provisions available for all without distinction of caste or sex, but also to be fundamentally rational.[48]

This argument is not only based on the authority of scriptural and oral tradition, but also on the claim that many Indian concepts conform to the results of the most recent scientific and psychological research and metaphysical speculation . . . "[49] The practice of "Tantrik Yoga," for instance, should be regarded as "a ritual which is at the same time, when rightly understood, singularly rational and psychologically profound." With reference to a review from *The Quest* of October 1913, it is maintained that Tantric ritual was "perhaps the most elaborate system of auto-suggestion in the world."[50] This was one of Woodroffe's/Avalon's favourite comparisons among many others, scattered across their numerous writings whose later editions often saw chaotic modifications and expansions. For instance, Woodroffe gave a range of lectures that were later turned into chapters of *Shakti and Shakti*, some of which were first delivered to the Vivekananda Society in 1917–1918 and to the Dacca Literary Society in 1916, which was then printed in *The Theosophist* of October 1918.

The most systematic comparison between *tantraśāstra* and Western scientific and philosophical concepts can be found in the *World as Power* series,

47 Woodroffe, *Principles of Tantra* 1, xiii–xiv.
48 Woodroffe, *Principles of Tantra* 1, lxxii.
49 Woodroffe, *Principles of Tantra* 1, 2: vii–viii.
50 Woodroffe, *Principles of Tantra* 1, 1: xvi.

published under Woodroffe's name from 1922 until 1929.[51] Woodroffe acknowledged that the *World as Power* series was significantly indebted to Pramathanāth Mukhopādhyāy (1881–1973, later Swāmī Pratyagātmānanda Saraswatī). Mukhopādhyāy was one of Woodroffe's main collaborators and a major provider of ideas.[52] He had received an education in philosophy and started his career as a professor at the National Council of Education, which was founded as a nationalist initiative in 1906 as a result of the Swadeshi movement.[53] The Tantric doctrine of Śivacandra was rearticulated by Mukhopādhyāy in the light of Western ideas, especially German Idealism.[54] Śivacandra's Śākta non-dualist interpretation of Advaita Vedānta, which focused on the all-pervading *śakti*, was identified by him with Western Monism – a notion that would be essential to the writings of Woodroffe/Avalon. In some ways, this paralleled the ideas of Vivekānanda the essential difference being an affirmative application of Tantric Kaula Śākta teachings revolving around *śakti* as the reconciliation of opposites such as mind and matter, individual and divine consciousness, or transcendent and empirical experience. As Woodroffe maintained in *Shakti and Shakta*, the Monism of Ernst Haeckel pointed out "in conformity with Shakta Advaitavada that Spirit and Matter are not two distinct entities but two forms or aspects of one single Entity or fundamental Substance."[55] This mirrored ideas that his friend Mukhopādhyāy had previously expressed in his books *Approaches to Truth* (1914) and *The Patent Wonder* (1915), which are among the most cited by Woodroffe.

Mukhopādhyāy, who deserves a comprehensive study of its own, introduced a fascinating synthesis of contemporary Western and Indian philosophical thought to the writings of Woodroffe/Avalon and decisively coined the understanding of Śākta *tantraśāstra* that we find therein. In *The World as Power*, it is maintained that consciousness was "wider and deeper than cerebral

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51 The parts are *Reality* (1922), *Power as Life* (1922), *Power as Mind* (1922), *Power as Matter* (1923), *Causality and Continuity* (1923), and *Mahāmāyā: Power as Consciousness* (1929). See Taylor, *Woodroffe*, 192–202.

52 His importance for Woodroffe/Avalon was, e.g. in Rāy, *Bhārater Sādhak* 11, 174. The reader can easily tell apart the clearly structured and well-argued passages by Mukhopādhyāy in *The World as Power* from the more confused ones from the pen of Woodroffe.

53 At that time, he was a colleague of Śrī Arabinda (Aurobindo) and maintained contacts with him. See Pratyagātmānanda Saraswatī, *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Kolkata: Saraban Asran, 1980), 7.

54 Andrew Sartori, "Beyond Culture-Contact and Colonial Dicourse: 'Germanism' in Colinial Bengal," *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2007): 86–89.

55 Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta*, 272.

consciousness," and that the "Cartesian dualism of Mind and Matter (with no possibility of interaction) is commonly discarded in Modern Psychology which tends more and more to regard them not as merely 'parallel aspects' but as coessential."[56] With reference to authors such as William James, Thomas Henry Huxley, or Émile Boirac, we learn that the "New Psychology" in the West "is establishing mind as a force, capable of energising in uncommon ways, and hence ushering in the philosophy and practice of so called 'occult powers' and Yoga."[57] The Vitalism of Henri Bergson, it is maintained, leads directly to the ancient truths of the Śākta doctrine. Especially noteworthy are the references to William James, for instance when we read that it "may be that the so-called subconsciousness is really cosmic consciousness," which is what the philosophy of Vedānta had always taught: "In India, the Vedāntic doctrine has afforded a wide and firm basis for the understanding of our common as well as 'occult' experiences, and that doctrine is clear in its main outlines."[58] The Śākta doctrine presented by Mukhopādhyāy and Woodroffe claimed to be thoroughly rational and scientific, but it was also decidedly world-affirming in its focus of the notion of Power/*śakti*, not only on an abstract philosophical level, but as the psycho-physical cultivation of the individual Self (*ātman*) through Tantric ritual.[59]

As has become clear by now, Woodroffe and his Indian collaborators extensively referred to the fields of occultism, psychical research, psychology, physiology, Idealism, Monism, Vitalism, and other Western currents to argue for the scientific value of Tantra. They explicitly regarded Tantra as the essence of "Indian occultism" and the popularity of Western occultism as an expression of the tendency to rediscover an ancient orthodoxy. In this light, fascinating parallels between Indian reformers and Western esotericists become tangible: their exchange was largely based on a shared language of esotericism and comparisons between Western esoteric concepts and Indian teachings. In both cases, the rejection of modern materialism, scepticism, and atheism were a key component in the defence of orthodoxy or "tradition."

56 John Woodroffe, *The World as Power. Power as Mind* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1922), xi, xiv.

57 Woodroffe, *The World as Power*, xv–xvi.

58 John Woodroffe and Pramathanāth Mukhopādhyāy, *Mahāmāyā: The World as Power: Power as Consciousness* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1929), 186, 188.

59 This notion was especially attractive for Western occultists, most notoriously Julius Evola.

7 Tantra as Esoteric Tradition

Neither Woodroffe nor his Indian friends regarded the revival of Tantra as an exclusively Indian affair. Tantra was depicted as the esoteric core of a religious tradition that formed the foundation of other "orthodoxies" as well. As has been seen, the language of "Indian occultism" or "Tantrik occultism" was frequently used to refer to a universal orthodoxy shared by Western and Indian tradition. In *Shakti and Shakta*, Woodroffe emphasised the scientific and psychological values of its practice by a discussion of magic, which was, according to him, "common to all early religions":

> Magic was dismissed by practically all educated men as something too evidently foolish and nonsensical to deserve attention or inquiry. In recent years the position has been reversed in the West, and complaint is again made of the revival of witchcraft and occultism to-day. The reason of this is that modern scientific investigation has established the objectivity of some leading phenomena of occultism.[60]

Again, Woodroffe maintained that current scientific observations were confirming ancient doctrines; and again, he stressed that these doctrines had always thrived in India, while they had been dismissed and forgotten in the West. Woodroffe's approach to magic is interesting, not only because it reflects contemporary theories about magic as the origin of religion, but also because of his reference to theories of magic as will-power that were wide-spread in Western esoteric contexts. Similar to Majumdār's discussion of the occult sciences, he explained magic as a "Power of Thought" and stressed that "Thought is a Force" that can be cultivated and exploited by the magician.

Apart from this "scientific" explanation of magic and occultism, Woodroffe also advanced an historical argument by declaring: "It has been well observed that there are two significant facts about occultism, namely its catholicity (it is to be found in all lands and ages) and its amazing power of recuperation after it has been supposed to have been disproved as mere 'superstition'."[61] Here, "catholicity" is clearly meant to denote the universal character of occultism. But, as has been indicated above, Woodroffe also drew parallels between Indian orthodoxy and the actual Catholicism of the Church, which he located on the same side as Tantra in the struggle against the corruptions of modernity

60 Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta*, 88.
61 Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta*, 91.

and its "Protestant" reformism. Śivacandra's *Tantratattva* was explicitly framed in such a way:

> The same forces, however, against which this book, as also other orthodoxies, protest, are in conflict both with Hinduism in its present Tantrik form and with Christianity of the older type. In the present mingling of East and West, each is providing a ferment for the other [. . .].
>
> In fact, in parts the book reads like an orthodox Catholic protest against "modernism," and is thus interesting as showing how many fundamental principles are common to all orthodox forms of belief, whether of West of East.[62]

Throughout his writings, Woodroffe emphasised the similarities, and indeed the shared roots, of both Tantra and Catholicism. This does not only concern their historical dimension but also their practical modes of worship, which had been denounced by "Protestantism" and reformism as superstition and idolatry.[63] The same argument was also taken up by Pramathanāth Mukhopādhyāy:

> Thus, amongst Christians, the Catholic Church prescribes a full and powerful Sādhanā in its sacraments (Saṁskāra) and Worship (Pūjā, Upāsanā), Meditation (Dhyāna), Rosary (Japa) and the like. But any system to be fruitful must *experiment* to gain *experience*. The significance of the Tantra Shāstra lies in this that it claims to afford a means available to all, of *whatever caste* and of *either sex*, whereby the truths taught may be *practically realized*.[64]

These passages demonstrate the link between the claim for the scientific, rational, and experimental character of Tantric religious practice and between the historical dimension of the underlying universal religious, "orthodox" tradition. On the one hand, this formed a structural analogy to the discourses of Western esotericism; an analogy that had itself been the outcome of an exchange between Western and Indian thinkers and practitioners in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, these discussions entered the field of the academic theory and history of religion, exerting a lasting influence on the study of Indian religious history.

62 Woodroffe, *Principles of Tantra* 1, xiii, xvi.

63 E.g., ibid., lxxi; Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta*, 106. In the latter reference, we find a rebuttal of an article by Moriz Winternitz in the *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift* from 1916, which likened *sādhanā* to magic. Woodroffe concluded that the "mind which takes these views is like that of the Protestant who called the Catholic Mass 'Hocus Pocus'," and that the "learned Professor has also evidently no liking for 'Occultism' and 'India-faddists' (Indiensschwarmern). But the former exists whether we like its facts or not."

64 Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta*, 61–62. Original emphasis.

8 Tantra and the Comparative Study of Religions

As the preceding section has shown, the historical dimension of the *tantraśāstra* of Woodroffe and his Indian collaborators was determined by a religious traditionalism that would inspire academic scholars of religion well into the second half of the twentieth century. These included authors such as Sylvain Lévi, Paul Masson-Oursel, Walter Evans-Wentz, Heinrich Zimmer, Mircea Eliade, Carl Gustav Jung, Lilian Silburn, or Agehananda Bharati. As diverse as these authors were, they heavily relied on the Woodroffe/Avalon writings and continued his approach to Tantra in a similar vein.[65] The result was, in the words of Hugh Urban, a veritable "Tantrocentrism" at the heart of the history of religion.[66] Much of this interest in Tantra was due to what Jeffrey Kripal called the "countercultural echoes of contemporary Tantric Studies,"[67] an aspect that leads us to the second large group of recipients: esotericists. Beginning with the exchange within the pages of *The Theosophist* that has been the starting point of this article, Theosophists and other esotericists rapidly became fascinated with the topic of Tantra, and especially with its Yogic aspects. Later esotericists such as Julius Evola, Israel Regardie, Gerald J. Yorke, or Kenneth Grant heavily relied on Woodroffe's/Avalon's work and, in the case of Evola, corresponded with him.[68] Notions such as "Left-Hand Path" (i.e., *vāmācara*) Tantra or a "Yoga of Power" are omnipresent in occultist contexts ever since.[69] The Eranos meetings exemplify that the borders between these esoteric and academic contexts were not

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65 Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 28.

66 Urban, *Tantra*, 165.

67 Jeffrey J. Kripal, "Remembering Ourselves: On Some Countercultural Echoes of Contemporary Tantric Studies," *Religions of South Asia* 1, no. 1 (2007).

68 See, e.g., the reference in John Woodroffe, *Is India Civilized? Essays on Indian Culture* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1918), vi, were an article by Evola in *Il Nuovo Paese* is quoted, according to which the Tantric system "offers many suggestions to the West in virtue of its accentuation of Will and Power." Cf. Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta*, 434.

69 Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 140–161; Henrik Bogdan, "Challenging the Morals of Western Society: The Use of Ritualized Sex in Contemporary Occultism," *The Pomegranate* 8, no. 2 (2006); Gordan Djurdjevic, "The Great Beast as a Tantric Hero: The Role of Yoga and Tantra in Aleister Crowley's Magick," in *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, ed. Henrik Bogdan and Martin P. Starr (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Kennet Granholm, "The Serpent Rises in the West: Positive Orientalism and Reinterpretation of Tantra in the Western Left-Hand Path," in *Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond*, ed. István Keul, Religion and Society (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

only very fluid, but often non-existent.[70] There, scholars such as Eliade, Jung, or Jakob Wilhelm Hauer discussed the topics of Tantra and Yoga and further developed ideas that had emerged in the very context that has been the subject of this article.[71]

Of course, Woodroffe was not the only example of a Westerner that engaged with learned Indians. Evans-Wentz is another prominent example with close ties to the Theosophical Society, who also befriended Woodroffe and collaborated with him.[72] Ananda Coomaraswamy, of Ceylonese descent but raised in England, is especially worth mentioning in the present context because of his relevance for Traditionalism and his involvement with the milieu around Woodroffe.[73] Indeed, there are rumours that Coomaraswamy had received direct support from Śivacandra, whom he reportedly met in Woodroffe's house together with the art historian Ernest Binfield Havell.[74] The claim of Śivacandra's influence on him still awaits clarification, but it appears to be evident that Coomaraswamy frequented the same circles as Woodroffe.[75] In any case, we do find in Coomaraswamy's writings the idea of a universal mysticism that is expressed in the "Tantric Doctrine" as well as in those of Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart.[76]

Among those scholars who were immediately influenced by such traditionalist and perennialist conceptions, Eliade is certainly and outstanding example. Not surprisingly, he focused on the aspects of *sādhanā* and Yoga, confirming and further elucidating the aspects that had been highlighted by Woodroffe/Avalon.[77] These included the world-affirming and "anti-speculative" attitude of Tantra, but also the "six-plus-one" chakra system that had been established as the standard thanks for the Woodroffe/Avalon books.[78] It is of special interest to observe that these ideas were linked by Eliade to a universal "occultism"

70 Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).
71 E.g. the respective aspects in Urban, *Tantra*, 165–202; cf. Hugh B. Urban, *The Power of Tantra: Religion, Sexuality, and the Politics of South Asian Studies* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).
72 Woodroffe wrote a foreword to his famous *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1927).
73 Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 34–36, 51–53.
74 Pāl, *Tantrācārya*, 105–106; Rāy, *Bhārater Sādhak* 11, 175–176.
75 Taylor, *Woodroffe*, 67, 104–105.
76 Ananda Coomaraswamy, "The Tantric Doctrine of Divine Beauty," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 19, no. 2 (1938).
77 Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), 200–273.
78 Eliade, *Yoga*, 241–243. Cf. White, *Kiss*, 220–229; Taylor, *Woodroffe*, 171; Gavin D. Flood, *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 158.

whose ancient roots were burgeoning again in modern times. In his study of *Occultism* from 1976, he wrote:

> . . .contemporary scholarship has disclosed the consistent religious meaning and the cultural function of a great number of occult practices, beliefs, and theories, recorded in many civilizations, European and non-European alike, and *at all levels of culture,* from folk rituals-such as magic and witchcraft-to the most learned and elaborate secret techniques and esoteric speculations: alchemy, Yoga, Tantrism, Gnosticism, Renaissance Hermeticism, and secret societies and Masonic lodges of the Enlightenment period.[79]

This exemplifies how a contemporary reader of academic and esoteric works about Tantra would encounter very similar ideas about its universalistic application, reflected by a traditionalist or perennialist historiography and phenomenology. The same can be said about the practice of Tantra and its parallels, if not identity, with Western scientific concepts. For instance, in the 1970s, the occultist author Israel Regardie took up Woodroffe's/Avalon's discussion, mainly through the œuvre of Jung, of Tantra and Yoga as psychological systems of magical self-cultivation. In his *The Middle Pillar* of 1970, Regardie declared that the "psychologies of the past may be summarised by the use of the words Yoga and Magic." Their common techniques were based on a non-dualist ontology:

> Analytical Psychology and Magic comprise in my estimation two halves or aspects of a single technical system. Just as the body and mind are not two separate units, but are simply the dual manifestations of an interior dynamic "something" so psychology and Magic comprise similarly a single system whose goal is the integration of the human personality.[80]

This concern for the modern adaption of ancient theories and practices – and their identification with "occultism" of "magic" – has been a recurring theme within the sources that were discussed by now. The assumption that they grew out of a primordial religious tradition was especially espoused by esotericists in the decades around 1900, but it was also adopted by renowned academic scholars who approached the study of religion through a perennialist or phenomenological perspective.

This is not to say that there were no differences between academic and esoteric approaches to Tantra, or to Indian religious history in general. The point is that both orientalist studies and the dazzling sphere of esotericism were highly

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79 Mircea Eliade, *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 58.

80 Israel Regardie, *The Middle Pillar: A Co-Relation of the Principles of Analytical Psychology and the Elementary Techniques of Magic* (Saint Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1970), 15–16.

heterogeneous fields that shared interests, methodologies, organisations, and individual protagonists. Both developed against the background of late eighteenth-century debates about the origin of religion and the ground-breaking philological discoveries that enabled them. Both increasingly turned to the "Light of the East," recognising the antiquity of the language and concepts that they apparently shared with "Western" traditions. And both, in different fashions, debated the demarcations between religion, science, and philosophy. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Theosophists became one of the most active forces behind the study of Indian traditions, producing countless translations, editions, and studies, many of which are still being used today. Moreover, they provided learned Indians with a platform to communicate with a vast readership, thus contributing to the emancipation of subaltern voices that had not been able to use such channels before.[81] The reformist thrust and commitment to educational and national sovereignty that was expressed by many Theosophists contributed to this. A clearly visible result of this was the profound transformation of Theosophical ideas *by* Indians, a process that deserves further attention in future research.[82] As the writings of Woodroffe/Avalon exemplify, a look at the underlying exchanges reveals a complex tangle that can only be fully comprehended from a global perspective. In the present context, these exchanges mainly concern the relationship between religion and science, and it were Theosophists and other esotericists who most vocally represented the attempt to cross the boundaries between them.[83]

This was one of several structural analogies, themselves the outcome of exchanges since the early nineteenth century, between "Western esoteric" and Indian reformist (or "orthodox") contexts. Tantra would emerge as a central identity marker in this discourse, and it was largely thanks to the Indian pandits and their ally Woodroffe that it became recognised as a major subject of serious research. In *Shakti and Shakta*, Woodroffe himself acknowledged this

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81 This was not without ambivalences, as Orientalist notions were part and parcel of Theosophical approaches to "India," which, after all, took place within a colonial context. For a discussion, see, e.g., Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold*, 177–207; Gauri Viswanathan, "The Ordinary Business of Occultism," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 1 (2000).

82 See the recent volume *Theosophy Across Boundaries*: Transcultural and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Modern Esoteric Movement, edited by Hans Martin Krämer and Julian Strube (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020). Also see the contributions to Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss, eds., *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah, and the Transformation of Traditions*, The Goldstein-Goren Library of Jewish Thought (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016).

83 Michael Bergunder, "'Religion' and 'Science' Within a Global Religious History," *Aries* 16, no. 1 (2016).

ongoing change in scholarly attitude. After his severe attacks on the ignorance of "the Orientalist and Missionary," he could observe how some orientalists came to appreciate the values of Tantra:

> As M. Masson-Oursel so well puts it (Esquisse d'une histoire de la philosophie indienne, p. 257) 'Dans le tantrisme triomphent une conception immanentiste de l'intelligibilité, l'esprit s'assigne pour but, non de se laisser vivre mais de se créer une vie digne de lui, une existence omnisciente omnipotente, qu'il maitrisera parce qu'il en sera auteur' (by Sādhanā).[84]

A look at Masson-Oursel's study shows that his understanding of Tantra was informed by none other than the writings of Arthur Avalon and Woodroffe.[85] Effectively, Woodroffe was thus citing himself, providing an impressive example of his growing influence on how the learned world viewed the *tantraśāstra*. This influence was the outcome of the efforts of a British judge as much as those of a Bengali guru, his learned disciples, and the Western esotericists they first reached out to in order to praise the value of a profound philosophical and scientific tradition that should revive the ancient greatness of India.

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84 Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta*, 325: "As M. Masson-Oursel so well puts it (Esquisse dune histoire de la philosophie indienne, p. 257) 'In tantrism, an immanentist conception of intelligibility triumphs, the spirit sets as its goal, not to live passively but to create a dignified live by itself, an omniscient, omnipotent existence, which it will master because it will be its author' (by Sādhanā)."

85 Paul Masson-Oursel, *Esquisse d'une histoire de la philosophie indienne* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1923), 232, 82. Listed are, "among the numerous publications" Avalon and Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power*, *Shakti and Shakta*, *Tantrik Texts*, *Principles of Tantra*, *The Great Liberation*, *Anandalahari*, *Mahimnastava*, *Hymns to the Goddess*, and the volumes *Reality* and *Power as Life* of *The World as Power*.

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Jens Schlieter

A Common Core of Theosophy in Celtic Myth, Yoga, and Tibetan Buddhism: Walter Y. Evans-Wentz and the Comparative Study of Religion

Imgination is the greatest of magicians.
(John Woodroffe, Foreword, *Tibetan Book of the Dead*)

Abstract: The contribution will discuss the impact of American Theosophist Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz (1878–1965) on the emerging "science of religion." Evans-Wentz first pursued Celtic studies, concluding in his The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries. Here, in line with Theosophical doctrines and Psychical Research, he claimed a "Fairyland" as "a supernormal state of consciousness into which men and women may enter temporarily in dreams, trances, and in various ecstatic states." "Fairies" are nothing less than the "intelligent forces now recognized by psychical researchers." Already in his early work, he drew freely on various other religious traditions in comparative perspective, aiming to corroborate evidence that the idea of rebirth has been advanced as a "common core" of the earliest strand of esoteric traditions. Later, he became attracted to Indian Yoga traditions, and, after periods of intensive practice and study in India, published a translation and commentary of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1927). Being the first translation into a Western language, this work was a ground-breaking contribution, yet loaded with Theosophical ideas projected into Tibetan Buddhism. An esoteric reading of the *Book*, Evans-Wentz argued, offers an almost scientific proof of reincarnation, but also a theory of karmic hallucinations that helped to explain cultural variants of after-death imagery. However, even though Evans-Wentz did offer an array of comparative remarks, he never advanced a methodology or system of religious thought, ritual, or a history of religion that overcomes the speculative assumptions of Theosophy. Therefore, the contribution argues that the innovative aspect of Evans-Wentz' studies should be seen in his appreciation of informants belonging to the respective traditions, but also in being a catalyzer for the emerging field of the study of esoteric traditions of Tibetan Buddhism.

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1 Introduction

Western occultism and esotericism were, according to the guiding hypothesis of the conference, one of the fertile grounds that nourished an academic interest in comparative religion. As such, several scholars of the Occult in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were – directly or indirectly – involved in the emergence of "comparative religion," or *Religionswissenschaft*, as an academic discipline. In this line, the approach of Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz (1878–1965) will be in the focus of this contribution. Although his books have been popular for almost a century now, his impact on the comparative study of religion has never been made the topic of an extensive study. The same holds true for studies of the history of the Theosophical movement,[1] or those dealing with the Western reception of Buddhism, and even in historiographies of the academic study of Buddhism, he is hardly ever discussed to a greater extent. As will be argued below, the reason for this negligence is the idiosyncratic, unconventional nature of Evans-Wentz' work. For some Theosophists, his interest in Celtic literature, Tibetan Buddhism, and Neo-Hinduism was, I assume, probably too nonpartisan, while Tibetologists were soon dissatisfied with his inaccurate translation and esoteric commentaries. For proponents of the academic discipline of comparative religion, however, though they made extensive use of his works, the absence of attempts to systematize the material, in combination with his highly speculative thoughts on the common heritage of Occidental and Oriental esotericism, was seemingly the most substantial impediment – even for scholars in the tradition of the phenomenology of religion.

So far, contributions on Evans-Wentz focused almost exclusively on his "pioneer role" in the study of Tibetan Buddhism in general, and Buddhist Tantrism such as the teachings of the liberation while in the Bar-do of the so called *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* in particular. This pioneer role has best been summarized by John Strong. Referring to the mid-1960, he comments that Tibet, at that time, "was still an academic terra incognita," and he continues: "as I sometimes joke – not completely accurately – to the students in my Tibetan religions class: 'when I was in college, there were only four books in English in Tibetan Buddhism – and they were all written by a single wide-eyed theosophist, W.Y. Evans-Wentz.'"[2] Even critics of his translations such as John M. Reynolds

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1 For example, there is no mention of Evans-Wentz in Olav Hammer, Mikael Rothstein, eds., *Handbook of the Theosophical Current* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). For helpful comments especially in regard to Theosophy, I would like to thank Yves Mühlematter and Friedemann Rimbach-Sator.

2 John Strong, "Tensions in the Field of Religious and Buddhist Studies", in *Teaching Buddhism: New Insights on Understanding and Presenting the Traditions*, ed. Todd Lewis and

acknowledge his pioneering role for the study of Nyingmapa and Kagyudpa literature.[3] In this respect, extant research, most importantly by Reynolds and Donald Lopez, has for the most part been dealing with the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and the idiosyncrasies of Evans-Wentz' Theosophical interpretation of Tibetan Buddhism. In addition, Evans-Wentz' biography has been studied. Actually, his life may serve as a significant example of a transcultural and transcontinental spiritual quest that led him to several countries and various encounters with remarkable figures of Asian spirituality. Still missing, though, is a work that analyzes his scholarly approach and evaluates his general contribution to the study of religion. Equally absent is a full bibliography of his contributions. Evans-Wentz' most significant books, still widely read today, were translations and studies of Tibetan Buddhism. Three of them emerged from a joint collaboration with an Indo-Tibetan scholar and translator, Lama Kazi-Dawa Samdup. His first book in this field was the ground-breaking translation *The Tibetan Book of the Dead or the After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, according to Lāma Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering* (1927, Oxford University Press; German edition 1935). Only one year later, in 1928, Evans-Wentz published Tibet's *Great Yogī Milarepa*. In 1935, the study *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines, or, Seven Books of Wisdom of the Great Path* appeared, and finally, the last book on Tibetan Buddhism, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* (1954). The Tibetan tetralogy is framed by two other publications, completing the list of Evans-Wentz' book-length treatises: *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911), and *Cuchama and Sacred Mountains* (1963; posthumous 1981). In addition, he published a number of articles in Theosophical and Neo-Buddhist journals, but these seemingly attracted much less attention. The relatively poor state of research on Evans-Wentz – one should note in this context that the Oxford University praised his work with an honorary degree (Doctor of Science) in Comparative Religion,[4] and that Stanford University has still a "Walter Y. Evans-Wentz Professor" in the Department of Religious Studies[5]– may nevertheless not

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Gary DeAngelis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), ix–xi, ix–x; Conze, in "Thirty Years": "The Tantra has always been the step-child of Buddhist studies. By 1940 W. Y. Evans-Wentz's classical editions of Kazi Dawa-Samdu p's translations were almost the only sources of intelligible information to which the English-speaking reader could turn" (23).

3 John Myrdhin Reynolds, *Self-Liberation through Seeing with Naked Awareness* (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1989), 71.

4 Cf. Ken Winkler, *Pilgrim of the Clear Light: The Biography of W.Y. Evans-Wentz*, 2nd ed. (1982 Middletown: Booksmango, 2013), 111.

5 The "Walter Y. Evans-Wentz Professor of Oriental Philosophy, Religion, and Ethics" was created in 1983 with funds of Evans-Wentz.

be accidental. As a matter of fact, his contributions to the emerging field of comparative religion have been fueled by strong spiritualist and esoteric motives, combined with an ardent spiritual quest that more often than not interferes with the material treated in his studies. Nevertheless, as shall be shown, his contributions had a considerable impact. Evans-Wentz was one of the first Western scholars who fully acknowledged autochthonous scholarship. He collaborated with indigenous teachers and, which was at the time not a common practice, mentioned them in his works. Moreover, his broad knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism and Yoga, but also Celtic, Christian, Gnostic, and Egyptian traditions enabled him to compare religious ideas and practices, accompanied by insights emerging from various encounters with protagonists of the respective traditions. Finally, his use of the generic concept of "books of dead" and the accompanying transcultural perspective of afterlife visions had a significant effect on the configuration of modern discourse of comparative mysticism, the analytic psychology of C.G. Jung,[6] and the broadly shared assumption of a transcultural prevalence of near-death experiences. To summarize, I will try to describe Evans-Wentz's work with a special focus on his way of "doing comparative religion."

Before moving on to this aspect, I shall start with a short biography of Walter Y. Evans-Wentz. For this purpose, I will rely on the autobiography by Ken Winkler, *Pilgrim of the Clear Light* (1982), and I will confine myself to aspects relevant for understanding his view of religion. Evans-Wentz was born on February 2, 1878 in Trenton, New Jersey, but moved with his family to Florida and California. His father was a German, his mother of English origin.[7] Winkler, Guy and Lopez hold that his parents were members of the Baptist Church;[8] other sources, however, seem to suggest that he was raised as a Unitarian in the tradition of Ralph Waldo Emerson.[9] But all conform that already his parents broke with organized church and favored spiritualism and freethinking. Already as a teen, he read Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*. Interested in spiritual experiences from early on, he was highly

6 On the relation to Jung, see William McGuire, "Jung, Evans-Wentz and various other Gurus," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 48 (2003), 433–445. For C. G. Jung, the *Book* was of crucial importance, because to him the bardo-experiences reveal the reality of the "archetypes."

7 Winkler, *Pilgrim*, 19–20.

8 Cf. David Guy, "The Hermit Who Owned His Mountain: A Profile of W.Y. Evans-Wentz" *Tricycle* 1997, accessed August 10, 2018, https://tricycle.org/magazine/hermit-who-owned-his-mountain; Donald S. Jr. Lopez, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: A Biography* (Oxford & Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 22.

9 Cf. Iván Kovács, "The Tibetan Tetralogy of W. Y. Evans-Wentz: A Retrospective Assessment: Part One," *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Winter 2015, 15–33; 16.

attracted by books of "occult philosophy"[10] by protagonists of the Theosophical Society, including Alfred P. Sinnett (1840–1921), whose book *Esoteric Buddhism* promoted not only the rebirth doctrine, but also the existence of "Mahatmas" that had somehow communicated esoteric wisdom to Sinnett. At the age of 22, he joined his father in being a successful real estate developer. Though he never left this business which offered him a considerable income, his spiritual search directed him to Loma Land, the American headquarters of the "Theosophical Society" at Point Loma, San Diego. After the death of William Q. Judge, this branch of the society had been headed by Katherine Tingley. Evans-Wentz "joined the American Section of the Theosophical Society in 1901 [. . . and] received a diploma from the Raja-Yoga School and Theosophical University in 1903."[11] However, he did not stay, but moved on. In 1906, he graduated from the newly-established Stanford University in English Literature. As it seems, it was William James (visiting professor at Stanford) and William Butler Yeats who raised in him further interest in spiritualist thought. He got increasingly immersed in the study of religious experience, building on "Psychical research" and the conviction of reincarnation, but also on James' idea of a pan-psychic reality permeating human existence. Evans-Wentz decided to continue research on the Celtic influences on English literature in Europe. Studying with various well-known scholars in Oxford and Rennes, he earned a "docteur ès lettre" in 1909 from the University of Rennes with a work on Celtic folklore. In 1910, he graduated with a BSc in Anthropology from Oxford University, and published his results in 1911. After his graduation, however, he did not return to the USA, but travelled for the next six years extensively through Greece, Turkey, and stayed for three years in Egypt, studying esoteric and occult literature, but also ancient Egyptian sources, Islamic faith, or Coptic-Gnostic beliefs and practices. These studies led him to believe that early Christianity harbored still ideas of "metempsychosis." Over the years, he seemed to have developed a strong dissatisfaction with Catholicism, and followed the "Christ myth theory," that is, the belief in Christ as a deity preceded the elaboration of the "historical Jesus," if not being a "reincarnation" of a deity, which was a common belief of various Theosophists.[12] In 1917, he moved on to Ceylon, meeting Adyar Theosophists such as Annie Besant, Theravāda Buddhists, and studying Indian traditions. In 1919, he visited the north of India, being now increasingly attracted to the study of Yoga practice

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10 Cf. Winkler, *Pilgrim*, 29.

11 Lopez, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead. A Biography*, 22.

12 W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-faith in Celtic Countries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), 360.

and philosophy.[13] Most importantly, in 1919 he met Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup, an ethnically Tibetan Sikkimese, who had already served as a translator/interpreter to Alexandra David-Néel and John Woodroffe. Though Evans-Wentz and Dawa Samdup collaborated only for three years, terminated by the death of the latter (1922), Evans-Wentz could make use of Dawa Samdup's translations, publishing them in the subsequent years. As has been variously stressed, despite of Evans-Wentz' claim to have been a "chela," an initiated follower of his "guru" Dawa Samdup, the latter obviously did not serve as a personal Guru.[14] Evans-Wentz did not receive "secret teachings" of him. As Reynolds remarks, it was almost the opposite, namely, that Evans-Wentz "occasionally attempted to foster his own views and interpretations on the Lama, as was the case, for example, with his Theosophical interpretation of reincarnation."[15]

As said, Evans-Wentz was not only scholarly interested, but practiced Hatha yoga (*āsana*-s, *prāṇāyāma*). Interestingly, he never seemed to have practiced under Tibetan Buddhist guidance, for example the six Yogas of Nāropa dealt with in his works.[16] The few allusions to Buddhist practice in his autobiographical notes are somewhat metaphorical, e.g., that he practiced in solitary places "the Dharma, the Buddhist 'way of truth,'"[17] or that he considered himself "as a faithful follower" of the "Buddha, of the Prophet, of Krishna, and of all the great Teachers" without being

13 Among his gurus were, for example, Sri Yukteswar Giri and Swami Syamananda Brahmachary; in addition, he met various important spiritual teachers such as Paramahansa Yogānanda (1893–1952), Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), Paul Brunton, Shri Ramana Maharishi, Sri Krishna Prem (i.e. Ronald H. Nixon, 1898–1965), Shunyata (i.e. Alfred J. E. Sorensen, 1890–1984), and Anagarika Govinda (i.e. Ernst L. Hoffmann, 1898–1985).

14 Cf., on their relationship, Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia, "Looking Beyond the Land of Rice: Kalimpong and Darjeeling as Modern Buddhist. Contact Zones for Sikkimese. Intellectual Communities," in *Transcultural Encounters in the Himalayan Borderlands: Kalimpong as a "Contact Zone,"* ed. Markus Viehbeck (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2017), 301–318.

15 Reynolds, *Self-Liberation*, 72. A prominent example for the latter can be found in Evans-Wentz claiming in the "Book" that the "late Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup was of the opinion that, despite the adverse criticisms directed against H. P. Blavatsky's works, there is adequate internal evidence in them of their author's intimate acquaintance with the higher lamaistic teachings, into which she claimed to have been initiated" (Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 7).

16 "Evans-Wentz did not practice under the guidance of a qualified Lama either the Six Yogas of Naropa or Māhamudrā or Dzogchen or any other Tibetan Buddhist practice for that matter. The only practice attested to in his diaries are Hindu" (Reynolds, *Self-Liberation*, 76).

17 Cf. Guy, *The Hermit* (n. p.).

allied formally with "any of the world religions."[18] He adapted an ascetic vegetarian lifestyle, visited ashrams, and joined groups of pilgrims. Actually, in his unpublished notes for an "Autobiography" (1920, cf. Winkler 2013), he described himself as a "world pilgrim" and spiritual seeker.[19] In the mid-1920s, Evans-Wentz returned to Oxford, working intensively on the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which was published in 1927. An immediate success, he became a well-known author in the developing field of Tibetan Buddhist studies. Constantly travelling from Europe to India, the USA, and back, he earned his income by land trade and house developing. Although Evans-Wentz had bought land in order to initiate his own ashram in India (Kasar Devi, Almora), he abandoned the plan to stay there and returned to California in 1941. There he realized his final project, namely, to settle near the mountain Cuchama (at the border to Mexico), considered sacred in the American Indian tradition, and dealt with in his final monography on sacred mountains. From this final work, we may only quote here how Evans-Wentz saw his life-project retrospectively: "If there were no Otherworld, or no extra-terrestrial state of consciousness, then, indeed, there would be for man no after-death existence; and all the teachings of the Great Sages and Seers throughout the ages would be invalid. But the writer, after more than fifty years of research in the historic faiths of mankind and in matters yogic and psychic [. . .], here places on record his own conviction that there is an Otherworld."[20] In 1965, he died without ever having considered founding a family to be an option.

2 Evans-Wentz's Life-Long Occupation: Theosophy, Animism, and Re-birth

Without doubt, it was the openness of Theosophy towards the comparative study of religion and psychic phenomena that encouraged Evans-Wentz to study Celtic myth, to search for Egyptian wisdom, and to proceed later to Yoga and Tibetan Buddhism. "Theosophical mythology singled out Egypt and later India and Tibet as the places where the perennial truths were to be found unadulterated. In particular, this was where the Masters resided."[21] However, the depiction of Tibet in

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18 Evans-Wentz, "Some Notes for an Autobiography", Special Collection, Stanford University Libraries, 16.

19 Cf. Winkler, *Pilgrim*, 34; Evans-Wentz, "Some Notes for an Autobiography", 3.

20 Walter Y. Evans-Wentz, *Cuchama and Sacred Mountains* (Ohio University Press: Athens, 1989), 82.

21 Hammer, Rothstein, *Handbook*, 8.

earlier works of leading Theosophists (such as Blavatsky, or Sinnett) was highly imaginative and far from being an encounter with Tibet, or a depiction of Tibetan Buddhism – to say the least.[22] In the *Fairy Faith*, Evans-Wentz sets out to prove that Celtic beliefs, as expressed in the living tradition, encompass an early strand of "world-wide animism," combined with the "doctrine of rebirth," as he says, and the existence of accessible otherworldly realms in this world.[23] Animism, Evans-Wentz holds, "forms the background of all religions in whatever stage of culture religions exist or to which they have attained by evolution [. . .]; and as far back as we can go into human origins there is some corresponding belief in a fairy or spirit realm."[24] Methodologically, Evans-Wentz describes himself as an "anthropologist" in the tradition of E.B. Tylor or Frazer,[25] but also as applying psychology in tradition of William McDougall ("Social Psychology") and William James.[26] Other terms Evans-Wentz uses for describing his method are "comparative folk-lore,"[27] which opens up the perspective of comparison as such,[28] and, occasionally, "comparative religion." The latter, in his understanding, allows him to trace the origin of the Celtic Otherworld belief – summing up "available facts of comparative religion, philosophy, and myth" – to "a prehistoric epoch when there was a common ancestral stock for the Mediterranean and pan-Celtic cultures."[29] In addition

22 Cf. Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 133–134.
23 Cf. Winkler, *Pilgrim*, 44–48.
24 Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 227.
25 Cf. on Tylor's evolutionary theory, Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 59–60; on the relationship to Tylor, see Bryan J. Cuevas, *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 218.
26 Cf. Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, xii, 282, 484, 505.
27 Here, the dominant influence of Sir John Rhys (1840–1915), Andrew Lang (1844–1912) and George William Russell (the "Irish mystic") (1867–1935) can be felt, as outlined by Friedemann Rimbach-Sator, "'Esoteric Fairy Faith.' The Theosophical Background of Walter Y. Evans-Wentz's The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries" (master's thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2018), 6, 22.
28 Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 281, holds that "comparative folk-lore" shows that in regard to the Fairy-Faith and its elements – relating to the "smallness of fairies, to changelings, to witchcraft and magic, to exorcisms, to taboos, and to food-sacrifice," "the beliefs composing it find their parallels the world over, [. . .] not only in Celtic countries, but in Central Australia, throughout Polynesia, in Africa, among American Red Men, in Asia generally, in Southern, Western, and Northern Europe, and, in fact, wherever civilized and primitive men hold religious beliefs."
29 Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 396.

to the basis of religion in "animism," he is convinced that a "re-birth doctrine" is expressed in various early traditions such as in certain Alexandrian Christians, Gnostic sects, and Indian traditions.[30] Most significant, in this respect, are the chapters VII on "The Celtic Doctrine of Re-Birth," and the concluding chapter XII, "The Celtic Doctrine of Re-Birth and Otherworld Scientifically Examined."[31] As evidence for Celtic re-birth doctrines, he adduces, for example, the "changeling creed," "soul-abductions," etc., being evidence to "a greatly corrupted folk-memory of an ancient re-birth doctrine: the living are taken to the dead or the fairies and then sent back again."[32] In broad strokes, he compares Celtic myths with initiation rites of Egyptian mystery cults, exhibiting a belief of "spiritual resurrection" and "re-birth into real life."[33] Most central for his views is the definition of "death," which "is but a going to that Otherworld from this world, and Birth a coming back again, and Buddha announced it as his mission to teach men the way to be delivered out of this eternal cycle of existence."[34] The concept of "re-birth," in other words, is closely linked to the Theosophical idea of a "felicitous" rebirth into human life, and enabled by this, the possibility lays open to progress into a divine being that will enjoy its otherworldly existence after-death – a general idea that Evans-Wentz sees in Celtic faith and, already in view, the "Nirvana of Buddhism."[35] Other ideas that I shall only mention in passing are his conviction that the Celtic doctrine of re-birth attests that there is a spiritual (or "vitalistic") evolution in the human domain towards perfection (and which includes "Darwinism" as only its lowest form).[36] This evolution is now scientifically corroborated in Psychical Research of

30 Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 362.

31 Evans-Wentz refers to Alfred Nutt's *Happy Otherworld and the Celtic Doctrine of Re-birth* (1897), in which the general thesis of a scientific "comparative mythology" proving the doctrine to be common among Celts, Greeks, and Hindus had already been established (cf. Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 358).

32 Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 252. Other evidence pertains to Celtic "heroes" such as "Cuchulainn and Arthur," who were, in his view, "considered reincarnate sun-divinities," so that, "as a sun-god, Arthur is like Osiris, the Great Being, who [. . .] enters daily the underworld or Hades to battle against the demons and forces of evil, even as Tuatha De Danann battled against the Fomors" (Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 310; cf., on Osiris, 321).

33 Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 313.

34 Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 358–359.

35 "It seems clear that the circle of Gwynvyd finds its parallel in the Nirvana of Buddhism, being, like it, a state of absolute knowledge and felicity in which man becomes a divine being, a veritable god" (Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 366).

36 "Scientifically speaking," Evans-Wentz holds, "the ancient Celtic Doctrine of Re-birth represented for the priestly and bardic initiates an exposition of the complete cycle of human evolution," that is "Darwinism," and, in addition, a theory of "man's own evolution as a spiritual

spiritualist phenomena.[37] To substantiate this claim, Evans-Wentz discusses in the concluding chapter extensively F. Myers' "subliminal self,"[38] or W. James' "subconscious self."[39] It should be worth noting that both, Myers and James, were early members of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), founded in 1882. In this line, he believes in the pre- and post-existence of an "indestructible" soul, or personal consciousness declared to be an emanation of a larger consciousness filtered into the individual brain. Expressing rather common convictions of Spiritualists and certain psychologists of the late 19th century, he draws on the metaphor of a "reservoir" of consciousness (as used by F. Myers, George Mead, among others): "We may regard this psychical power as like a vast reservoir of consciousness ever trying to force itself through matter."[40] The imagery finally ends in a spiritualist utopia that the vast reservoir will overflow its banks and transform the fully evolved man into the "subconsciousness."[41] In the concluding chapter, Evans-Wentz aims to offer a "scientific explanation" of the validity of Celtic rebirth beliefs. However, this explanation consists merely in stating that modern psychical research has been able to demonstrate "support" for the existence of "veridical hallucinations," supernatural "noises," visions, dreams, trance states, and "spirit-possession." In this vein, he adduces evidence of psychology that attests the existence of a "'supernatural' lapse of time"[42] or that states of consciousness exist without any relation to the individual. However, these assumptions of a trans-individual nature of (reincarnating) consciousness often rather vaguely refer to an "x-quantity" that indicates the "noumenal world" of consciousness, and spirits as higher "explanation" for things that happen in the phenomenal world.[43]

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being both apart from and in a physical body, on his road to the perfection which comes from knowing completely the earth-plane of existence" (Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 365).

37 For Evans-Wentz, it is "self-evident" that the "Celtic Doctrine of Re-birth" is a "direct and complete confirmation of the Psychological Theory of the nature and origin of the belief in fairies," and there is "much evidence to be derived from a study of states of consciousness, e. g. dreams, somnambulism, trance, crystal-gazing, changed personality, subconsciousness" (Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 383).

38 Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 465–490. The "subliminal self" is still a category of his later works, cf., e.g., Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book*, 31, 97; Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga*, 5.

39 Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 506.

40 Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 498, cf. 501.

41 Cf. Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 498.

42 Cf. Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 459–471; especially the cases of the "life review" in the drowning are noteworthy here, cf. Jens Schlieter, *What is it like to be Dead: Near-death Experiences, Christianity, and the Occult* (New York: Oxford University Press 2018), 160.

43 Cf. Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 490–493.

In sum, the method and theory that governs *Fairy-Faith* joins psychical research of the time in assuming that a theoretical explanation may simply consist of a metaphysical theory of the pre- and post-existence of "consciousness," which is attested by religious discourse, a vitalistic interpretation of Darwinism, and latest experimentation with paranormal phenomena. In contrast to Theosophical doctrines that reign, as Rimbach-Sator has shown, almost all of the book's background assumptions,[44] Psychical Research is far more prominently quoted. Only few passages openly express the necessity to use Theosophical terminology (e.g., the "astral body," or the "astral plane"[45]), disguising on the surface Evans-Wentz 's use of an elaborate Theosophical framework, whose specific position within Theosophy more broadly shall not discussed here. Methodologically, however, Evans-Wentz does not reflect explicitly on how a comparison of different religious traditions, of their ideas, or of concepts should be done. Instead, he directly identifies spiritual teachers of various traditions as advanced beings destined to teach the world. Obviously intrigued by the Theosophical idea that "comparative folk-lore" as such will show the ubiquity of otherworld narratives, he outlines a reincarnation process that will include a happy destiny in the beyond, and finally, perfection. The truth of Fairy tales, he holds, will in the not too distant future be proven by (Psychical) science.

3 Evans-Wentz' Tibetan Tetralogy

Without question, Evans-Wentz publication of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* in 1927, given his broad reception and overwhelming success (more than 500′000 copies sold in English alone), was his most outstanding achievement. Its effect and impact on the Western view of Tibetan Buddhism in general, and of "transcultural" after-death experiences in particular, were tremendous. In regard to the accuracy of Evans-Wentz's depiction of Tibetan Buddhism, however, we can only restate what Donald Lopez observed, namely, that for the modern

44 Rimbach-Sator, *Esoteric Fairy Faith*, 41, is able to show Theosophy present at the very basis of Evans-Wentz's interpretation: "Concerning the lower fairies, the esoteric fairy faith reflects the Theosophical debate on elementals that appear in séances and dwell in the same realm of the recently departed: Kama Loca. This purgatory realm is the subjective pre-state of the positive dwelling of the immortal Monad until reincarnation: Devachan. This reveals fairyland as the Theosophical afterlife state Kama Loca / Devachan" – in short: "Theosophical theory in a Celtic light."

45 Cf. Evans-Wentz, *Fairy-Faith*, 29, 167–171.

scholar of Tibetan Buddhism Evans-Wentz's books are "fraught with problems: errors in translation, inaccurate dates, misattributions of authorship, misstatements of fact, unjustified flights of interpretation."[46] Relying on the essential translation work of Dawa Samdup – Evans-Wentz never learnt Tibetan – he compiled various "treasure" texts that belong to a class of secret Tantra teachings on how to behave in the after-death state (*bar do*). These texts were in Tibet designated as *bar do thos grol*, "Liberation through hearing in the Intermediate State." In its first edition, the *Book* contained a "Preface" by Evans-Wentz and a foreword "Science of Death" by Sir John Woodroffe. The third edition of 1957 added a "Psychological Commentary" by C. G. Jung, that had been prepared for the German edition (1935), and an "Introductory Foreword" by Lama Anagarika Govinda.

I will only shortly summarize the teachings of the *Book* as portrayed by Evans-Wentz in 1927. For this purpose, it is not necessary to discuss in detail if the translation is appropriate judged by present day knowledge of Tibetan Buddhist teachings. Although the Tibetan historical and ritual context of these teachings was mentioned by Evans-Wentz, it was put in the background in favor of presenting the *Book* as "scientific, psychological, and humanistic."[47] Evans-Wentz holds it to be scientific, based on a transcultural dimension of "Symbol-codes" which can also be found, for example, in the "Egyptian Book of the Dead," Christian *ars moriendi*, or Greek mythology. These "symbol-codes" now prepare the ground for an esoteric-occult reading of otherworldly journeys. Obviously, Evans-Wentz could easily adapt the title "Book of the Dead," a title that was well established for the Egyptian context.[48] "As a mystic manual for guidance through the Otherworld of many illusions and realms, whose frontiers are death and birth, it resembles *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* sufficiently to suggest some ultimate cultural relationship between the two," he says.[49] Evans-Wentz holds that the *Book* is an outstanding example for the "Art of Dying," aiming to teach the dying to be clear-minded and calm when death approaches. The Tibetan art of dying encompasses, he explains, alluding to Theosophical imagery, the art "of

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46 Donald Lopez, "Foreword to Evans-Wentz," *The Tibetan Book*, G.

47 Michael Nahm, "The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Its History and Controversial Aspects of Its Contents." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 2011, 29 (3): 373–398, 375.

48 In 1842, it had been introduced by Prussian Egyptologist Karl R. Lepsius in his *Das Todtenbuch der Ägypter* ("Egyptian Book of the Dead"). It took only some years before becoming in all European languages the common designation for the whole genre of Egyptian hieroglyphic funerary texts portraying the deceased's journey to the underworld (cf. Lopez, *Biography*, 101). Egyptian afterlife conceptions were highly important to Western occultism and Esotericism, e.g., for H. P. Blavatsky.

49 Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book*, 2.

going out from the body, or of transferring the consciousness from the earth-plane to the after-death plane" is, he adds, known as *Pho-wa* and still practiced in Tibet.[50] In his first introduction to the teachings of the *Book*, Evans-Wentz describes it as a "mystic manual for guidance through the Otherword,"[51] and holds that spiritually advanced encounter death with "solemn joyousness."[52] It presupposes an accompanying 'spiritual friend' reading passages aloud to the dying, or, more precisely, to the deceased consciousness that is imagined to be still around – outside of his former body. This manual, he says, describes how the "principle of consciousness" of the deceased enters a "trance-state" at the moment of death. This is the first after-death state of three "intermediate states" (Tibetan *bar do*), which amount to a maximum of 49 days until the "consciousness" turns to its next existence. The first bardo is the "'Transitional State of the Moment of Death', wherein dawns the Clear Light." For the one who is not able to stay focused on the "Clear Light" (Tib. *'od gsal*), the second bar-do emerges, the "Transitional state [. . .] of Reality" (Tib. *chos nyid bar do*). Here, negative karma, heaped up through evil acts committed in lifetime, will produce "hallucinations": "thought-forms, having been consciously visualized and allowed to take root and grow and blossom and produce, now pass in a solemn and mighty panorama."[53] Now the deceased, becoming aware of his death, develops a desire to possess a body again. Finally, if the wandering consciousness fails to recognize reality in the second bardo, the third, the "bardo of mundane existence," will dawn, which comprises lively visions of punishment and judgment. It ends with the search for a new body. The narrator, advising the disembodied consciousness, serves, as Evans-Wentz observes, as a "guide for initiates."[54] With this comment he aims to underscore the structural similarity of the Tibetan "guide" with those described in early Mediterranean milieus of esoteric mystery cults. For Evans-Wentz, as he discloses in 1959, these claims are based on insights grounded on the "unequivocal testimony of yogins who claim to have died and re-entered the human womb consciously" – they are therefore "truly scientific and yogic."[55] Given the description of "scientific Re-birth theory" in the "Fairy-Faith," this view does not astonish.

50 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, xiv, referencing his own work, namely *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 169–170, 246–276.

51 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 2.

52 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, xvii.

53 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 29.

54 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, lxi.

55 Cf. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, v.

As said above, the *Book* vitalized visionary imaginings of "out of body experiences," which can be easily connected to Theosophical intentional practices of "astral projection," or, as quoted above, to the "art of going out of the body."[56] A somewhat astonishing fact is Evans-Wentz' choice of a King-James-Bible-style translation language. In Wentz and Samdup's translation, we read: "When the consciousness-principle getteth outside [the body, it sayeth to itself], 'Am I dead, or am I not dead?' It cannot determine. It seeth its relatives and connexions as it had been used to seeing them before. It even heareth the wailings."[57]

As an example of Evans-Wentz' method and guiding assumptions we may turn to the "judgment scene" found in the *Book*. Evans-Wentz, arguing for a close relation to ideas expressed in the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, indulges once more in historical speculations on a common origin of Tibetan Buddhist, Egyptian, Greek, and, finally, Christian judgment scenes.[58] The greater part of Christian "symbolism" is for Evans-Wentz an adaptation of Egyptian and Eastern religions. He still adheres to an inner core beyond cultural particularities. It comes as no surprise that he can present a "Buddhist" reading of the Platonic myth of Er, discovering "*karmic* record boards"[59] there, or that he identifies a symbolic common core in the "weighing" of the soul. This outlook that glosses over specific contexts shares, methodologically, convictions of cross-cultural interpretation of the "phenomenology of religion," for example, by Mircea Eliade. More specifically, Evans-Wentz rests on the belief that the doctrine of rebirth is an essential pre-Christian doctrine that remains visible in some medieval Christian teachings on the art of dying.[60] For Evans-Wentz, the *Book* could, however, add an important and decisive moment with its "psychological" theory that not only describes a commonality, but adapts the

56 Cf. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, xxxiii; 92, 100. He equates the Tibetan Tantric Buddhist concept of an "illusory body" (Tib. *sgyu lus*) with the "astral-body" of Theosophy.

57 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 98.

58 "Judgment Scenes," Evans-Wentz (*Tibetan Book*, 35) argues, are so similar "in essentials" that a common origin, "at present unknown," seems certain. And he continues: "In the Tibetan version, Dharma-Raja (Tib. *Shinje-chho-gyal)* King of the Dead [. . .], the Buddhist and Hindu Pluto, as a Judge of the Dead, corresponds to Osiris in the Egyptian version. In both versions alike there is the symbolical weighing."

59 Plato, he says (*Tibetan Book*, 36), describes in the myth of Er (*Republic*, 10th book) a similar judgment, in which "there are judges and *karmic* record-boards (affixed to the souls judged) and paths – one for the good, leading to Heaven, one for the evil, leading to Hell – and demons waiting to take the condemned souls to the place of punishment, quite as in the *Bardo Thodol*."

60 Cf. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 239–240.

teaching itself as an element of his own understanding on how religious plurality should be explained. Evans-Wentz speaks of "hallucinatory visions" in the second bardo, and uses term, "hallucinations," in his translation of the Tibetan text.[61] These "hallucinations" are triggered by karmic forces and are therefore dependent on the individual's conscious life. The *Book*, consequently, "views the problem of the after-death state as being purely a psycho-physical problem; and is, therefore, in the main, scientific. It asserts repeatedly that what the percipient on the *Bardo* plane sees is due entirely to his own mental-content; that there are no visions of gods or of demons, of heavens or of hells, other than those born of the hallucinatory *karmic* thought-forms constituting his personality."[62] Actually, in the *Fairy-Faith* he already introduced the "panoramic life review"-feature, reported by individuals of death-threatening situations such as drowning, as a perfect, "scientifically valid" device to explain paranormal memories in close-to-death (and after-death-) states. He could now argue that these extraordinary visions of one's whole life condensed in seconds are nothing less but each "seed of thought" that "*karmically* revives."[63] Building on this adaptation of the interpretation of hallucinatory effects of karma, Evans-Wentz is able to declare that, accordingly" for a Hindu, or a Moslem, or a Christian, the *Bardo* experiences would be appropriately different: the Buddhist's or the Hindu's thought-forms, as in a dream state, would give rise to corresponding visions of the deities of the Buddhist or Hindu pantheon; a Moslem's, to visions of the Moslem Paradise; a Christian's, to visions of the Christian Heaven, or an American Indian's to visions of the Happy Hunting Ground." In conclusion, "this psychology scientifically explains why devout Christians, for example, have had [. . .] visions (in a trance or dream state, or in the after-death state) of God the Father seated on a throne in the New Jerusalem, and of the Son at His side, [. . .], or of Purgatory and Hell."[64]

Evans-Wentz, however, declares his own contribution to be comments of Tibetan doctrines from a comparative religion point of view, while, at the same time, he transgresses pure comparisons by identifying the *comparanda*. In an appendix, he once again voices his "hypothetical" opinion that there is a common core in the religious traditions – for example, in Christian monasticism and its "*yoga*-like practices" that he believes to have a "direct relationship with the more ancient monastic systems such as those of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Taoism," or (as already proposed in his *Fairy Faith*), that "esoteric Christianity"

61 Cf. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 156, 167.
62 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 34.
63 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 33.
64 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 34.

was "in general accord with the old Oriental teachings touching Rebirth and *Karma*."[65] But neither a theory of direct historical dependency, nor the Theosophical theory of how such strikingly parallel development come about, is offered. Instead, Evans-Wentz alludes to the possibility that – in the same way as the Buddha merely restated what already prehistoric Buddhas had found – the Christian doctrine may build on pre-Christian doctrines, which once more reckons with a common esoteric core. However, in the later Christian development, these esoteric teachings had been transformed into Church-based exoteric teachings of an anthropomorphic deity, the singularity of Jesus, faith in a Savior, forgiveness of sins, and of a condemnation of rebirth-beliefs or spiritual evolution, etc. In regard to the latter, the spiritual evolution in higher realms, an evolutionary process that precludes rebirth in lower realms, e.g., humans as animals, Evans-Wentz' intentional isogetic reading of Tibetan Buddhism (and their non-evolutionary understanding of karma and rebirth) is obvious.[66]

In what reminds us of Max Müller's pathetic self-perception of the value of "comparative religion," Evans-Wentz argues that "the hope of all sincere researchers into comparative religion devoid of any religious bias ought always to be to accumulate such scientific data as will some day enable future generations of mankind to discover Truth itself – that Universal Truth in which all religions and all sects of all religions may ultimately recognize the Essence of Religion and the Catholicity of Faith."[67] The essential categories that Evans-Wentz applies in these contexts are the "thought-forms" of Theosophy, declared to be the ground layer visible in religious "symbolism"[68]– for example, the Christian "weighing" of souls

65 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 234.

66 Evans-Wentz (*Tibetan Book*, 42–43) holds, in line with prominent Theosophists, that the exoteric interpretation of karma may entail the human "life-flux" "very often does take re-embodiment in sub-human creatures," but in its "esoteric interpretation," according to "various philosophers, both Hindu and Buddhist, from whom the editor has received instruction," the "human life-flux to flow into the physical form of a dog, or fowl, or insect, or worm, is [. . .] held to be as impossible."

67 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 1.

68 Evans-Wentz offers no reference, but probably refers to "Thought-Forms" in their earlier meaning as, for example, outlined by Sinnett. In the A.P. Sinnett, *The Occult World*, 2nd Am. Ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1885), 129, we read: "The human brain is an exhaustless generator of the most refined quality of cosmic force out of the low, brute energy of Nature [. . .]. This is the key to the mystery of his being able to project into and materialize in the visible world the forms that his imagination has constructed out of inert cosmic matter in the invisible world. The adept does not create anything new, but only utilizes and manipulates materials which Nature has in store around him, and material which, throughout eternities, has passed through all the forms. He has but to choose the one he wants, and recall it into objective existence."

in the "bar-do," as he says – that finally prove to be "adaptations from Egyptian and Eastern religions."[69] Already in his introduction to the book, he refers to these as "symbol-codes": Although the book treats the doctrine of "rebirth" as a scientifically given fact, it occasionally departs from the "rational." This, Evans-Wentz holds, is only a superficial reading, as it is merely the outcome of "a secret international symbol-code in common use among the initiates."[70] This, of course, corresponds well, he says, with Western Occultist ideas of a "hidden symbolism" engrained in secret language. The hidden pagan dimensions in Christianity have been condemned by "uninitiated ecclesiastics," as "'Oriental imagery gone mad.'"[71] While he admits that those esoteric ideas of a hidden symbolism hold especially true for "Northern Buddhism" with its claim to possess an orally transmitted, secret (Yogic) teaching of the Buddha not in line with a literal reading of the "Southern" Pali Canon, even the parables and metaphors of the latter can be read "symbolical."[72] In short, "'Esoteric Buddhism,' as it has come to be called – rightly or wrongly – seems to depend in large measure upon 'ear-whispered' doctrines of this character, conveyed according to long-established and inviolable rule, from *guru* to *shiṣḥya* [sic], by word of mouth alone."[73]

This hermeneutic principle of hidden meanings and symbolic codes allows not only to adhere to a common esoteric core. It empowers Evans-Wentz to harmonize his reading with earlier canonical Theosophist teachings of having been "communicated" by Mahatmas of Tibet (Sinnett), or with what Helena Blavatsky had described as "her decoding of *The Stanzas of Dzyan* in the secret Senzar language."[74] In his only remark on Blavatsky in the *Book*, he defends her with an allegedly positive comment by Dawa Samdup on her intimate knowledge of "higher *lāmaistic* teachings."[75] Although Evans-Wentz does not refer to Alfred P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* in the *Book*,[76] there are clear similarities in their understanding of the secret knowledge of "esoteric Buddhism." In his work of 1885, Sinnett had offered a neo-Hinduist reading of the Buddha. A "secret knowledge, in reality, long antedated the passage through earth-life

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69 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 241.
70 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 3.
71 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 4.
72 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 5.
73 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 5.
74 Donald Lopez, Afterword to the *Tibetan Book*, 253.
75 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, 7.
76 He mentions, however, the impact Sinnett's works *Esoteric Buddhism* and *Occult World* had on him in his "Notes for an Autobiography", 18.

of Gautama Buddha. Brahminical philosophy, in ages before Buddha, embodied the identical doctrine which may now be described as Esoteric Buddhism," and "Shankaracarya" being the newly reincarnated Gautama Buddha.[77] In the same vein, Evans-Wentz declares that, despite some doctrinal differences, the "state of liberation" as conceptualized by Śaṃkara, is essentially the same as the "Buddhist void."[78] In other words, Evans-Wentz, in line with hidden "symbol codes," saw no need to correct earlier Theosophical doctrines (and never criticizes classical Theosophical depictions of "Tibetan teachings") but could express his interpretation in this established framework.

To summarize, we can see how the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* was especially acknowledged for validating claims of "astral projection" and the transmigrating soul on a transcultural basis. In its special Theosophical reading, based on a translation already inspired by Theosophy, it offered new evidence for the common core of esoteric teachings of early traditions in general, and the "scientific proof" of rebirth with the soul's near- and after-death experiences in particular. Moreover, the insights provided were taken as psychological, scientific, and experiential evidence of a "non-duality" that interpenetrates and correlates both the disembodied mind and its "experienced" environments. Gods, after-death planes of existence, etc., are neither an objective reality nor merely psychological artifacts, but do exist on a conventional level if somebody experiences them. This idea could now be used to accredit the cultural variability of heavens, hells, God, or the quality of light (or "the Light") experienced, without, however, relativizing the "experiences" themselves. Championing Theosophy, Evans-Wentz could implicitly argue that the *Book* was a perfect basis to evaluate the wisdom of the "Tibetan Masters," mediumistically received by the first generation of Theosophists, despite all disputes in respect to the formers' existence, or the latter's veracity, respectively.

In 1928, Evans-Wentz published a second book on Tibetan Buddhism, this time consisting mainly in a translation of the life-story of Milarepa, a Tibetan Buddhist mystic, poet, and Tantrist practitioner of the 11th century and one of the founding figures of the Kagyu-school, written in the 15th century by Tsangnyön

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77 Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, 3, cf. 147–150, argues: "Buddha reincarnated himself, nest after his existence as Gautama Buddha, in the person of the great teacher of whom but little is said in exoteric works of Buddhism, but without a consideration of whose life it would be impossible to get a correct conception of the position in the Eastern world of esoteric science – namely, Sankaracharya," reappearing in order to "repair certain errors in his own earlier teachings" – i.e., the problems caused by the Buddha passing esoteric knowledge into inferior castes.

78 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book*, lxxiii.

Heruka. Despite the greater fame of his first book, the book on Milarepa was his most influential in academia, used in emergent Tibetan Buddhist Studies for decades. In the introduction to the work, mainly consisting in an outline of the Tibetan context, we find only occasional allusions to Theosophy, and his comparative remarks – for example, on parallels between Gnosticism and Tibetan Buddhism of the "Kargyütpas," are for the most part very general in nature. The main focus is, again, on the common ancient rebirth doctrine, the search for "realization" and salvation – in Gnostic tradition, the "Enlightenment of Christhood"[79]– and the nature of ultimate reality: "The Un-Created, Non-Being, or Body of All-Intelligence, the Impersonal Deity of Christian Gnosticism, may be compared with the Voidness of the Mahāyānic Schools."[80] In a section on "The defense of the hermit ideal," Evans-Wentz, obviously describing his personal vision,[81] draws freely from early Buddhism, Mahāyāna, and Neo-Hinduist thought, and does not spare the reader to read of his criticism of modern life of Wall street financiers or pleasure-seekers. In all societies, we, learn, yogins emerge who look – with empathy – on their contemporaries as trapped in a net of deceptive karmic illusions. These yogins are not only true "guardians" for their peers. As "scientists" of spiritual cultivation, they serve as essential agents in the ongoing spiritual evolution of humanity;[82] their ideal being an "unselfish preparation for service to the Race."[83] As Milarepa's life bears witness, however, the Yogin (as a comparative category applied to Indian traditions, but also to Sufism, Taoism, and Gnostic Christianity) must first realize his insights in solitude, which will allow him to return as a "World-Teacher" to human society. These descriptions prepare the ground for the final argument of the introduction in which one can surely see an attempt to justify the classical Theosophical claim to have been in contact with hidden "Mahatmas" and their supernatural capacities. Evans-Wentz argues that such "Arhants," being in passion of powers "as yet undiscovered, but probably suspected, by Western Science,"[84] still exist today, though only "exceedingly few."

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79 W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibet's Great Yogī Milarepa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 11.
80 Evans-Wentz, *Milarepa*, 11.
81 Cf. Evans-Wentz, *Milarepa*, 18.
82 Evans-Wentz, *Milarepa*, 17: "It must equally be kept in mind, in judging the yogi, that he claims to have proved, at least to himself, by methods as careful and scientific in their own realm as those known in the laboratories of the West in the realm of physical science, that the ideals of the worldly are merely the ideals of an immature social order, of races still in the lower and middle grades of the World-School."
83 Evans-Wentz, *Milarepa*, 18.
84 Evans-Wentz, *Milarepa*, 20.

However, for Evans-Wentz, "the only valid and scientific procedure is to explore for oneself the path leading to Arhantship, as Milarepa herein bids us do."[85] The only precondition for the Western sceptic would be an open attitude as being the case of scientific experimenters: "Without faith that a certain experiment may lead to a certain result, no chemist or physicist could possibly discover fresh scientific truths; and no man can ever expect to discover that New World, of which Milarepa sings in his ecstatic joy of triumph, unless he first sets up a postulate that there is a New World awaiting his discovery."[86] Actually, the analogy to experimentation in natural sciences does only partly suffice: For Evans-Wentz, the outcome of the experiment is already known – a problem that he solves by leaving the analogy of experimentation for the more plausible imagery of discovering a new territory, a "New World." In sum, in this work, the scholar-practitioner Evans-Wentz appears only alludes to the deeper layers of the common spiritual heritage, while a discussion of his claims, and remarks on methodology of comparative religion are fully absent.

In 1935, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* saw the light. In addition to its translations of seven Mahāyāna Buddhist texts, which will not be dealt with here, it contains a lengthy introduction that once more testifies the biographical stability of Evans-Wentz's beliefs. In his attempt to subsume the Indian and Tibetan doctrines of the seven texts under the heading of "Yoga," the style of his explanations changes, coming closer to Guru-like attitudes visible in Neo-Hinduist and Neo-Vedāntist Indian contemporaries of Evens-Wentz. But not only that: With "Yoga" as the unifying principle of the mastery of breath, will, energy, knowledge, and the self, Evans-Wentz seems to have no problem to explain Buddhist Yoga with explanations and descriptions drawn from classical Hindu texts and Neo-Vedāntist, probably oral, teachings. Yoga, in consequence of being refined to a transcultural category, is everywhere: "the applied psychology of religion, yoga is the very tap-root of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Taoism. Similarly, if perhaps in less degree, it has nourished the growth of the Faith of the Parsees; and in the development of the three Semitic Faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, it has been a very important shaping influence."[87] And, of course, "initiation into the Mysteries of Antiquity was *largely yogic*,"[88] as were the practices by Christian ascetics and monastics, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, or the Celtic druids. Grounded in the nature of reality itself, it seems so obvious for Evans-Wentz that he makes no effort to substantiate his

85 Evans-Wentz, *Milarepa*, 24.
86 Evans-Wentz, *Milarepa*, 24.
87 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga*, 35.
88 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga*, 35.

claims with remarks on historical dependencies, or with a close comparative reading of respective texts. For Evans-Wentz, there is not even a need for this. If the category of "Yoga" can be applied to Occidental traditions, "Yoga," correctly understood, is as much a Western tradition as it is Eastern. As in earlier works, comments on methodology are absent, and very few passages try to systematize the material presented. Evans-Wentz describes himself as being an "anthropologist" of internal universe, driven by an? interest in "anthropology and psychology as applied sciences in the sense understood in *yoga*."[89] Still, Theosophy is underlying framework, obvious in Evans-Wentz depiction of "occult fraternities of India and Tibet," that may convey their insights "telepathic," in symbols, or oral, but "never completely by means of written records."[90]

In 1954 the concluding volume of the Tibetan tetralogy appeared: *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, containing excerpts of texts on Padmasambhava, the mythical founder of Tantrism in Tibet, and on Dzogchen, "the great perfection," a Tibetan system of Tantric teachings, and an introduction. While there is a considerable overlap with his earlier Theosophist, Neo-Vedāntist, and Neo-Platonic reading of Tibetan Buddhism – the focus now being on the "one mind," or "at-one-ment" – it is the tone that has changed. In his introduction, Evans-Wentz declares with pathos that the "Yoga of Knowing the Mind in its Nakedness," translated in the work, is known as "the doctrine which automatically liberates man from bondage [. . .]. In common with all schools of Oriental Occult Sciences, the Mahāyāna postulates that the One Supra-Mundane Mind, of Universal All-Pervading Consciousness, transcendent over appearances and over every dualistic concept born of the finite or mundane aspect of mind, alone is real. Viewed as Voidness, it is the Become, the Unborn, [. . .] the predicateless Primordial Essence, the abstract Cosmic Source where all concrete or manifested things come and into which they vanish into latency." This "One Mind" is "the Transcendent Fullness of the Emptiness, the Dissolver of Space and Time and of *sangsāric* (or mundane) mind, the Brahman of the *Rishis*, the Dreamer of *Māyā*, the Weaver of the Web of Appearances, the Outbreather and the Inbreather of infinite universes throughout the endlessness of Duration."[91] However, the Tibetan text does mention the "one mind" only once and does not build, as Reynolds remarks, on the view of "some sort of Neo-Platonic hypostasis, a universal Nous, of which all individual minds are but fragments or appendages."[92] To Evans-Wentz, it is the "One

89 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga*, 48.
90 Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga*, 50.
91 Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, 1.
92 Cf. Reynolds, *Self-Liberation*, 80: "However, there is no equivalent in the actual Tibetan text for his "the One Mind." The phrase *sems gcig-po* occurs in one place where it means "It is

Cosmic Mind," "the unlimited Supra-Mundane Mind,"[93] formed of "mankind's minds, or consciousnesses," that "are collectively one," forming in their entirety the "body of one great multi-celled organism, mentally illuminated by the One Cosmic Mind," and being the unknown source of "cosmic rays and matter in all its electronic [sic] aspects, as light, heat, magnetism, electricity, radio-activity," etc.[94] The vision that Evans-Wentz follows here is that the individual consciousness will merge with the cosmic one if evolved enough, and that exactly this is meant in the Buddhist *nirvāṇa*. A new, overly enthusiastic tone may be seen not only as mirroring Indian Neo-Vedānta, but as also anticipating psychedelic mysticism of the 1960s, if not the writings of New-Age authors of the 1980s. Moreover, the whole concept, in line with the Spiritualist's bursting reservoir of consciousness mentioned above, shares certain traits of Aldous Huxley's "mind at large" – probably not accidentally, Huxley's work *The Doors of Perception*, expanding the idea, was published in the same year, 1954.

Generally, it must be said, Evans-Wentz misses to acknowledge the advanced epistemology of Buddhism. Any critical reflection on the limitation of language, prominent in Madhyamaka and Yogācāra philosophers, is absent. As has been the case in his earlier works, there are few suggestions of a systematization – for example, that the "Orient" developed four methods of imparting spiritual knowledge beyond "literacy," namely, through "telepathy or psychic osmosis," symbols such as mudras or maṇḍalas, sound (as in mantras), or symbolic language.[95] However, no systematic comparison is sought after. Remarks such as that it "is only by dying on the Cross of *Sangsāra* that one attains life more abundantly,"[96]– placing elsewhere Jesus Christ next to the Buddha as both being Theosophic "avataras" – or that "animal instinct, whereby the multitude are chiefly guided and through which they are controlled by the state, must be transcended,"[97] make it surely difficult for traditional historians of religion to take the work as unbiased scholarship.

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the single (nature of) mind which encompasses all of Samsara and Nirvana" (*'khor 'das yongs la khyab-pa'i sems gcig-po*). This is its only occurrence." Reynolds (*Self-Liberation*, 71–115) lists various other problems of Evans-Wentz' translation. For example, resorting to Hindu Tantric concepts, Evans-Wentz designates the consorts or female aspects of the Buddhas as "Shaktis," "Powers," "in this way reversing the polarity of the whole Buddhist system."

93 Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, 7.

94 Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, 9; cf. 10, 197–199.

95 Cf. Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, 24.

96 Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, 75.

97 Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, 80.

4 Evans-Wentz' Contribution to the Comparative Study of Religion

"W. Y. Evans-Wentz is a great scholar who devoted his mature years to the role of bridge and shuttle between Tibet and the west: like an RNA molecule activating the latter with the coded message of the former" – with these words, Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert praise "the work of this academic liberator" in their free adaption, *The Psychedelic Experience. A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1964).[98] By the 1960, Evans-Wentz' translation of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* had become an indispensable source for inspiration of various audiences. With the *Book* at hand, Theosophists and Spiritualists were convinced to have sufficient evidence for remarkable correspondences to Western occult views, proving not the least the transcultural prevalence of certain experiences of the disembodied soul in after-death realms, but also the principle teachings of the founding fathers and mothers of Theosophy.[99] The influential writer and intellectual, Aldous Huxley, referred to Evans-Wentz' works in his writings, and had even made use of the *Book* as a guide for accompanying his dying wife.[100] While the wide circulation of his books ensured Evans-Wentz many readers of a general audience, too, it is much more difficult to trace his influence on the emerging field of "comparative religion," or the "science of religion." On the one hand, scholars of religion that were attracted by C.G. Jung (who had written two introductory essays printed in Evans-Wentz' books), or adapted in some way or the other the approach of a transcultural "essence" in religion, quoted his works, but usually without mention of their view of an esoteric common core in the East and the West. Mircea Eliade, for example, refers to his studies,[101] or Joseph Campbell, in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, quotes from Evans-Wentz' *Milarepa*.[102] Among scholars of (Tibetan) Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna of the 1950s and 1960, studies by Evans-Wentz were frequently mentioned, but with the respective works of such scholars as Guiseppe Tucci, Shashibhusan Dasgupta, and David L. Snellgrove (or, from the late 1960s onwards, Alex Wayman and others),

98 Cf. Schlieter, *What is it like to be Dead?* 200–202.
99 Cf. Schlieter, *What is it like to be Dead?* 163–165.
100 Cf. Schlieter, *What is it like to be Dead?* 183.
101 Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958) refers to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, cf. 236, 246, 325, 331–333; 391–393, 431. Eliade refers also to *Tibetan Yoga* and *Milarepa*.
102 Cf. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949 Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 147–149.

scholars entered the field that were not only to able to read Tibetan and Sanskrit. Yet, these scholars could, however, build on Evans-Wentz as one forerunner to overcome the earlier distinction between a "real" Buddhism and a "degenerate" Tantric Buddhism, but without adhering to his Theosophical preconceptions.[103] In a way, Evans-Wentz' works succeeded in no longer depicting Buddhist Tantra as a weird monstrosity, a degeneration, or an aberration, which had largely been the view of various scholars of Buddhism in the late 19th and early 20th century (such as Friedrich Max Müller in his famous dictum that "there is nothing esoteric in Buddhism"[104]). In current studies of Tibetan Buddhism, however, Evans-Wentz' influence has almost vanished. Mostly, his works are mentioned shortly in their overview of earlier Western works on Kagyupa literature, Milarepa, or the *Book*. Yet, until most recently, new translation of the various scriptures that belong to the corpus of "The Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States" (*bar do thos grol chen mo*), as the Tibetan title has it, still pay a faint tribute to Evans-Wentz by using variants of the established title *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.[105]

To conclude, it seems that Evans-Wentz can indeed best be portrayed as a religiously interested, enthusiastic scholar-practitioner who was caught between at least three different stools, and was accordingly to patronize. In the field of Tibetan Buddhist Studies, his limited philological skills were criticized, as were his Theosophical isogetical readings of Buddhist doctrines. For Theosophists, it seems that he was neither "orthodox" nor innovative enough to resume a more elevated position. In addition, his focus on Tibetan Buddhism (and not Indian traditions of Yoga favored by later Theosophy), and his lack of philological skills – in the Adyar branch, many Theosophists had knowledge of Sanskrit[106]– were supposedly additional obstacles to his later reception in Theosophy.

For scholars of comparative religion, the absence of a theoretical reflection on the comparative enterprise, and the predilection for perennialist, pan-karmic rebirth theory, but also his religiously interested enthusiasm

103 Cf. Christian K. Wedemeyer, "Tropes, Typologies, and Turnarounds: A Brief Genealogy of the Historiography of Tantric Buddhism," *History of Religions*, 40, 3 (2001), 223–259. Christian K. Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, and Transgression in the Indian Traditions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

104 Friedrich M. Müller, *Life and Religion: And Aftermath from the Writings of the Right Honourable Professor F. Max Müller* (New York: Doubleday, 1905), 218–219.

105 For example, Gyurme Dorje, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. 1st Comp. Trans. (New York: Penguin, 2006).

106 Cf. Yves Mühlematter, "Translation between Acceptance and Deviance. Translational Endeavors within the Theosophical Society. A Case Study of Annie Besant's Bhagavad Gita" (presentation at the ESSWE Conference in Erfurt unpublished).

hindered a broader recognition. Paradoxically, while his works flourished and were read by a multitude, the author's achievements – apart from presenting the translations – were mostly considered to be not particularly noteworthy. Things would have looked different if Evans-Wentz would have been able to go beyond a culture-transcending "Occult Science" and to present a truly "comparative esotericism" of Tibetan Buddhism, Hindu Tantra, and Western occult traditions – a task that has, as of today, only in part been achieved.

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Léo Bernard

Paul Masson-Oursel (1882–1956): Inside and Outside the Academy

Abstract: Paul Masson-Oursel (1882–1956) was a French Indologist who held the position of director of studies in Indian religions from 1927 to 1953 at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. However, alongside his well-received academic publications, Masson-Oursel also published many articles on India in non-academic periodicals, some of which are clearly associated with esoteric currents. In 1929 for instance, he wrote a report for the Gruppo di Ur titled "On the Role of Magic in Hindu Speculation" which was published in the periodical *Krur*,[1] directed by the Italian esotericist Julius Evola (1898–1974). Furthermore, in its edition of March 15th, 1946 the periodical *Spiritualité* printed an article by Masson-Oursel entitled "Similarity between physics and psychology in Indian philosophy."[2] This periodical was directed by Robert Linssen (1911–2004), a close disciple of spiritual spokesperson Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986). In their journals, both Evola and Linssen approached India through spiritually engaged perspectives, which makes the presence of an academic such as Masson-Oursel in their columns somewhat surprising. In this article I will ask why he desired and saw it fit to publish in such periodicals.

1 Introduction

In *Scholars and prophets: Sociology of India from France in the 19th–20th centuries*,[3] Roland Lardinois examines what he calls "the field of production of discourses on India." Throughout this book, Lardinois discusses the autonomy of scholarly activities within a field of production which was also composed of authors interested in India from a literary or spiritual perspective. He highlights

1 Paul Masson-Oursel, "Sul ruolo della magia nella speculazione indù," *Introduzione alla Magia quale scienza dell'Io* (Roma: Tilopa Editrice, 1929), 259–264. For a French translation, see Paul Masson-Oursel, "Sur le role de la magie dans la speculation hindoue," in *Tous les écrits de Ur & Krur (1927–1928–1929): Introduction à la Magie (1955)* (Roma: Archè, 1986), 297–305.

2 Paul Masson-Oursel, "Identité de la physique et de la psychologie dans la philosophie indienne," *Spiritualité* 9, no.16 (15 March 1946): 90–91.

3 Roland Lardinois, *Scholars and Prophets: Sociology of India from France 19th-20th Centuries* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2013). The book was first published in French in 2007, see Roland Lardinois, *L'invention de l'Inde: Entre ésotérisme et scienc*e (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2007).

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the fluid borders and continuous exchange between what he called the “scholarly pole” and the “heteronomous pole” of the field, the non-hegemonic currents, composed of people without institutional affiliation. In the attempt to arrive at a more precise understanding of the relation between these two poles, Masson-Oursel represents an exemplary case study. Here, I intend to focus on the nuanced relation with non-hegemonic currents to which Masson-Oursel’s work testifies with a view to bringing out both the common and diverging epistemic patterns crossing the broad field of the production of discourses on India at that time. What were the points of agreement? What were the bones of contention? Before presenting the structure of my work, allow me to clarify one point. According to my view, Masson-Oursel does not belong to the non-hegemonic currents because his academic position makes him a representative of the established scholarly pole, that is to say the hegemonic pole. However, and as my work will point out, Masson-Oursel may have held some perspectives towards Hindu studies which appear not to chime with what one can understand from standard scholarship. Then, instead of apprehending Masson-Oursel as a deviant scholar who is no longer part of the hegemonic pole, I prefer to perceive him as a facet of the academic and hegemonic pole, which is something more plural than consistent. With this precision in mind, I will first address Masson-Oursel’s scholarly work, with special emphasis on his faith in comparative philosophy. After mentioning his interest in esoteric matters, his relations with non-hegemonic currents will be analysed and the common ground shared with these currents clarified. By the end of this article, Masson-Oursel’s involvement in a periodical such as *Spiritualité* should begin to make sense while new light will also be cast on the orienting principles of his scholarly work.

2 The Plan of a Lifetime: *La philosophie comparée*

Paul Masson-Oursel had a background in philosophy. After following the classes of Henri Bergson (1859–1941), he received his bachelor’s degree in 1901 and his *agrégation* in 1906. His principal mentor was Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939), thanks to whom he became the subeditor of the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger* from 1918. After the death of Lévy-Bruhl, Masson-Oursel became the director of publications of the journal, a position he shared with Sorbonne Professor Émile Bréhier (1876–1952). Nevertheless, Masson-Oursel never restricted

himself to a single subject. In his auto-obituary written in 1952, four years before his death, Masson-Oursel wrote:

> My masters were Bergson in philosophy, Pierre Janet in psychology, Lévy-Bruhl, Durkheim and Mauss in sociology. I received the teachings of Alfred Foucher who, alongside Hellenism, introduced me to Indianism, and those of Sylvain Lévi who embodied total Indianism. However, I also wanted to do sociology with Chavannes in order to situated China relative to Greece and India. I started by studying Chinese logicians alongside Greek sophists.[4]

It then appears that Masson-Oursel was educated by the cream of French scholarly society in the human sciences. From philosophy to Oriental studies, by way of psychology, sociology and anthropology, Masson-Oursel was closely acquainted with the most renowned French scholars of his time, and his sound transdisciplinary academic education allowed him to develop a research program entitled *La philosophie comparée* – comparative philosophy. He set out his program for the first time in 1911 in an article entitled "Purpose and Method of Comparative Philosophy," published in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*.[5] He inclusively identifies as philosophical all "views on the nature of reality and the situation of Man"[6] and seeks to compare the various philosophical views emanating from across the world. From his perspective, comparative philosophy is "the comparative study of philosophical ideas, to whatever civilization they might belong."[7] He emphasises that "no one philosophy has the right to put itself forward as co-extensive with the human mind, but each, even the weakest, is of documentary value."[8] Naturally, he is well aware that each philosophical system emerged from a very specific historical context, and he criticizes the hasty comparisons made during the nineteenth century which did not pay attention to the differences revealed by history. Nevertheless, he suggests that "certain identical gestures of the mind [. . .] may well vary in shape, while being constant in nature,"[9] such as "the conflict between reason and faith, as well as their reciprocal influence; the differentiation among several mental functions dedicated to knowledge, which are speculative or practical to

4 Quoted in Olivier Lacombe, "Paul Masson-Oursel (1882–1956)," in *Ecole pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses, Annuaire 1957–1958* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1957), 19.
5 Paul Masson-Oursel, "Objet et méthode de la philosophie comparée," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 19, no. 4 (July 1911): 541–548.
6 Masson-Oursel, "Objet et méthode," 542.
7 Masson-Oursel, "Objet et méthode," 541.
8 Masson-Oursel, "Objet et méthode," 547.
9 Masson-Oursel, "Objet et méthode," 545.

varying degrees; the admittance of several forms of reasoning."[10] For instance, he argues that "the situation in Islam of a peripatetic rationalism in confrontation with a free-spirited mysticism finds its counterpart in catholicity."[11] Through his comparative philosophy, Masson-Oursel sought to discover metaphysic laws overarching the diversity of philosophical ideas. It was his conviction that a comparative philosophy which consistently appeals to history, understood as a positive and rational undertaking, may well be considered an exact science. Masson-Oursel later devoted one of his doctoral dissertations, the one he considered as his "major" thesis, to comparative philosophy, the other was focused on Indian philosophy.[12] Published in 1923, *La philosophie comparée* refined the research program first sketched in 1911. Masson-Oursel introduced his intention in the following terms: "The desire to expand, indeed to deepen one's knowledge through acquaintance with systems of thought other than those of the civilization to which one belongs, has been felt in diverse circles."[13] Greek mysticism and the introduction of Indian Buddhism in Medieval China are called upon to illustrate his assertion, as well as Neoplatonism and Kabbalah. Yet he notices that "all the attempts to trace new ways" of those "speculative milieus", which "have established syncretism as a method," have only led to "impasses or false turns."[14] "If the 'perennis philosophia' was incessantly preached, hardly anyone thought to approach it by studying what Diogenes Laërtius called the 'philosophy of the barbarians'"[15] states Masson-Oursel, and he regrets that "the disinterestedness of true science was lacking; as well as patience and method."[16] Masson-Oursel then explains his own method: influenced by Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), Lévy-Bruhl, to whom this book is devoted, and Auguste Comte (1798–1857), he emphasises the positivism of comparative philosophy and its solid foundation in the investigation of history. Philosophies are "materials as real as any other data. They exist in beliefs, oral traditions, written treatises"[17] and can be grasped in history. Highlighting the example of philology, as well as anthropology and physiology, Masson-Oursel further advocates the use of the comparative method and, more precisely, of analogies, in philosophy. Nevertheless, he reduces his program to three civilisations: Europe,

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10 Masson-Oursel, "Objet et méthode," 545.

11 Masson-Oursel, "Objet et méthode," 544.

12 Paul Masson-Oursel, *Esquisse d'une histoire de la philosophie indienne* (Paris: Geuthner, 1923). It goes without saying that Masson-Oursel's work expanded beyond comparative philosophy.

13 Paul Masson-Oursel, *La philosophie comparée* (Paris: Alcan, 1923), 1.

14 Masson-Oursel, *Philosophie comparée*, 1–2.

15 Masson-Oursel, *Philosophie comparée*, 3.

16 Masson-Oursel, *Philosophie comparée*, 2.

17 Masson-Oursel, *Philosophie comparée*, 11.

India and China. In conclusion, he asserts that the comparative method will allow for a proper understanding of religion and "compensate for the effect of desiccation for which erudite history is commonly reproached, a history which willingly loses sight of the human sense of events, institutions, customs and ideas."[18] In addition, after expressing caution over the distortive effect of theories and doctrines on our perception of reality, Masson-Oursel argues: "We have no chance of gaining access to this reality until we have systematically compared doctrines, to the extent that they neutralize each other to reveal the necessary, solid residue of pure experience. By so doing, perhaps we will find clear facts whose existence we hardly suspected."[19] As examples of such facts, he cites levitation, telepathy, and above all, the experience of the absolute. According to him, "The experience of the absolute, denounced as the vainest of pretensions by the positivists, will perhaps appear to a positivism worthier of the name as a datum which we had misapprehended, as is so often the case, a datum which in any case harbours an incontestable truth content."[20] A similar set of objectives for comparative philosophy, orienting the approach of Masson-Oursel towards the occult, were also expressed in his review of a non-academic book – in which he participated – dealing with "the problem of fate." There, Masson-Oursel wrote: "We are of the conviction that to better understand the diverse ways in which these problems have been posed by human kind is the first condition for addressing them positively; it may sometimes even provide us with a means of solving them."[21]

The reception of Masson-Oursel's thesis is difficult to gauge. Given that comparative philosophy is nowadays an established sub-field of philosophy, one might expect *La philosophie comparée* to be considered a seminal work. An inquiry into the historiography of comparative philosophy, however, suggests otherwise. Other scholars are considered more seminal figures in the field,[22] and even if, in 2005, a collective book devoted to comparative philosophy written by renowned French speaking philosophers acknowledged Masson-Oursel as the father of the term, his program was misread as lacking ambition.[23] Such a misread is, for me, due to a lack of attention concerning Masson-Oursel's unconventional interests and personal perspectives that we shall now examine.

18 Masson-Oursel, *Philosophie comparée*, 195.

19 Masson-Oursel, *Philosophie comparée*, 185.

20 Masson-Oursel, *Philosophie comparée*, 186.

21 Paul Masson-Oursel, review of *L'homme après la mort*, by Fernand Divoire, *Mercure de France* (1 October 1927): 153.

22 Brajendranath Seal (1864–1938) and Charles A. Moore (1901–1967) mostly.

23 François Chenet, "Du sens de la philosophie comparée," in *Philosophie comparée. Grèce, Inde, Chine* ed. Johachim Lacrosse, (Paris: Vrin, 2005), 80.

3 Masson-Oursel off the Beaten Academic Track: His Interest in Esoteric Matters

As mentioned in the intro, Masson-Oursel wrote several articles in different periodicals that I consider related to esoteric currents. *Western esotericism,* or simply *esotericism*, refers to an "umbrella term"[24] or more precisely a "historiographic category"[25] that covers a wide range of religious and philosophical currents. These currents vary from ancient Gnostic speculations to contemporary alchemy and include elements such as Christian Kabbalah and Illuminism, among others. As noticed by Henrik Bogdan and Olav Hammer in *Western Esotericism in Scandinavia,* "which substantive characteristics might unite such a disparate set remains an open and controversial issue," however, "considerably less controversy surrounds the question of what contents should be counted as part of the category of Western esotericism."[26] These contents are for the most part gathered in the *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*.[27]

Thus, Masson-Oursel wrote articles in esoteric periodicals such as *Krur* and *Spiritualité*. Both periodicals were very different in perspectives[28] but shared common objectives. *Spiritualité* "sought to see the world regenerated by the spiritual transformation of the individual,"[29] just as the *Gruppo di Ur* prompted its readers to "transform yourself."[30] Masson-Oursel wrote short texts concerning aspects of Hindu philosophies in these periodicals. Those aspects were of particular interest for the readers because they dealt mostly with magic, understood as "the human claim to act immediately on nature by means of states of consciousness

24 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Introduction," in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), xi.
25 Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse 1900–1930* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 8. On the construction of such a category see Wouter J.Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
26 Henrik Bogdan and Olav Hammer, "Introduction," in *Western Esotericism in Scandinavia*, ed. Henrik Bogdan and Olav Hammer, (Boston: Brill, 2016), 1.
27 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ed., *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006). This publication tends however to focus on specific cultural areas (namely French, English, German and Italian) and to overlook others (such as Scandinavian).
28 *Krur* harshly criticized the theosophical movement, while *Spiritualité*, nearly twenty years later, was inscribed in this movement.
29 "Editorial," *Spiritualité* 8, no.1 (15 December 1944): 1.
30 "Aux lecteurs," in Julius Evola, *UR & KRUR "Introduction à la magie" UR 1927*, trans. Gérard Boulanger (Milano: Archè, 1983), 4.

or psychic operations."[31] My lack of expertise in the field of Hinduism does not allow me to enter into technical matters and to discuss in detail the content of Masson-Oursel's articles in esoteric periodicals. How particular Masson-Oursel's understanding of Hindu perspectives was is a question that I do not seek to answer here. As previously mentioned, my interest is rather focused on the reasons why Masson-Oursel accepted to publish in such periodicals, which could hold scholarly perspectives[32] but were definitely not academic.

A first answer would be to assume feelings of sympathy on the behalf of Masson-Oursel for contents usually related to esotericism. This assumption is not ill-founded. Already in his thesis on comparative philosophy, Masson-Oursel sought to explain phenomena such as levitation, telepathy or the experience of the absolute. This can be directly related to his interest in psychical research which was attested to by his speech at the *Institut Métapsychique International* in 1951.[33] Also, Masson-Oursel was drawn to astrology, to the point that he wrote a foreword for French astrologer André Barbault in 1961.[34] Moreover, Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) detailed in his private diary his meeting with Masson-Oursel in March 1946 and described his apartment in this way: "On one shelf there were books about occultism, on another a skull, a Saint Sulpician lithograph, a horoscope."[35] Those interests were exacerbated toward the end of his life but did not appear all of a sudden at that time. However, to summarise Masson-Oursel's involvement in esoteric periodicals to an interest in esoteric matters is by far incomplete. A finer picture may emerge but only through an analysis of his complicated relationship with non-hegemonic currents, both related to esotericism and not.

The list of Masson-Oursel's relations with non-hegemonic currents is a long one. Masson-Oursel wrote numerous articles and papers in non-academic periodicals, some very similar to *Spiritualité*,[36] as well as several forewords to books written by non-academic authors. An exhaustive representation of those publications, as useful as it may be, runs the risk of being muddled and

31 Masson-Oursel, "Sul ruolo della magia nella speculazione indù," 259.

32 Hans Thomas Hakl, "Julius Evola and the UR Group," *Aries* 12, no.1 (2012): 53–90.

33 Paul Masson-Oursel, "Lumières de la Raison : Profondeurs de la Conscience," *Revue Métapsychique*, no.15 (July-August 1951): 97–98

34 Paul Masson-Oursel, foreword to *De la psychanalyse à l'astrologie*, by André Barbault, (Paris: Seuil, 1961), 7.

35 Mircea Eliade, *Fragments d'un journal* I, 1945–1969 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 20.

36 From 1949 on, he regularly published short articles in the periodical *Harmonie* edited by Jacques Demarquette (1888–1969), an active promoter of mysticism and interfaith dialogue.

indigestible.[37] I will thus adopt a selective approach and I will start by focussing on his disagreement with the perspective of René Guénon (1886–1951).

4 His Relationship with René Guénon

René Guénon is a well-known figure for scholars of Western esotericism. He is considered to be the father of the Traditionalist School, a current which, incidentally, deeply influenced other scholars of religion during the twentieth century.[38] Raised in Blois, the young Guénon quickly integrated within the Parisian occultist milieu of *La Belle Époque*. His quarrel with Dr Gérard Encausse (1865–1916), also known as Papus, led him to join the *Église Gnostique de France* in 1908. According to David Bisson, this group furnished him with the three main elements of his doctrine: the concept of "Tradition" or a common heritage, guarded by a small elite, which predates revealed religions; the idea of an evil at work in the world; and the necessity of personal transformation in gaining access to original knowledge and combatting this evil.[39] Of particular interest for present concerns is that Guénon first planned to have an academic career. He graduated in philosophy in 1916 and became a high-school professor of philosophy. However, his thesis in Indian studies was rejected in 1921 by the dean of the Sorbonne upon the recommendations of Sylvain Lévi (1863–1935). Concerning Guénon, Lévi wrote to the dean: "He intends to exclude all elements that do not correspond to his conception [. . .] everything is in the Vedanta [. . .] he shows little concern with history and historical criticism [. . .] he is willing to believe in a mystical transmission of a primary truth revealed to the human genius from the first ages of the world."[40] The premature

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37 There are a few examples: Paul Masson-Oursel, "La Libération à l'indienne," *Cahiers de l'Étoile*, no.8 (May-June 1929): 405–416; Paul Masson-Oursel, "La méditation asiatique et la psychanalyse," *Psyché*, no.1 (November 1946): 68–70; Paul Masson-Oursel, "Le signe de l'homme," *Le Signe de l'Homme*, no.1 (October 1946): 8–9; Paul Masson-Oursel, "Comment l'Inde se représente l'âme humaine ou l'esprit humain," *Harmonie*, no.1 (January 1949): 7–9; Paul Masson-Oursel, introduction to *Amulettes, talismans & pantacles* by Jean Marquès-Rivière (Paris: Payot, 1950), 5–6; Paul Masson-Oursel, introduction to *Le pressentiment chrétien dans les religions anciennes* by Emile Lesimple (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1942), 7–8.

38 Mircea Eliade was one of them, as demonstrated by Mark Sedgwick in Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

39 David Bisson, *René Guénon: Une politique de l'esprit* (Paris: Pierre-Guillaume de Roux, 2013), 31.

40 Jean-Pierre Laurant, *René Guénon: Les enjeux d'une lecture* (Paris: éditions Dervy, 2006), 109–110; Bisson, *René Guénon*, 46. It should be noted that this derogatory report ended with a

end of Guénon's academic career did not prevent him from maintaining relations, however fraught, with a representative of the academy such as Masson-Oursel, who taught classes on Indian religions at the *École Pratique* from 1920. Both Guénon and Masson-Oursel knew each another well: they apparently took several courses jointly at the *École Pratique* and were both frequent visitors to the *Musée Guimet* in Paris, where many conferences on Indian civilization were held. Their relationship is well-documented thanks to a large body of letters exchanged between Guénon and Guido De Giorgio (1890–1957), an Italian esotericist closely tied to the aforementioned periodical *Krur*. De Giorgio also frequented the *Musée Guimet*, and evidently maintained some level of contact with Masson-Oursel since he had made the acquaintance of Guénon through him. The letter written by Guénon to De Giorgio on the 12th of October 1924 gives us an insight into Guénon's perception of Masson-Oursel:

> The opinion which you express of Masson-Oursel is in complete accordance with what I myself think of him. I do not believe that he is capable of seeing things otherwise; that is, other than through western eyes and through the prism of modern philosophy; we must not forget that, before he turned towards Oriental studies, he was trained in philosophy. Besides, he is too closely integrated into official circles, especially since he replaced Foucher at the Hautes Etudes; and I know that he also maintains relations with theosophists.[41] He exhibits a tendency towards appeasing everyone and all opinions, a result no doubt of his quite indecisive character.[42]

Guénon presents here an incisive portrayal of the intermediary position of Masson-Oursel in the field of scholarship on India at that time. In Guénon's opinion, Masson-Oursel did not stand with him because he was too engaged in the academy. Moreover, he reproached Masson-Oursel for having adopted the

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surprising recommendation that Guénon's thesis should be accepted: a recommendation, however, which was purely rhetorical in nature.

41 Although he was indeed close to several theosophists and accepted to have one of his conference papers published in a theosophical periodical in 1935, Masson-Oursel never minced his words when offering his assessment of the Theosophical Society, a major esoteric current, speaking of an "eclectic theosophy" in 1921 and of "a few international snobs" in 1960. See Paul Masson-Oursel, "La psychologie contemporaine et l'Intelligence de la Pensée Indienne," *Revue Théosophique*, no.4 (June 1935): 122–125; Paul Masson-Oursel, "Doctrines et méthodes psychologiques de l'Inde," *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, (1921): 529; Paul Masson-Oursel, introduction to *Disciplines, ritualisme et spiritualité* by René Fouéré (Paris: éditions du vieux colombier, 1960), 9–10.

42 Correspondence from René Guénon to Guido De Giorgio, 12 October 1924, (unpublished letter, *correspondance avec De Giorgio, non publié, 1924–1949* available on http://www.index-rene-guenon.org), 2.

standpoint of a Western philosopher on India. Guénon's criticism should be read as a response to Masson-Oursel's review of his book *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues,* the once rejected doctoral dissertation, in the periodical *Scientia*. Masson-Oursel here criticized Guénon's "categorical condemnation of any attempt to explain what is metaphysical through the historical method."[43] At the same time however, he recognized in Guénon "the very rare virtue of judging the Hindu matter in an Indian way" and agreed with Guénon's conviction that "knowledge cannot compensate for understanding, and European criticism cannot dispense with initiation into indigenous traditions."[44] This stance allows us to understand another of Guénon's letters to De Giorgio, written on the 12th of June 1927: "I recently saw Masson-Oursel, who said to me that he was drawing ever closer to my point of view and now recognizes that the orientalists had committed a great number of errors [. . .] He is really too indecisive and overly afraid of compromising himself by making clear affirmations in one direction or another."[45] A few months later however, in a review of Guénon's book *Le Roi du monde*, Masson-Oursel did choose his side:

> Leibniz loved to say that there is gold in the smoke of scholasticism. It can probably be found – even among the alchemists – in the universal symbolism as set out by the Gnostics, the Hindus, the Chinese and the Kabbalists. Unfortunately, R Guénon does not seek to extract this gold; only critique may aspire to such an aim. He takes everything for valid currency, provided it be traditional in character, and does not doubt that everything corresponds to everything else. He thereby attests to the lineage of the symbolists. He possesses the knowledge; yet shows no caution in what he accepts. Critique would represent in his eyes a miserly undertaking, one which discredits the researcher, and entirely superfluous for an author who believes himself in possession of metaphysical truth.[46]

From 1927 onwards, the split between Guénon and Masson-Oursel seems to have been definitive. Guénon's contempt for the historical-critical method was too radical to be overlooked by Masson-Oursel whose criticism of Guénon's work chimed with that of Lévi concerning Guénon's doctoral dissertation. For a scholar, of course, attention to historical detail is an essential prerequisite;

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43 Paul Masson-Oursel, review of *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*, by René Guénon, *Scientia* 31 (1922), 411.

44 Masson-Oursel, review of *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*, 411. This criticism is mentioned in Xavier Accart, *Guénon ou le renversement des clartés* (Milan: Archè, 2005), 201–202.

45 Correspondence from René Guénon to Guido De Giorgio published in Guido De Giorgio, *L'Instant et l'Eternité* (Milan: Archè, 1987), 263.

46 Paul Masson-Oursel, review of *Le Roi du monde*, by René Guénon, *Revue critique d'histoire et de literature,* no.20 (15 October 1927): 399.

nevertheless, Masson-Oursel did maintain relations with several of Guénon's followers. On the 22th of March 1947, for example, he lectured at the "Groupe d'Etudes des Techniques Mystiques et du Yoga," a group of non-scholars, for the most part physicians, primarily influenced by Guénon's ideas and seeking to study meditation techniques.[47] Moreover, in an article written in 1953 in the highly reliable *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, Masson-Oursel alluded to the possibility, through linguistic studies, of the recognition one day of a "primordial fund," shared by Asian and European civilizations, and Guénon, "who in thought took his bearings from Brahmanic teaching and in concrete life from the Islamic milieu,"[48] is credited as the main theorist of such a notion. The perspective of a "primordial fund" clearly appealed to Masson-Oursel and may explain his engagement with Guénon and those around him. He did, however, spell out that, to receive his full backing, this idea would need to be supported by scientific investigations. Masson-Oursel faced a wall which other authors not affiliated with the academy felt free to climb.

5 His Influence in the Spread of Neo-Hinduism

Another aspect of Masson-Oursel's mixed tangle of relationships is his engagement with actors in the field of Neo-Hinduism, both Hindu thinkers and their French translators. Neo-Hinduism is a term applied by Western scholars to Hindu thinkers who, in response to the challenges which emerged from the encounter with Western thought during the nineteenth and twentieth century, redefined "Hindu dharma as an essentially universal, ethical 'religion' (*sādhārana dharma*), based on principles of non-violence (*ahimsā*) and compassion."[49] Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948), Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) were all eminent Neo-Hinduism representatives. As a scholarly concept the term

47 For more on this group, better known as the "Winter Group" from the name of its main investigator, see Xavier Accart, "'Le Groupe Winter' entre perspective 'traditionnelle' et expérimentation médicale," *Politica Hermetica. Ésotérisme et guérison*, no.18 (2005): 98–108. See also Accart, *Guénon ou le renversement des clartés*, 911–923.

48 Paul Masson-Oursel, "La connaissance scientifique de l'Asie en France depuis 1900 et les variétés de l'orientalisme," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* (1953): 351.

49 William J. Johnson, "Neo-Hinduism," in *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (New-York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 220.

"Neo-Hinduism" can of course be contested, and we will not seek here to address the question of the boundary delimiting the "Neos" as a group.[50] Following Wilhelm Halbfass (1940–2000), "Neo-Hinduism" is used as a convenient label to encompass the historical reality of India that is "the relatively unprepared opening to foreign, Western influences, the adoption of Western concepts and standards and the readiness to reinterpret traditional ideas in light of these new, imported and imposed models of thinking."[51] Such reinterpretations play a decisive political role in India, and also found fertile ground in the West and in France, especially through the popular publications of Romain Rolland (1866–1944).[52] That Masson-Oursel played a part in this spread is a significant factor of his biography which deserves detailed treatment.

6 His Acquaintance with the Ramakrishna Order

In March 1936, the centenary of the birth of Ramakrishna (1836–1886), the renowned Bengali guru who promoted a vision of harmony between religions reinforced by his purported mystical experiences, was celebrated at the *Musée Guimet*. Some days later, the *Institut de Civilisation indienne* – the Institute of

50 The Indologist Paul Hacker (1913–1979) scholarly coined the concept during the 1970s to make a distinction between what he perceived as "traditional Hinduism" and this "novel Hinduism." The unmistakable contempt which Hacker showed towards Neo-Hinduism has led to much justified criticism, not least that of Wilhelm Halbfass himself. Let me make clear that there is no contempt intended in my use of the term Neo-Hinduism. See Paul Hacker, "Aspects of Neo-Hinduism as Contrasted with Surviving Traditional Hinduism," in *Paul Hacker. Kleine Schriften* ed. Lambert Schmithausen (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1978), 580–608; and Wilhelm Halbfass, *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedanta* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). For more recent and much harsher criticism of Hacker's work see Joydeep Bagchee and Vishwa P. Adluri, "The passion of Paul Hacker. Indology, orientalism, and evangelism," in *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India*, ed. Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander and Douglas T. McGetchin (New York: Routledge, 2014), 215–229.

51 Wilhelm Halbfass, "Research and Reflection: Responses to my Respondents," in *Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbass and its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies* ed. Eli Franco and Karin Preisendanz, Poznan studies in the philosophy of the sciences and the humanities, vol. 59, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 307.

52 Romain Rolland, *Gandhi* (Paris: Stock, 1924); Romain Rolland, *Essai sur la mystique et l'action de l'Inde vivante* (Paris: Stock, 1929); Romain Rolland, *Vie de Ramakrishna* (Paris: Stock, 1929); Romain Rolland, *Vie de Vivekananda* (Paris: Stock, 1930).

Indian Civilization which belonged to the University of Paris and was located in the Sorbonne – also celebrated Vivekananda, Ramakrishna's disciple and founder of the Ramakrishna Order. Paul Masson-Oursel delivered a laudatory speech on both occasions. Those events may well have inspired an association named "Les Amis de la Pensée indienne" to send a letter to the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order, requesting the dispatch of a permanent ambassador of the Order to France. The Swami Siddheswarananda (1897–1957) subsequently arrived in France in 1937 and succeeded in creating a French ashram, the *Centre Védantique Ramakrishna*, which still exists today. Masson-Oursel and the Swami were close friends and exchanged several letters. For instance, we learn in a letter sent by Masson-Oursel to the Swami on the 3rd of April 1939 that the Swami followed the classes of Masson-Oursel at the *École Pratique* and that Masson-Oursel adapted the content of his teaching to the interests of the Swami, namely by addressing "the question of Yoga-Psychanalysis."[53] Moreover, a lecture delivered by Masson-Oursel at the *Centre Védantique* the 25th of February 1940, on the occasion of the 105th anniversary of Ramakrishna, provides much insight into Masson-Oursel's interest in Neo-Hinduism. It appears that Masson-Oursel actually devoted himself to the spiritual life and had a personal acquaintance with the spiritual teachings of Ramakrishna. During his address, he announces that:

> I do not want to be a professor here, I will not speak as an academic, I would like, for once, to express only sincerity, because if I do not take the attitude of a modest disciple, I will have to flee like a wretch before this image [that of Ramakrishna] whose austere virtue reduces us to nothing as soon as we are anything other than sincere.[54]

Masson-Oursel then details his own spiritual life, quoting his favourite authors, from Seneca to Pierre Corneille by way of Epictetus, and expresses his own philosophical and spiritual beliefs:

> The power that dominates me, but also invades me, what does it matter to me whether it is give this name or another? He is here, in me, and I am in him. That is enough, because that is all. There is something else in me than myself, and I am somewhere other than myself. [. . .] I am not locked in this miserable thing, Mr. X . . ., nothing more. [. . .] God and me, same thing.[55]

53 Correspondence from Paul Masson-Oursel to Swami Siddheswarananda (3 April 1939, unpublished letter transmitted to the author at the courtesy of Alejandro Gutierrez), 1p.
54 Paul Masson-Oursel, "Lecture delivered by Mr Masson-Oursel for the 105th birthday of the birth of Ramakrishna" (25 February 1940, retranscription transmitted to the author at the courtesy of Alejandro Gutierrez), 1.
55 Masson-Oursel, "Lecture," 5.

The professor even appears to claim for himself the status of spiritual teacher, or *guru*:

> Academic training, which advocates the virtue of intelligence, objectivity, perhaps made me too timid to become a Guru. But Ramakrishna teaches us above all boldness. Let us repeat it: he was not a disciple of the great Goddess, Krishna, Civa, Yahweh, Jesus, Muhammad; he made himself Great Goddess, Krishna, Civa, Yahweh, Jesus, Muhammad!
>
> In reflecting on this incredible, overwhelming adventure, let us remember the following teaching: the spiritual life consists in overcoming contradictions [. . .] We must not freeze before any of these contradictions. If you do not brave them, then you do not exist [. . .].[56]

Yet he regrets that he had enjoyed a "overly equable life" and adds: "What I probably missed was finding myself often enough in desperate conditions, I would have been more exalted."[57] Finally, Masson-Oursel concludes his teaching by praying: "May Ramakrishna reminds us of what a man can achieve."[58] This address tells us much about his motivations and inner-conflicts: Masson-Oursel the academic, trained in historical criticism, but facing his own spiritual beliefs, his desire for the absolute, and trying to reconcile them with his professional agenda. In my opinion, this inner tension is the key which allows for a proper understanding of his relations with authors and periodicals approaching India through spiritual perspectives, and indeed of his scientific work.

7 The Collection "Spiritualités Vivantes"

The spiritual indebtedness of Masson-Oursel to Ramakrishna teachings explains his close relationship with Jean Herbert (1897–1980), who was the main French translator of the writings of Neo-Hinduism. In 1947, they created together, with the *Albin Michel* publishing house, a collection of books entitled *Spiritualités vivantes*, which proved to be a success still published today under its label.[59] A leaflet of the collection *Spiritualités vivantes* and a letter,

56 Masson-Oursel, "Lecture," 5–6.

57 Masson-Oursel, "Lecture," 6. Unfortunately, Masson-Oursel spoke too fast as the Second World War would bring tragedy to his own life. As a member of the resistance, his eldest son disappeared after being caught by the Gestapo. Masson-Oursel himself spent time in captivity and returned severely traumatized. Later, in 1953, his wife passed away and the death of his younger son quickly followed. See Lacombe, "Paul Masson-Oursel (1882–1956)," 21.

58 Masson-Oursel, "Lecture," 7.

59 The collection is currently directed by Marc de Smedt and Jean Mouttapa, two people deeply involved in interfaith dialogue. The 2012 catalogue of *Albin Michel* made an inventory

dated November 4, 1944, sent by Masson-Oursel to Henry Corbin (1903–1978), a renowned French Iranologist whose research centred upon Sufism and who participated in the Eranos meetings, are very informative sources regarding the aims of this collection.[60] We learn that originally the collection was to be two-fold: one part, directed by Herbert, devoted to the edition of "the original texts of contemporary thinkers enjoying incontestable authority among the religious, mystical or spiritual groups with which they are associated;"[61] the second part, edited by Masson-Oursel, focusing on "studies made according to the methods of modern western science, and in a spirit of respectful sympathy by historians of spirituality, without regard given to country of origin."[62] Its goals were thus ambitious. The editors hoped "to introduce among the spiritual elites around the world a wave of intense sympathy and warm understanding through which everyone will find themselves enriched,"[63] and they had "high hopes the provision of Eastern resources to the West may prepare the advent of a more complete, more spiritually advanced man."[64] During an interview accorded shortly before his death,[65] Jean Herbert mentioned that, together with Masson-Oursel, he had already planned to create a collection on Hindus masters in 1937, but that it was in the wake of an article published in the periodical *Les Cahiers du Sud* that a contract was signed with *Albin Michel* in 1944. Indeed, a small controversy erupted between Masson-Oursel and Herbert during the Second World War. In an academic periodical, la *Revue de l'histoire des religions,* Masson-Oursel first criticized "French contemporary Indology."[66] In his opinion, the Indology of the day had up to then seen only "sporadic and very limited results" and Masson-Oursel himself was trying to address this lacuna. He asserts that "Indology cannot depend, as formerly it has done, solely upon the linguists."[67]

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of 267 books published in the collection, although most of them were published from 1970s onwards when the collection came to be issued in pocket format.

60 Correspondence from Paul Masson-Oursel to Henry Corbin, including a prospectus for the collection *Spiritualités vivantes* (4 November 1944, 5 COR 273, Henry and Stella Corbin fonds, École Pratique des Hautes Études Manuscripts and Archives – Religious Sciences section, Paris, France).

61 Prospectus for the collection *Spiritualités vivantes*.

62 Prospectus for the collection *Spiritualités vivantes*.

63 Prospectus for the collection *Spiritualités vivantes*.

64 Prospectus for the collection *Spiritualités vivantes*.

65 Jean Herbert, "*Orient de l'âme*. Entretien avec Jean Herbert," interview by Nouvelles Clés, *Nouvelles Clés* 22 (1992): 19–28.

66 Paul Masson-Oursel, "L'Indianisme français contemporain," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 126 (1943): 57–62.

67 Masson-Oursel, "L'Indianisme," 58.

Indologist should "seek a meaning, a religious value, in those old texts, which are nearly all religious."[68] There is no room for "specialists with bounded horizons,"[69] neither for "naïve enthusiasts."[70] Masson-Oursel recommends a synthetic as well as analytic investigation and calls for "monographs which combine history and geography on every aspect and period of Indianness"[71] in addition to "the joint work of the Pandits and the Europeans."[72] Herbert reviewed this article in a non-academic periodical, a literary journal named *Les Cahiers du Sud*, in 1944, where he agrees with Masson-Oursel's assessment and adopts a similarly critical stance towards contemporary Indology.[73] He nevertheless criticizes the proposed remedy: Masson-Oursel, whose synthetic mind and encyclopaedic knowledge are praised, is exhorted to go further, to surpass his "inveterate humility." In Herbert opinion, scholars should not get lost in historical research or "dwell at length on apparent divergences of detail."[74] They should rather "introduce India to the West."[75] To be properly understood, India should be perceived "in its most beautiful heights, in the most beautiful contributions it has made to the common treasure of humanity,"[76] which is to say, in Herbert's mind, its spiritual writings. "To penetrate to the truth of an idea and to live one's life in accordance with it is much more important than to look for its distant origins"[77] and scholars should work to fathom Hindu spiritual ideas. The goals of the twofold collection *Spiritualités vivantes* then appears very clear. It was designed to meet the same challenge of cultivating a deeper understanding of India in the West through two different approaches: the first was academic, promoted by Masson-Oursel, and concerns the furtherance of comparative and historical studies; unlike the second, promoted by Jean Herbert, which relates to the translation and diffusion of spiritual writings. *Spiritualités vivantes*, whose section devoted to spiritual writings was first intended to embrace four different collections relating to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islamism and Taoism, is illustrative of the collaboration between non-hegemonic currents and representatives of the academy in the

68 Masson-Oursel, "L'Indianisme," 59.
69 Masson-Oursel, "L'Indianisme," 58.
70 Masson-Oursel, "L'Indianisme," 61.
71 Masson-Oursel, "L'Indianisme," 62.
72 Masson-Oursel, "L'Indianisme," 62.
73 Jean Herbert, "La Mission de l'Indianisme Français," *Les Cahiers du Sud* (1 April 1944): 304–306.
74 Herbert, "La Mission," 305.
75 Herbert, "La Mission," 304.
76 Herbert, "La Mission," 305.
77 Herbert, "La Mission," 305.

sciences of religion.[78] More broadly, the scope of diffusion of Neo-Hinduism in France attests to the depth of relations between these two poles, which should evidently not be framed in dualistic terms.

8 Neo-Hinduism from the Theosophical Society to the Academy

The case of Jean Herbert exemplifies the difficulties involved in separating the academic from the non-academic when it concerns Neo-Hinduism. I mentioned above Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Sri Aurobindo as two eminent Neo-Hinduism representatives: somewhat confusingly, the former was a university lecturer in philosophy,[79] who exercised a considerable and direct influence over the field of comparative philosophy, while conversely the latter is considered to be a mystic and spiritual leader. Similarly, Herbert was as close to the Theosophical Society as the academy. He lectured at the Theosophical Society and wrote several articles in the theosophical periodical, *Le Lotus bleu*.[80] One article, particularly long and rich, harshly criticizes a collective book written by established scholars: the first volume of *L'Inde classique* by Louis Renou (1896–1966) and Jean Filliozat (1906–1982).[81] As an adept and translator of Neo-Hindu writings, it is hardly surprising to find Herbert associated with the Theosophical Society which is itself historically entangled with Neo-Hinduism.[82] Meanwhile, it should be noted concerning Herbert that he ended

78 The success of this collaboration should, however, be qualified. I found no record of academic comparative studies published in the collection, which gave prominence rather to the translation of spiritual writings.

79 As well as President of India from 1962 to 1967 by the way.

80 Jean Herbert, "Notes sur la Philosophie contemporaine de l'Inde," *Le Lotus bleu* 49, no.2 (April 1938): 33–49; Jean Herbert, "Indianisme d'après-guerre en Sorbonne," *Le Lotus bleu* 55, no. 9–10 (November-December 1950): 359–376

81 Jean Filliozat and Louis Renou, *L'Inde classique: Manuel des études indiennes* (Paris: Payot, 1947).

82 On those reciprocal influences see Ulrich Harlass, "Another Neo-Hinduism? The Reception of Theosophy in the South Indian Journal the Siddhanta Deepika," *Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, no.2 (2017): 164–186.

For an overview of the Theosophical Society, see James A. Santucci, "Theosophical Society", in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1114–1123. See also Gauri Viswanathan, "Theosophical Society," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol. 5, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 678–688.

his career as a representative of the academy, to be exact as a *privat-docent* at the University of Geneva from 1955 to 1964 in charge of a classes on "Oriental Mythologies."[83] Regardless, Herbert, a brilliant interpreter, did not come to Oriental studies through philological studies but through his personal encounter with Sri Aurobindo, who granted him permission to translate his writings, in 1934. Another figure situated somewhere between Neo-Hinduism, the Theosophical Society and the academy is Gabriel Monod-Herzen (1899–1983). Monod-Herzen was an important French member of the Theosophical Society who also spread the teachings of Sri Aurobindo in France. Notably, he published a book on Sri Aurobindo in 1954.[84] As to his relation with the academy, an unpublished letter addressed by the already mentioned Louis Renou, a French philologist and director of the Institute of Indian Civilization, to Masson-Oursel is instructive. In this letter, dated the 17th of February 1950, we learn that Monod-Herzen was preparing a thesis on Sri Aurobindo, and that while Renou had accepted the idea of such a thesis four years before, he had decided to withdraw his support because Monod-Herzen's attitude toward academic Indology was too hostile and abusive. He refused to be part of the exam board, and it is my guess that Masson-Oursel was the thesis supervisor. This letter evidently did have an impact, as I have found no record of any thesis completed by Monod-Herzen. It would have been rejected as Guénon's thesis had been rejected by the dean of the Sorbonne thirty years ago. Louis Renou addresses Monod-Herzen in disparaging terms:

> M-H. belongs to that group of people who believe themselves capable of attacking 'official' or 'academic' orientalism by appealing to living traditions and to the revelations which they have received from this or that contemporary mystic. There were people of this kind, well forgotten today, in the time of Burnouf and St Julian. There was Guénon, who Claudel considered to be the greatest living orientalist from the time of S. Lévi (and whose work still casts a shadow) There is now M.-H. and Jean Herbert (the recent book of the latter, 'Indian Spirituality' is no more than a long, vicious polemic against all the work which has been done in our domain). What would these pygmies know if there had not been the likes of Champollion, Burnouf, Colebrooke at the dawn of our studies?[85]

Nevertheless, after reading this letter we must not conclude that Louis Renou, as a philologist, was opposed to all modern interpretations of Hinduism. Rolland

83 Paul Servais, "Jean Herbert (1897–1980) et l'art de la traduction" in *Passeurs de religions entre Orient et Occident* ed. Jacques Scheuer and Paul Servais, (Louvain-la-Neuve: Bruylant-Academia, 2004), 193–203.
84 Gabriel Monod-Herzen, *Shri Aurobindo* (Paris: Les Cahiers du Sud, 1954).
85 Correspondence from Louis Renou to Paul Masson-Oursel (17 February 1950, Paul Masson-Oursel file, documents waiting for inventory, Sorbonne Interuniversity Library Archives, Paris, France).

Lardinois's distinction between a more conservative faction of the "scholarly pole" composed of philologists set apart from a more recent and open-minded side represented by philosophers such as Masson-Oursel should be qualified in light of Renou's privately expressed spiritual perspectives.[86] Indeed, Louis Renou also participated in the spread of Neo-Hinduism and was closely connected with the Swami Siddheswarananda. They exchanged several letters which were published in a book written by Ms Maud Lallement, a French disciple of the Ramakrishna Order.[87] In those letters, we learn that Renou was interested in Swami's translations from Sanskrit and was glad that the Swami had acknowledged his dependence on scholarly critical methods. Moreover, in a letter dated the 13th December of 1943, Renou addressed the Swami in the following terms: "your goal is not to situate historically the doctrines in which you deeply hold faith, rather through these doctrines to establish standards which are valid for our time."[88] He further asserts:

> I wish only that you be more economical still with your appeals to ancient sources, and that you come to elaborate a technique for approaching the divine to which all humanity may subscribe, one which overarches all religion and national doctrine. I am of the opinion that you are capable of succeeding in such an endeavour.
>
> This does not prevent you from being of service to our studies in a more modest way by allowing them to benefit from the experience which you acquired through direct contact with India. The war having ended, I am entirely ready to open the doors of our institution so that you may address our little group of students on those doctrines that you have mastered, as it were, from the inside.[89]

Through the intervention of Renou, Swami Siddheswarananda actually gave lectures on Upanishadic thought at the Sorbonne each week. He was greeted in the Institute on the 26th of June 1947 by two welcome addresses delivered by Alfred Foucher (1865–1952) and Masson-Oursel.[90] Soon after the beginning of the First Indochina War, Foucher warned that "an immense task presents itself to your generation" that of reconciling "the West and the East, those two brothers so closely twinned by geography and history, who have become enemies." He praised the Swami, who "gave sincere and reassuring testimonials", as France's

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86 Lardinois, *L'invention de l'Inde*, 164 and 197.
87 Maud Lallement, *Swami Siddheswarananda et son temps: Tomes I, II & III* (Nantes: éditions du Petit Véhicule, 2006–2007).
88 Lallement, *Swami Siddheswarananda: Tome II*, 21.
89 Lallement, *Swami Siddheswarananda: Tome II*, 21–22.
90 Lallement, *Swami Siddheswarananda: Tome II*, 95–98.

"best lawyer" and thanked him. Unexpectedly taking a political stance, he then emphasized the strength of will in France to accompany Asia on the path of independence as long as Asia "agrees to be carried along in safety and in respect for the ties that bind her to us."[91] For his part, Masson-Oursel entreated the Swami to stay in France "to show what a pure, holy, just, and selfless man can achieve", and also implicitly referred to the current political situation while hoping for "mutual respect."[92] Taking a less political tone, Renou justified the presence of the Swami on the occasion of the first lecture given by the latter in November 1947 in the following terms: "the Institute of Indian Civilization looks for everything which may enlarge its horizons and for every genuine teaching [. . .]." Then added: "We seek to make room for the living tradition, for the classical Vedanta as well as the modern,"[93] thereby acknowledging the contribution which the modern pandits might make to Indian studies.

9 Common Features in the Field of Discourses on India

My aim here has been to identify, through the study of Masson-Oursel's relations with non-hegemonic currents, the points of agreement and bones of contention which marked the broad field of discourses on India at that period. It is now time to come to some general conclusions on the matter. The principal bone of contention was, as expected, the level of consideration to be given to history and philology. On the question of the mutual agreements, I perceive three shared features across the writings of Masson-Oursel, some other academics and certain non-hegemonic currents: (1) the adopting of a critical attitude towards scholarly and philology-oriented Indology, (2) an interest in indigenous perspectives, (3) the high aspirations which they invested in their writings.

(1) Dissatisfaction with scholarly and philology-oriented Indology appears to be the most obvious element shared by Masson-Oursel and non-hegemonic currents. Masson-Oursel aimed to arrive at a deeper understanding of Hindu traditions, a goal which in his opinion had not been achieved by Indology. His

91 Lallement, *Swami Siddheswarananda: Tome II*, 96–97.
92 Lallement, *Swami Siddheswarananda: Tome II*, 98.
93 Lallement, *Swami Siddheswarananda: Tome II*, 108.

criticism especially focused on the lack of sympathy towards the Indian religious way of thinking, and this criticism was shared by people located outside the academy, such as Herbert, Guénon and Monod-Herzen.

(2) Masson-Oursel's criticism is obviously linked to his own perspective towards Indology. What might be called the indigenous or insider perspective towards religion appealed to him. He firmly believed that commentary from modern Hindu philosophers can assist in coming to an understanding of Hindu sacred writings and herein also lies the reason for his interest in Guénon's assessments. In addition to his appeal towards the idea of a primordial knowledge, Guénon's theories resonated with Masson-Oursel because they appeared to embrace the notion of "judging the Hindu matter in an Indian way." A speech delivered by Masson-Oursel at Geneva in 1949 during the *Rencontres internationales de Genève* is particularly instructive in this regard. To the question: "Is it easier to understand religious otherness if we are ourselves a religious person?" Masson-Oursel provided the following answer:

> . . . When seeking to understand a non-European, human reality, the advantages of cultivating a sympathetic attitude towards and informing ourselves on religious matters far outweigh the disadvantages [. . .] There are people whose intelligence of religions is heightened, arising from the fact that religion is not confined to words [. . .] when we foolishly consider religion to be of no relevance, spiritual facts, inherently spiritual facts, remain unintelligible. It is better to understand the latter badly while according them meaning, than to grasp them in linguistic terms alone without discovering their meaning: a gesture of pure poverty. Jean Herbert knows this well, and he has often protested against such a mentality. Certain men whose knowledge should make them great Indologists or sinologists, on the pretext that they are not interested in magic or the power of the spirit – two different expressions for the same thing – limit themselves ultimately to a mere grammatical knowledge without arriving at the meaning of the text.[94]

Masson-Oursel, as I pointed it out, devoted himself to the spiritual life: believing that his devotion facilitated a better understanding of Indian religions, he took inspiration from the spiritually engaged perspective from which representatives of Neo-Hinduism or esoteric spokespersons addressed Hindu texts. His position however was not uncommon in the scholarly field. Here is not the place to enter into a discussion on the religionism/reductionism debate which shook the field of the study of religions,[95] neither will I detail Masson-

94 Paul Masson-Oursel, "L'homme des Civilisations Orientales," in *Pour un nouvel humanisme, textes des conférences et des entretiens organisés par les Rencontres internationales de Genève* (Neuchâtel: éditions de la Baconnière, 1949), 75.

95 For an overview of this debate – which "is principally concerned with defining the proper method for the academic study of religion" – with a special emphasis on Western esotericism,

Oursel's participation in the Eranos meetings.[96] I will instead limit myself to two remarks. First, there is no inconsistency between Masson-Oursel's attraction towards the insider perspective and his program of comparative philosophy, which is decidedly etic in orientation. As indicated, Masson-Oursel was pursuing the same objective in both: to understand the spiritual phenomenon, to grasp its meaning and even its reality. They were both possible "means of realizing the spiritual" to use his own words as he expressed them at Eranos.[97] Second, if such an objective accorded with Eranos's religionist perspective and "the project of exploring historical sources in search of what is eternal and universal,"[98] Masson-Oursel never sacrificed historical evidence,[99] and his position is better understood in comparison with that of other French Indologists, such as Renou and Lévi. For instance, in an enthusiastic review of a book on Japanese Buddhism written by a Japanese Buddhist, Sylvain Lévi wrote:

> Religion, foreign to reason and science, cannot be explained by reason and science only; it is the work of the heart more than of the spirit, and must be appreciated through the heart more than through the spirit. Reading the sacred texts is not enough to gain an understanding of them; we must also love them with the fervour of a devotee, while also being ready to love other beliefs with equal fervour.
>
> [. . .] The history of religions, to be exact and faithful, should resort to patient erudition as well to intuition; it is at the same time a science and an art.[100]

Through these assertions, Lévi implicitly referred to the overly positivist German Indology he firmly criticized.[101] Naturally, similar claims to an intimate understanding of Indian religion were expressed by non-academic authors like Herbert,

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see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 7, no.2 (1995): 99–129.

96 He participated several times in the Eranos meetings. His lectures delivered on the 1936 edition were issued in Joseph Campbell, ed., *The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* (London: Routledge, 1955).

97 Paul Masson-Oursel, "The Indian theories of Redemption in the Frame of the Religions of Salvation," in (ed.), *The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, ed. Joseph Campbell, 3.

98 Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 296.

99 And in this respect, he found himself closer to Gershom Scholem (1897–1982) than Henry Corbin, two leading figures of the Eranos meetings.

100 Sylvain Lévi, review of *Le Bouddhisme Japonais*, by Ryauon Fujishima, *Revue critique d'histoire et de littérature*, no. 52 (29 décembre 1890): 497–499.

101 Pascale Rabault, "Sylvain Lévi, lecteur de l'indianisme allemand: Comptes rendus parus dans la Revue Critique d'histoire et de littérature (1885–1914)," in *Sylvain Lévi (1863–1935): études indiennes, histoire sociale*, ed. Lune Bansat-Boudon and Roland Lardinois (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 301–342.

Monod-Herzen and Guénon; however, from Masson-Oursel's perspective, as well as that of Lévi or Renou, such an understanding by necessity included philological erudition and historical criticism, a prerequisite unambiguously articulated in Masson-Oursel's program of comparative philosophy.

(3) Another striking feature of comparative philosophy is the high aspirations which Masson-Oursel invested in his program. In his auto-obituary, Masson-Oursel claimed: "There will be peace between human beings, in all the diversity of their societies, only once a less rigid and more generalized perspective of comparative study has emerged which will enable them to interact without either hatred or indifference."[102] Masson-Oursel truly believed comparative philosophy can further the cause of peace through its cultivating of a keener appreciation of human thought and otherness. "Comparative philosophy is a necessary condition not only for peace, but for human existence itself" was his creed.[103] If he was glad to have had an albeit limited influence within the academic circles, one can assume that he aspired to make a wider impact. The scope of influence of non-hegemonic currents sharing similar goals would thereby have represented a major force of attraction for him. Some of these currents also believed that a deeper understanding of Indian wisdom may play a role in building World peace and in aiding the recovery of the "materialistic" West. This is clearly expressed in the first edition of the periodical *Spiritualité*, which "proposes precisely to achieve the triumph of spirit over matter, love over hatred, through the synthesis of the overwhelmingly scientific Western culture with the spirituality of the East [. . .]."[104] *Krur* for its part regretted that this Western world, "whose limit is matter," "does not know light".[105] This must be understood within the historical and cultural context of the first half of the twentieth century, deeply affected by the two world wars, the process of decolonisation and permeated by an atmosphere of crisis relating to the decline of the West and its forms of rationality. The collective book directed by Jacques Masui and published in 1949, *Approches de l'Inde: Tradition et incidences*,[106] also provides a good example of such an atmosphere which I cannot discuss it in detail here.

102 Lacombe, "Paul Masson-Oursel (1882–1956)," 20.

103 Paul Masson-Oursel, "True philosophy is comparative philosophy," trans. Harold E. McCarthy, *Philosophy East and West: A Quarterly Journal of Oriental and Comparative Thought* 1, no.1 (April 1951): 8.

104 "Editorial," *Spiritualité*, no.1 (15 December 1944): 1.

105 "Introduzione: 'Volontà di Avanti,'" in *Introduzione alla Magia quale scienza dell'Io* (Roma: Tilopa Editrice, 1929), 1.

106 Jacques Masui, ed., *Approches de l'Inde: Tradition et incidences* (Paris: Les Cahiers du Sud, 1949).

This book included articles written by scholars, such as Masson-Oursel, his student Olivier Lacombe, and Mircea Eliade, alongside others written by "prophets", namely René Guénon, Jean Herbert and Sri Aurobindo. Furthermore, its opening epigraph is a quote from René Guénon: " . . . if anything from the West can be saved, it will be with the help of the East . . . " This epigraph echoes what Masson-Oursel wrote to the Swami Siddheswarananda in an unpublished letter dated 3 January 1940: "If it were to widen its field of influence, an apostolate like yours would restore to the Westerners their human dignity."[107] Masson-Oursel was not the only academic Indologist who held this view. Alfred Foucher entertained the same expectations in the non-academic periodical *France-Asie*. In an article on Sri Aurobindo, he praised him while asking whether:

> The problem is currently the same for all: will humanity allow itself to descend into a barbarity, precariously based on a combination of interests and avidities, or will the human race, faithful to its vocation and listening to the teachings of its wise men, make the necessary efforts to unite itself at a higher level of civilization?[108]

10 Further Issues

Although the focus here has been on Masson-Oursel, it then appears that he was not the only French Indologist to share certain viewpoints with non-hegemonic currents. Nevertheless, the depth of his relations with esoteric circles, which can schematically be perceived as located at the extremes of non-hegemonic currents, were quite remarkable for an academic Indologist of the time. I have yet to find any article by either Lévi or Renou in periodicals such as *Krur* or *Spiritualité*. Thus, the features I specified appear to be insufficient to explain Masson-Oursel's involvement in esoteric periodicals. His publicly acknowledged personal interest, as mentioned earlier, in areas related to esoteric currents -although not exclusively- may further explain this close relationship. Renou and Lévi do not, for their part, provide us with any public declaration of that kind. While Masson-Oursel, especially towards the end of his life, was seemingly not fazed by the controversial nature of these areas: Lévi and Renou, may simply not have had any interest in them, or alternatively

107 Correspondence from Paul Masson-Oursel to Swami Siddheswarananda, (3 January 1940, unpublished letter transmitted to the author at the courtesy of Alejandro Gutierrez), 2p.
108 Alfred Foucher, "Shrî Aurobindo," *France-Asie* 4, no. 59 (April 1951): 1193.

could perhaps not bring themselves to public acknowledge such an interest.[109] I can do no justice to such an interrogation within the confines of the present article. Similarly, the interpretations of Hinduism given by Neo-Hinduist representatives, or even esoteric spokespersons, may have had an influence on the understanding of Hindu traditions by academic scholars such as Masson-Oursel or Renou; however, this must be discussed in more detail by specialists in Indian studies.[110] I have sought in this article merely to highlight some features common to the broad field of Indology. To a certain extent, there can be a common ground between what may be called the academic, the non-hegemonic and the esoteric. Common perspectives and aspirations can be shared by each side and, in my opinion, this common ground needs to be clarified before getting into an analysis of their relationships and mutual influences in the various fields of human societies. This approach can indeed be applied to other fields, such as the medical one, on which my thesis, dealing with the practice of and discourse on medical holism in France during the interwar period, is focused.

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109 In an instructive article in which he spoke in favour of the help modern pandits can bring to Indology while criticising esoteric currents, Renou asserted : "it is hoped that we will arrive at a stage in which it will no longer be possible to write general histories of philosophy without mentioning the philosophers of India; manuals of alchemy or astrology (like the two, excellent by the way, which have just appeared in the French collection "Que sais-je?") leave out the considerable contribution of India in these matters to which Berthelot or Biot once knew how to ensure justice." See Louis Renou, "L'indianisme en 1952," *Diogène*, no.2 (April 1953): 90. It should be noted that the manual of astrology he referred to was highly critical, which was not the case of the one dealing with alchemy.

Sylvain Lévi for his part was a reader and supporter of the periodical *Atlantis* directed by the esotericist Paul le Cour (1871–1954).

110 Another very important chapter in the life of Paul Masson-Oursel which I did not have time to discuss here was his involvement in the field of psychology and more precisely applied psychology. On that matter, see the informative article focused on Masson-Oursel by Ana Freire, "Le fait psychique total au carrefour de la psychologie et de la psychagogie," *Academia*, accessed 20 June 2018, https://www.academia.edu/15670540/LE_FAIT_PSYCHIQUE_TOTAL_AU_CARREFOUR_DE_LA_PSYCHOLOGIE_ET_DE_LA_PSYCHAGOGIE

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Sabine Böhme

The Ancient Processional Street of Babylon at the Pergamonmuseum Berlin: Walter Andrae's Reconstruction and Its Anthroposophical Background

Abstract: Walter Andrae (1875–1956) was one of the most renowned German Near Eastern archaeologists in the period preceding the First World War. In the mid-1920s he managed to secure the transfer of the Ashur and Babylon finds to Berlin. With the arrival of these finds, the planning and furbishing of the exhibition rooms and halls of the Museum of Ancient Near East in the Pergamon-Museum entered its next phase. The core exhibit of the museum, inaugurated in 1930, was the Ishtar Gate, the Throne Room Façade, and the Processional Street from Babylon. These findings became one of the masterpieces of the Berliner *Museumsinsel* – today considered to be part of the world's cultural heritage. However, Andrae's arrangement of these elements was not only directed by academic conceptions of the early 20th century. Rather, the arrangement represents Andrae's very own concept of a museum, influenced by the teachings of Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), founder of the anthroposophical movement, to whose ideas Andrae had been exposed since joining the anthroposophical church *Die Christengemeinschaft* (The Christian Community). This context has been overlooked by generations of specialists in the field. By drawing attention to the anthroposophical context, we can read the arrangement of the Ishtar Gate, the Throne Room Façade, and the Processional Street as Andrae's restaging of a Babylonian path of initiation with evident allusions to the ritual practice of modern anthroposophy.

1 Introduction

Museum exhibitions tell us as much about those who created them as they do about the historical periods and facts that they try to exhibit and explain. The exhibition on the Ancient Near East, conceived by the architectural historian and excavator Walter Andrae, which opened in the *Pergamonmuseum* Berlin in 1930, is no exception to this rule. The so-called Processional Street and the Ishtar Gate hall ensemble from Babylon, with adjacent rooms displaying different epochs of Ancient Near Eastern history, seem on first sight to have been

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created merely to display enormous architectural structures and unique artefacts. However, there is compelling evidence that Andrae created the exhibition in a manner that gave form to his personal, tightly woven version of the story of the Ancient Near East, developed in accordance with anthroposophical thinking on the history of humankind.[1]

2 Walter Andrae (1875–1956): Excavator, Architect, Curator

For Walter Andrae, the year 1928 was a turning point in his career. After the death of Otto Weber, he was appointed director of the *Vorderasiatische Abteilung* (*Department of Ancient Near East)* of the future *Pergamonmuseum* Berlin. In 1899, as a young architect, Andrae had joined the German excavations in the ruins of Babylon on the Euphrates, then falling within the Arabic parts of the Ottoman Empire but today in Iraq. At first – according to Robert Koldewey,[2] head of the excavating mission and Andrae's year-long mentor – the young man had hardly anything to recommend him apart from his exceptional drawing skills. However, by 1903 Andrae's newly honed capabilities had already led to him being entrusted with an excavation site of his own at Ashur, on the banks of the Tigris in northern Mesopotamia.[3]

The modern scientific approaches implemented by the Germans working on these projects were soon admired worldwide. Meanwhile, the main objective

1 I would like to thank Dr. Nadja Cholidis and Dr. Lutz Martin for their constant support of my research on Walter Andrae.

2 Robert Koldewey (1855–1925) excavated in Babylon from 1899 until 1917.

3 Walter Andrae was born on February 18th, 1875 in Anger near Leipzig into a Protestant family. His family was not – as he himself points out in his memoirs – very religious. Walter Andrae, *Lebenserinnerungen eines Ausgräbers* (Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1988), 18. Andrae's grandfather and father had worked as railway engineers in Saxony, and his father was known in Leipzig as a gifted musician and lay theatre actor. Andrae, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 25–26. Andrae received his secondary education at the prestigious Grimma Boarding School and later studied in Dresden, where he took a degree in architecture. Andrae, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 9–10, 299. In 1914, he married a considerably younger cousin from the paternal side of his family: Emma Andrae (1892–1974). After returning from the Western front in 1915, Andrae was transferred to the Turko-German expedition corps in Ottoman Mesopotamia and Palestine. Andrae, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 223, 226–227. Walter Andrae held the post of Director of the Vorderasiatische Museum from 1928 until 1951. Beate Salje, "Ein Museum hält Rückschau und blickt in die Zukunft: 100 Jahre Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin," *Antike Welt* 30, no. 3 (1999): 285–291. He died on July 26th, 1956 in Berlin.

of the financiers and supporters of these excavations was to obtain exotic finds for a new building (der *Neubau*, now the *Pergamonmuseum*) on Berlin's Museum Island, a public demonstration of the achievements of *Deutsche Wissenschaft*.[4] All of this came to a halt during the course of the First World War.

After his return from the war, Andrae began to publish the results of the excavations, relying as he did so on the well-founded modern-style documentation of the excavators. However, for the time being he was forced to continue his work without direct access to the original finds. The majority of these had stayed behind in the excavation house at Babylon while others had been confiscated by the Portuguese government during an attempt to move them to Berlin by ship after the outbreak of war.[5]

In 1922, Andrae and his family moved from Hemmenhofen/Bodensee to the German capital of Berlin, where he took up a post as a curator at the *Staatliche Museen Berlin* in the Department of Ancient Near East. The exhibition space that would be devoted to finds from the Ancient Near East was still in its planning stages at this point. After receiving his *Habilitation* from the Technical University Charlottenburg, Andrae began to lecture on architectural history. In 1927, after long negotiations, he finally managed to secure the transfer to Berlin of the finds that had been discovered at Babylon and Ashur. When the post of director of his department became vacant, Andrae was the obvious choice to fill the position.

Andrae created an indisputable cultural highlight when he reassembled the impressive Ishtar Gate, the Processional Street, and the Palace Throne Room Façade, constructed of glazed bricks, in the so-called Ishtar Gate hall, one of the first three rooms opened in 1930 as the Department of Ancient Near East. The public, as well as the national and international press, responded overwhelmingly and guided tours by the director of the department were much in demand. Additional impressively furnished rooms on both sides of the Processional Street axis leading to the Ishtar Gate opened in 1934. By 1936, Andrae had finished all the halls and rooms of the Department of Ancient Near East in the *Pergamonmuseum*.

Impressive as this record is, there is more to Andrae's personality than his public work immediately reveals. In his autobiography, *Lebenserinnerungen*

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4 Sabine Böhme, "Die Goldene Leibniz-Medaille, eine Grußblatt-Sammlung, eine „Festschrift" sowie ein Exlibris und die „deutsche Wissenschaftstradition": Späte Ehrungen für Bruno Güterbocks (1858–1940) „unendliche Arbeit" als Schriftführer der DOG im Jahr 1928," *marru* 6 (2018): 311–329.

5 Nadja Cholidis, "'Abgegeben an Portugal für Assur-Funde': Ein Kapitel deutsch-portugiesischer Museumsgeschichte (1914–1927)," in *Zum Kriegsdienst einberufen: Die Königlichen Museen zu Berlin und der Erste Weltkrieg*, ed. Petra Winter and Jörn Grabowski (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 133–160.

eines Ausgräbers (Memoirs of an Excavator),[6] Andrae describes how, as a soldier in 1917, he stayed several days on the shores of the Sea of Galilee during the retreat of the Turko-German units through Palestine. Later in his life, he seems to have connected this stay with a spiritual experience that provoked a fundamental change in his worldview and attitude to life.[7] During the 1920s, Andrae became involved in anthroposophical[8] circles in Berlin and in the *Christengemeinschaft* founded under the influence of Rudolf Steiner.[9] His and his family's commitment to anthroposophical ideas did not cease during their lifetime.

3 The Riddle of Andrae's Exhibition Concept

From the time of Andrae's appointment as director of the museum, it is possible to observe a paradox concerning the way in which his contributions were perceived by colleagues and the scientific community. Attentive and careful reading

6 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Terms in italics are often used in anthroposophical contexts.

7 See Mario Zadow, "Andrae, Walter Ernst," *Forschungsstelle Kulturimpuls – Biographien Dokumentation*, accessed June 16, 2018, https://biographien.kulturimpuls.org/detail.Php?&id=22. Most likely, Andrae's conversion to Anthroposophy goes back to those days by the Sea of Galilee. This is corroborated by his son Ernst Walter, who states that his father's adherence to anthroposophy was a fruit of the second half of his life. Walter Andrae, "Das Kleinod von Babylon," *Erziehungskunst*. *Monatsschrift zur Pädagogik Rudolf Steiners* 5 (Mai 1988): 322, accessed June 16, 2018, https://www.erziehungskunst.de/archiv/jahrgang-1980-1989/jahrgang-1988/mai-1988/. The year 1917 is close to the half-way point in Walter Andrae's life (1875–1956).

8 Anthroposophy is known today to many due to its influence on the ideas of integral medicine, biodynamic agriculture, and Waldorf pedagogy. Anthroposophy is intrinsically related to the person and the teachings of its founder Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). Born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Steiner received a degree in philosophy from Rostock University in 1891. After contributing to an edition of Goethe, studying German idealism, and writing on Nietzsche's philosophy, he established contact with the Theosophical movement in 1900. However, the Anthroposophical movement, with Steiner as its undisputed leader, separated from the Theosophical movement in 1912. See Helmut Zander, *Rudolf Steiner: Die Biografie* (München: Piper Verlag GmbH, 2011), and Heiner Ullrich, *Rudolf Steiner: Leben und Lehre* (München: C.H. Beck, 2011).

9 The Christian Community. See section 6: The Cultic Function of the 'Trilogy' or the 'Gem of Babylon' (*Das Kleinod von Babylon*) in the Museum of Ancient Near East Orient according to Walter Andrae.

of his vast publications would have displayed obvious traces of anthroposophical thoughts to anyone who cared to look. However, apart from casual remarks reflecting on Andrae's esoteric interests, there was never an open discussion in the public sphere or in learned circles about his spiritual leanings. This may have been due to the fact that his position had quickly become unassailable. He was renowned not only for his work in the museum but as one of the model excavators of Imperial Germany and the gifted negotiator who had managed to extract – with the support of the remarkable Gertrude Bell – the Ishtar Gate bricks from British Mandate Iraq.

Andrae was pensioned off in 1951.[10] As before, he resided in West Berlin, while the museum belonged to the Eastern part of the city. During the subsequent decades, the Cold War and the deepening partition of Berlin would help to keep a lid on many questions concerning the museum. Successive generations of Near Eastern archaeologists were somehow convinced that Andrae's approach in his presentation of Ancient Near Eastern architecture followed along much the same lines as Theodor Wiegand's approach for the classical halls and rooms in the *Pergamonmuseum*.[11]

Generally, it should be noted that all the departments (Classical, Ancient Near East, and Islamic Art) of the pre-Second-World-War *Pergamonmuseum* (originally a department of medieval German art was also to be incorporated) displayed examples of the antique architecture of their respective periods – very often in the form of large, reconstructed architectural parts or façades.[12] In a recent discussion about the *Pergamonmuseum*, Nikolaus Bernau[13] stresses

10 Salje,“ Ein Museum hält Rückschau,” 287.

11 Nikolaus Bernau, “Das Pergamonmuseum und seine vier Museen als Lehrinstrumente einer anderen Moderne,” in *Pergamon: Panorama der antiken Metropole*, ed. Ralf Grüßinger et al. (Berlin: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2011), 389–391. Hans W. Witschurke describes the Department of Ancient Near East and the entire *Pergamonmuseum* as museums of architecture and early civilisations. See Hans W. Witschurke, “Das Pergamonmuseum – Das Museum für Architektur und den Ursprung der Zivilisation,” in *Museum der Museen*: *Die Berliner Museumsinsel als Entwicklungsgeschichte des deutschen Kunstmuseums*, ed. Hans W. Witschurke (Aachen: Geymüller, 2015), 177–208.

12 “Das Pergamonmuseum wendet sich bis heute mit seiner anschaulichen Sammlung rekonstruierter Architekturfragmente an alle Schichten der Gesellschaft: Es war das erste populäre Museum auf der Spreeinsel” (“The *Pergamonmuseum*, with its vivid collections of reconstructed elements of architectural fragments, continues to address all stratas of society up to the present day. It was the first popular museum on the Spree island”). Witschurke, “Das Pergamonmuseum,” 190.

13 Bernau, “Das Pergamonmuseum und seine vier Museen,” 389–390.

that the common trait of all the departments was the "staging of period architecture" by means of "spolia, partial reconstructions and castings". According to Bernau, the exhibits of the classical department were intended to serve as style examples for students of architecture. By contrast, the department with the Ancient Orient collections "celebrated colour as an essential part of architecture, reflecting on Goethe's research on colours".[14]

It seems that it was overlooked, or consciously ignored, by many that Andrae had considerably enlarged the scope of archaeological research into ancient architecture by adding, from the start, a dimension of transcendental meaning to the conceptual arrangements of the exhibition halls.[15] A number of questions that might have been raised concerning Andrae's approach were not asked. For example, why did he place a pair of Hittite sphinxes from Hattusha /Boğazköy (mid-2nd mill. BC) in Anatolia with different dating and origin at the entrance of the Neo-Babylonian Processional Street of Babylon (6th century BC)?[16]

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14 This is a topic that deserves closer analysis. In fact, it seems that all its halls and rooms were painted in colours that had been carefully selected by Walter Andrae. It is extremely likely that this colour scheme was inspired by Andrae's spiritual views, which would have followed Rudolf Steiner's reception of Goethe's theory of colours. Bernau, who does not give a reference here but probably draws on Andrae's *Lebenserinnerungen* (Andrae, 279–280), is one of several researchers who seem to have come close to grasping Andrae's a Anthroposophical master plan but stopped short of explaining it.

15 In Walter Andrae, *Die Ionische Säule: Bauform oder Symbol?* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1933), 2, one can find this enlarged concept of an archaeological analysis of architecture. "Archaeological research finds itself . . . confronted to a greater or lesser extent with clearly defined groups of forms and shapes which it classifies, thereafter verifying this classification by reference to their historical context and the laws regarding their historical context and classifies into regional groups. However, if the research is concerned with the genesis and development of these forms, it also arrives at the transcendental, that is the field which determines the spiritual content of all monuments of a higher kind . . . We are indeed concerned with the reality of the symbols and the influential powers behind them." ("Die archäologische Forschung . . . sieht sich mehr oder minder deutlich umgrenzten Formengruppen und Gestaltungen gegenüber, die sie ordnet, auf ihre zeitgesetzlichen Zusammenhänge prüft und nach Erdregionen scheidet. Forscht sie aber nach Entstehung und Entwicklung jener Formen, so kommt sie gleichfalls ins Transzendente, also in das Gebiet, das den geistigen Inhalt aller höher gearteten Denkmäler bestimmt . . . es geht uns durchaus um die Wirklichkeit dieser Symbole und der hinter ihnen wirkenden Kräfte").

16 Bernau, "Das Pergamonmuseum und seine vier Museen," 389, is again the most recent commentator. He assumes that the sphinxes from Hattusha have only a restricted role as architectural elements that mark the entrance of the Processional Street.

4 From *Das Gotteshaus und die Urform des Bauens im Alten Orient* via *Die Ionische Säule: Bauform oder Symbol* to *Alte Feststraßen im Nahen Osten*: Andrae's Core Publications during the 1930s and Early 1940s and Their Anthroposophical Context

From 1928 to 1941, Andrae worked out his own set of ideas regarding the architecture and culture of the Ancient Near East. Ever since his participation in the famous excavations prior to the First World War, he had defined himself not as an archaeologist per se, in the 19th century understanding of the term, but as an architectural researcher.[17] Indeed, much of the task of these first German excavators had been the analysis of the remnants of huge building structures of mud brick architecture.[18]

When Andrae published *Das Gotteshaus und die Urform des Bauens im Alten Orient* (The House of God and the Primordial Form of Constructing in the Ancient Near East) in 1930, the work seemed, on first sight, to be a projection of this experience. However, he did not limit himself throughout its many pages to explaining the development of religious and non-religious buildings in the Ancient Near East, for example by analysing the types of the Babylonian and Assyrian temples in the first millennium BC, and from there reaching back to their common *Urformen* (primordial forms) in prehistorical times. On the contrary, he also tried to explain the *sense* of these developments, not as a technical contribution or as the work of an art historian but, rather, as someone who searches *Urformen* and their powerful inherent growing force " . . . as an

17 Walter Andrae, "Die Technik des Ausgrabens," *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen* 79, no. 5 (1927): 116–122; Walter Andrae, "Altorientalische Ausgrabungen," *Berliner Museen* 49, no. 2 (1928): 26–29; Margarete van Ess, "Koldewey – Pionier systematischer Ausgrabungen im Orient," in *Auf dem Weg nach Babylon,* ed. Ralf-B. Wartke (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2008), 90–107; Dittmar Machule, "Robert Koldewey und die Bauforschung," in *Auf dem Weg nach Babylon,* ed. Ralf-B. Wartke (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2008), 108–123.

18 In 1926, Andrae and several other architectural researchers founded the *Koldewey-Gesellschaft. Vereinigung für baugeschichtliche Forschung e.V*. (Association for Architectural Research). It is still active today.

attempt to come closer to the growing forces and to the sense underlying the development".[19]

Shortly after the *Gotteshaus*, he published in 1933 *Die Ionische Säule, Bauform oder Symbol?* (The Ionian Column: Structural Form or Symbol?). The title already suggested that Andrae was now even more focused on the spiritual meanings of architectural forms. This interest was summarised in an article of the same year, *Symbol in der Baukunst* (Symbol in the Art of Construction), in which he wrote: "We have to become aware of how something which has been formed out of earthly matter is infused with supernatural spiritual meaning and, as a consequence, appears before us as an image of a transcendental truth. We experience this in, for example, the sign of the Cross."[20] Already in 1927/28, Andrae had taught at the Technical University Charlottenburg that, "form theory is not only the recognition and study of all forms that have ever been invented but also, and to a much greater extent, involves empathy with the essence of the forms, their spiritual content, and the sensing of a deep religious meaning in the best among them."[21]

In his *Alte Feststraßen im Nahen Osten* (Old Processional Streets in the Near East), published in 1941, Andrae set out to reconstruct four processional streets from four different ancient cities – Hattusha/Boğazköy, Ashur, Babylon, and Uruk –, each featuring various images of the gods and supernatural winged creatures. He explained that images of gods act as images of what he terms essentialities: "If images of such spiritual beings are erected to the right and the left of these processional streets in order to visualise for the physical eye of the humans passing between them and next to them what can only be perceived by

19 "(Als) ein Versuch der treibenden Kraft und damit dem Sinn der Entwicklung nahezukommen." Walter Andrae, *Das Gotteshaus und die Urformen des Bauens im Alten Orient* (Berlin: Hans Schoetz & Co. Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1930), 89.

20 "Es muß uns bewußt werden, wie ein aus irdischem Stoff Geformtes mit überirdisch-geistigem Sinn erfüllt wird und nun als Bild einer transzendenten Wahrheit vor uns steht. Wir erleben es beispielsweise am Zeichen des Kreuzes" Walter Andrae, "Symbol in der Baukunst," *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 9, September 10 (1933): 373–374.

21 "Formenlehre ist für uns nicht bloß das Erkennen und Erlernen aller je erfundenen Formen, sondern auch, und noch viel mehr das Einfühlen in das Wesen der Formen, in ihren geistigen Inhalt und das Ahnen einer tiefen religiösen Bedeutung der besten von ihnen" Unpublished lecture manuscript: "Bauformen der Antike u. der Renaissance". "Architectural forms in Antiquity and Renaissance" by Walter Andrae from February 5, 1927–1928 (Technical University of Charlottenburg). Source: Estate Walter Andrae, Staatsbibliothek Berlin-Preu ßischer Kulturbesitz 103.

the spiritual eye . . ., [then] even those who are not yet highly imbued, will be elevated to higher levels of knowledge."[22]

5 The Inherent Context of the Processional Street and the Ishtar Gate Hall Ensemble of Babylon: An Example for Andrae's Museal Concept

Much work remains to be done if we are to trace and clearly identify Andrae's anthroposophical thought in his work and publishing over the period of some 30 years from the early 1920s until the mid-1950s. Andrae is most explicit in those writings published after the Second World War, in which open references to Rudolf Steiner abound. Meanwhile, his curatorial interpretation of the Processional Street and the Ishtar Gate hall ensemble has barely been altered in the years since he laid it out and can still be studied in today's *Vorderasiatische Museum* (Museum of Ancient Near East).

In 1945 Andrae had to endure the *Entnahmeaktion* (removal operation) undertaken by the *Trophäenkommission* (trophy commission) of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD). Numerous objects from the Berlin museums, among them many exhibits of the Department of Ancient Near East, were transferred to the Soviet Union – for good, it seemed at the time. Andrae did not live to see their return in 1958. Against this backdrop, he felt the urge to draw up a synopsis of his work as curator. The result was a volume of 387 typed pages.[23] In this testimony, entitled *Wesen und Wert eines* Museums (Essence and Value of a Museum), Andrae dwells extensively on anthroposophical conceptions of man, the successive stages of culture, and the different forms of human aesthetic perception through history as laid down by Rudolf Steiner from 1900 onwards. These concepts provide not only the epistemological key to Andrae's analyses of Ancient Near Eastern civilisations but also the key to an understanding of the exhibition in the museum halls.

22 "Wenn an Feststraßen rechts und links Bilder solcher Geisteswesenheiten aufgerichtet wurden und den leiblichen Augen der zwischen ihnen oder neben ihnen vorbeiziehenden Menschen sichtbar machen, was nur vom geistigen Auge erschaut werden kann . . ., so werden auch die noch nicht Hochbegnadeten hinaufgehoben zu den höheren Stufen der Erkenntnisse." Walter Andrae, *Alte Feststraßen im Nahen Osten: Hattusa, Assur, Babylon, Uruk*, 2nd. ed. (Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1964), 14.

23 Estate Walter Andrae (1875–1956) 78,1 (typoscript), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

Andrae intended to publish this testimony. However, the renowned Gebrüder Mann publishing house declined the manuscript on the grounds that the content would not meet the requirements and standards of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (German Research Foundation).[24] Despite this refusal of publishing support, Andrae did not set aside his project. Instead, he compiled a markedly shorter, summarised version of his interpretation of the Processional Street, the Ishtar Gate, and the Throne Room Façade. This 'Trilogy', as he usually called it, evidently formed the museum's backbone, dating to the Neo-Babylonian period, or more precisely to the reign of Nebukadnezar II (604–562 BC). In this unpublished summary, he introduces another term for the ensemble: *Das Kleinod von Babylon*.[25]

It was not until 1988, long after Andrae's death, that an excerpt of these later writings found its way into the public realm. On the occasion of the launching of the second edition of Andrae's memoirs in the same year,[26] the West German Anthroposophical magazine *Erziehungskunst – Monatsschrift zur Pädagogik Rudolf Steiners* published a shorter version of *Das Kleinod von Babylon* in cooperation with Andrae's eldest son Ernst.[27] Here, the focus is on the overall meaning of the *Kleinod,* as revealed in its animal reliefs and the symbolism of the plants depicted on the three intensely colourful and glazed brick façades.

Ernst Andrae contributed a short introduction to this article which provides some useful hints. For example, he notes that his father had drawn inspiration for his work by meeting the two *Erzoberlenker*[28] of the *Christengemeinschaft*, Dr. Friedrich Rittelmeyer and Emil Bock,[29] as well as from the study of the work of Rudolf Steiner. With regard to the *Kleinod*, it was especially Steiner's lecture on

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24 Andrae's handwritten version of his museum testament is documented in nine folders (Estate Walter Andrae 76). The title is *Entstehen und Leben eines Museums. Die Vorderasiatische Abteilung der Staatl. Museen* zu *Berlin. The Emergence and Life of a Museum of the Near Eastern Department of the State Museums of Berlin*. The last folder dates to September 22, 1951 (Estate Walter Andrae 76). Attached to the folder is a letter by R. Hartmann of the publishing house Gebr. Mann Berlin dating to March 1, 1952.

25 Estate Walter Andrae 87 (typoscript), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz: *Das Kleinod von Babylon*. (The Gem of Babylon) 1954.

26 Andrae, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 1988.

27 Andrae, "Das Kleinod von Babylon," 321–335, accessed June 20, 2018, https://www.erziehungskunst.de/archiv/jahrgang-1980-1989/jahrgang-1988/mai-1988/.

28 The term is usually not translated by the Christian Community. The *Erzoberlenker* holds the highest leading position in the Christian Community.

29 Andrae, "Das Kleinod von Babylon," 322. Friedrich Karl Rittelmeyer (1872–1938) and Emil Bock (1895–1959) were *Erzoberlenker* of the Christian Community in the 1920s and 1930s.

the gospel of Luke that piqued Andrae's interest.[30] In this lecture, Steiner had talked about Moses and a certain Zaratos or Nazarthos as the two incarnations during the so-called Egypto-Chaldean cultural epoch of the "individuality" of Zarathustra, who was himself the leading initiate of the preceding so-called proto-Persian cultural epoch.[31] In fact, Walter Andrae himself refers to the "great initiated" Zaratos or Nazarthos who would have stood behind the design of the 'Trilogy' as the teacher and inspirer of Nebukadnezar II.[32] One is hard pressed to find any Zaratos or Nazarthos in the historical sources. Nevertheless, for the internationally known excavator, curator, museum director, and lecturer in architecture, Steiner's vision of history had obviously become crucial already in the early stages of his work on the exhibition.

In a small museum guide to the then nearly completed exhibition, published in 1934, the director stresses the singularity of the 'Trilogy'. According to him, it was the only spot in ancient Babylon close to the *Königsburg* where the coloured façades could be discovered which show "the incomparably precious sparkle of the walls of enameled colours".[33] There is no doubt that this was, for Andrae, a result of its cultic character. Indeed, Andrae would later speak in the *Kleinod* of the great importance of the 'Trilogy' within the history of spirit ("*geistesgeschichtliche Bedeutung*").[34]

In Babylon, in the time of Nebukadnezar II, the 'Trilogy' for Andrae had been the core of the New Year's processional street, starting from the New Year's festival house, the *Bit akitu* (Assyrian for festival house), outside the city walls, which took place in spring.[35] In the museum, Andrae showed a reconstruction of the

30 Andrae, "Das Kleinod von Babylon," 323; Rudolf Steiner, *Das Lukas-Evangelium; ein Zyklus von 10 Vorträgen, gehalten in Basel vom 15.- 26. September 1909*, GA 114, 9th ed. (1909; Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2001), 95–112, accessed June 20, 2018, http:// www.bdn-steiner.ru/cat/ga/114.pdf#view=Fit.

31 Steiner, "Das Lukas-Evangelium," 101–102.

32 Andrae, "Das Kleinod von Babylon," 324, footnote 2. One would assume that Steiner follows Schuré in this respect. However, there is no mention in Schuré of Zarathos or Nazarthos. On the influence of Schuré on Rudolf Steiner, see Helmut Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland: Theosophische Weltanschauung und gesellschaftliche Praxis 1894–1945*, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 555, 578, 602, 623, 693–694, 788–797, 855.

33 " . . . den unerhört kostbaren Glanz der Schmelzfarbenziegelwände". Andrae, *Kurzer Führer durch die Räume der Vorderasiatischen Abteilung der Staatlichen Museen* (Berlin: Herausgegeben von der Vorderasiatischen Abteilung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 1934), 6.

34 Andrae, "Das Kleinod von Babylon," 323.

35 "Über die Richtung, in der sich die Prozession auf dieser Straße bewegte, kann gar kein Zweifel sein: sie kam von Norden und schritt nach Süden, sie bewegte sich eben vom Festhaus im Norden nach dem Haupttempel Esangila im Süden" ("There can be no doubt regarding the direction in which the procession was moving on the street: it came from the north and

Processional Street and placed the Throne Room Façade in the Ishtar Gate hall in reduced size, divided in two parts on each side of the Ishtar Gate. As suggested by the excavator Robert Koldewey, the façade in its original setting would have stretched along one wall of the enormous throne room of the southern part of the king's palace, which was situated behind the Ishtar Gate and inside the city walls.

A particular role is attributed by Andrae to two sphinxes who – in his view – had welcomed those proceeding along the street before they reached the gate complex. He does not give their precise position in the *Kleinod*. However, in his detailed study of processional streets in the Ancient Near East published in 1941,[36] he had assumed that two metal sphinxes stood in front of the Ishtar Gate complex as guardian figures of the Processional Street. No traces of them had been found in the excavation but – according to Andrae – they should be added because they are mentioned in the sources.[37] In the *Kleinod*, Andrae advances an ideal-type reconstruction regarding what "Gestalt" the sphinxes in Babylon might have had. In his view, they must have been similar to sphinxes found in Hittite Hattusha in Anatolia.[38] We will return to this point later.

As a whole, all the discussions in the *Kleinod* only make sense if one accepts that Andrae saw the 'Trilogy' as having been masterminded by "the great initiated" Zaratos: his explanations of anthroposophical aesthetics, his conclusions concerning the inner experience of those proceeding along the path as they encountered the images of lions, bulls, and "mushchushshus" (snake-dragons) – or the experiences they were meant to have according to the intentions of Zaratos:

> When the image of a lion (Fig. 9.1) entered the vision of a Babylonian of that time, an assimilation took place (of the latter's) notion of the power of a lion with the idea of the female-divine power of knowledge, as well as with the human power of emotions (such as courage, affection, ire, etc.) commanded by the goddess Ishtar. In the same way, an assimilation would happen of the notion of the power of the bull (Fig. 9.2.), the power of Adad, and the human willpower commanded by Adad; likewise the power of the griffon-dragon (Fig. 9.3.) with the human capability of thinking, the Marduk-Nabu powers.[39]

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proceeded towards the south, moving from the festival temple in the north towards the main temple Esangila in the south.") Andrae, *Alte Feststraßen*, 35–36.

36 Andrae, *Alte Feststraßen*, 35–36.

37 Andrae, *Alte Feststraßen*, 37.

38 For an easily accessible reproduction of the Hattusha sphinx, see: Andrae, "Das Kleinod von Babylon," 329–330.

39 "Erschien nun im Gesichtskreis des Babyloniers jener Zeit das Bild eines Löwen (Figure 9.1), so assimilierte sich der Gedanke Löwenkraft mit dem der weiblich-göttlichen Wissenskraft und den von der Ischtar gelenkten menschlichen Gefühlskräfte (wie Mut, Liebe, Zorn usw). Gleicherweise assimilierten sich die Gedanken Stierkraft (Figure 9.2.) – Adad-Kraft – von Adad gelenkte Willenskraft des Menschen, sowie Schlangengreif-Kraft mit Marduk-Nabu-Kräften

Fig. 9.1: One of several walking lions made of glazed tiles in relief originating from the Processional Street of Babylon, 6th century BC (VAB 01379–01409), as seen today as part of the installations in the Vorderasiatische Museum (Museum of Ancient Near East) of the Pergamonmuseum Berlin.
© bpk/Vorderasiatisches Museum. SMB/ Olaf M. Teßmer

Fig. 9.2: Drawing by Walter Andrae from 1902 showing a relief of glazed tiles representing a bull figure on the Ishtar Gate from Babylon, 6th century BC. It was drawn by Andrae with a view to the future reconstruction of the gate in the Vorderasiatische Museum (Museum of Ancient Near East) (Vorderasiatisches Museum, SMB. VAK 7).
© bpk/Vorderasiatisches Museum. SMB/ Andres Kilger.

And further: "This was indeed the intention of the great initiate: To internally correct all souls heading into the Holy City of Bab-ilu, even before they had completely passed the gate (i.e. the gate complex), meaning to purify them."[40]

For Andrae, this act of purification is clearly connected to the perception of symbolic images that Babylonians in the age of the 'Trilogy' would have experienced. The ability to perceive these is described by Andrae as a time-specific *Bildbewußtsein* (awareness of the image) and *Bilddenken* (thinking through the images):[41] "Any contemplation of ancient Near Eastern images of human beings, animals, and plants does not, as its main purpose, serve as a reproduction of nature [in the mind of the thinker]; it is an expression of the essence, that is the portrayal of the natural form including the respective idea."[42]

göttergelenkter menschlicher Denkkraft (Figure 9.3.)"; Andrae, "Das Kleinod von Babylon," 324.

40 "Und das war die Absicht des großen Eingeweihten: Alle Seelen, die den Weg in die Heilige Stadt Bab-ilu nehmen wollten, noch vor dem vollkommenen Durchschreiten des Tores innerlich zurechtzurücken, das heißt zu reinigen"; Andrae, "Kleinod von Babylon", 324.

41 Walter Andrae, "Dargestelltes und Verschlüsseltes in der altorientalischen Kunst," *Die Welt des Orients*, 2, no.3 (1956): 252.

42 "Die Betrachtung der altorientalischen Menschen-, Tier-, und Pflanzenbilder hat als Hauptanliegen ihrer Darstellung nicht Nachahmung der Natur, sondern Wesensausdruck, also Darstellung der natürlichen Form mit Einschluss der Idee derselben zu sein." Andrae, "Kleinod von Babylon," 324.

Fig. 9.3: Drawing by Walter Andrae from 1902 of the walking mythical snake-dragon (mushchushshu) consisting of different glazed tiles in relief, originating from the Ishtar Gate of Babylon, 6th century BC (VAB 4431). As in Figure 9.2., the corresponding colourful relief is today a part of the Ishtar Gate reconstruction in the Vorderasiatische Museum Berlin (Museum of Ancient Near East).
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6 The Sphinxes and the Throne Room Façade as Clue to the Cultic Meaning of the Processional Street and the Ishtar Gate Ensemble

It is possible to detect a gradual development over the years of the arguments in Andrae's writings concerning the meaning and functioning of the sphinxes and the Throne Room Façade. When he placed two sphinxes in front of the museum's Processional Street in 1934, one of these was the restored original of a sphinx found at Hattusha, Bogazköy, dating from the mid-2nd millennium BC, an object notable for being from a completely different area and time period than the Processional Street, while the second was a replica.[43] Both were firmly anchored into the corresponding walls.[44] In the short version of the *Kleinod*, written some two decades later but not published until 1988, Andrae is seen still struggling to justify his choice of object. However, he is clearly convinced that a type of sphinx similar to those from Hattusha would have welcomed the processional participants to the 'Trilogy' complex in Babylon. He had indicated a reason for this already in an article in 1935. There he describes the Hattusha Sphinx as a complete image of the *Viergetiergedanken* (the idea of the four-tiered animal) that is as the symbol of the four essential powers active in the human essence, one of the basic anthroposophical concepts of human nature.[45]

43 Walter Andrae, "Sphinx aus Hattuschasch VA 10980," *Berliner Museen*, 56, no. 2 (1935): 37–39.
44 Günter Marks, "Macht in engen Grenzen," *Frankfurter Rundschau* 24.9.2011.
45 Andrae, "Das Kleinod von Babylon," 324. The lion part of this composite sphinx symbolises human emotional powers; the bull parts symbolise the willpower of man; the snake-dragon

In his *Kleinod*, the analysis of the role in the 'Trilogy' of this type of sphinx serves as a clue to the intentions of the great initiated,[46] rooted as they were in the specific *Bilddenken* or *Bildbewußtsein* of the Ancient Near East. *Die pädagogische Tat des großen Eingeweihten* (the educational achievement of the great initiated) – to sum up Andrae's line of thought – consisted in deconstructing the complex symbolic message of the *Viergetiergedanken* or the sphinx by confronting the entrants on their way into the city of Babylon with *einzelnen Wesenheiten* (single essentialities) determining their lives by using the symbols of lion, bull, and snake-dragon one after another. The fourth element of the *Viergetiergedanken*, that which represents the human ego, is not to be encountered on the Processional Street nor at the Ishtar Gate itself, but – according to Andrae – is met instead when a viewer looks at the glazed Throne Room Façade. In the *Kleinod*, the sight of the Throne Room Palace Façade of Nebukadnezar's Babylon is described as having been restricted to *die Einzuweihenden* (those to be initiated).[47] This elite was to experience the presence of the king as *Repräsentant der Menschheit von Babylon* (representative of the humankind of Babylon).[48]

There were similar stages of development in Andrae's reconstruction of this very Throne Room Façade, which assumes a position of great importance within the Ishtar Gate complex. A watercolour by Andrae, dated to 1927, shortly after he had succeeded in securing the arrival of the finds of Babylon in Berlin, shows his original ideas concerning the Ishtar Gate hall.[49] Here, Andrae is still following Koldewey's reconstruction of the Throne Room Façade, with a simple, tall and slim colonnade (*Säulengang*) crowned by two rows of double-sided volutes atop the pillars. This reconstruction was implemented for the museum's

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elements correspond with the thinking power, while the human face and the headgear represent the human ego. Walter Andrae, *Sphinx aus Hattuschasch*, 38–39.

46 Andrae, "Kleinod von Babylon," 328.

47 "Wir können vermuten, dass (in den Thronsaal) nur die Einzuweihenden hineinziehen sollten, bevor sie den übrigen in die heilige Stadt hinab folgen konnten". (We can assume that . . . only those to be initiated were meant to enter (the throne-room), before following the others down into the holy City.) Andrae, "Das Kleinod von Babylon," 324.

48 "Er als der Repräsentant der Menschheit von Babylon trug in seiner Person das Ich des Volkes, das alles Denken, Fühlen und Wollen seines Volkes bestimmte" (He, as the representative of the humanity of Babylon, bore in his very person the ego of the people which commanded all thinking, feeling, and longing of his people.) Andrae, "Das Kleinod von Babylon," 326.

49 A reproduction of this watercolour can be found on the front cover of the publication by Kohlmeyer and Strommenger. Kay Kohlmeyer and Eva Strommenger, *Wiedererstehendes Babylon: Eine antike Weltstadt im Blick der Forschung* (Berlin: Enka Druck, 1991) and in Sabine Böhme, "Ein Anthroposoph lässt in Berlin den Alten Orient wiedererstehen," *Antike Welt* 48, no. 4 (2017): fig. 2.

opening of its first exhibition halls in 1930.[50] However, this is not what we see in the exhibition today (Fig. 9.4).

Fig. 9.4: Reconstructed Throne Room Palace Façade from Babylon, 6th century BC, in the Vorderasiatische Museum Berlin (Museum of Ancient Near East). It is made of coloured glazed tiles showing floral elements and lions. This version of the façade in the museum's Ishtar Gate hall was put in place at the end of the 1930s and has remained there until today. The slim pillar stems show three constrictions. On top of the stem there are three rows of double-sided volutes and a crowning palmette.
Vorderasiatisches Museum, SMB. VAB 1457–1459 (lions), VAB 1460–1461 (ornaments)
© bpk/Vorderasiatisches Museum. SMB/ Olaf M. Teßmer

Andrae had already considered a different version of the volute design in 1933, adding an additional row on top of the two rows of double-sided volutes. He had become convinced that there had to be three rows of double-sided volutes with a crowning palmette. Koldewey's original reconstruction of a slim pillar was altered by Andrae to take the form of a stem with three constrictions. He advanced this suggestion for the first time in 1933, in his *Die Ionische Säule, Bauform oder Symbol?*[51] Four years later, in 1937, he re-established contact with the ceramic workshop[52] with whom he had worked between 1928–1930. It is not currently clear exactly when the two parts of the Throne Room Façade were altered, but 1937 marks a definite terminus post quem.[53] Andrae justifies his alteration in *Die Ionische Säule* as follows: The palm tree with three rows of double-sided volutes and a crowning palmette represents the midpoint of a development from the primordial form (*Urform*) of the bundle of plants (reeds, for example) to the classical form of the Ionic column.[54] According to Andrae, the

50 Walter Andrae, "Das Vorderasiatische Museum," *Berliner Museen* 51, no. 5 (1930): 108–113; Walter Andrae, "Die Neuen Säle für Altorientalische Kunst im Vorderasiatischen Museum," *Berliner Museen* 55, no. 3 (1934): 47–56. The next two wings were opened to the public in 1934 and the museum's exhibit on the Ancient Near East was completed in 1936.

51 Andrae, *Die ionische Säule,* plate VII.

52 SMB-ZA, I/VAM 262: Reproduktionsentwurf für die Thronsaalfassade aus Babylon 1937.

53 The alterations most likely took place between 1938 and March 1940, as is suggested by orders from this period and by the termination of the respective contracts concluded by the *Generaldirektion* (personal communication of Dr. Lutz Martin, Museum of Ancient Near East Berlin).

54 Andrae, *Die ionische Säule*, 55–56.

architectural form acquired a growing number of symbolic meanings during this process of development, only to partly lose them again during its passage into the next cultural epoch (see below). Within the confines of the *Bilddenken* or *Bildbewußtsein* of the Egypto-Chaldean epoch, the palm tree with three double-sided volutes symbolises the three essentialities: the body, soul, and spirit of the human being.[55]

In *Die Ionische Säule*, Andrae also explains the changes of this architectural element from its primordial form during the passage into the Greco-Roman cultural epoch, when the Ionic column had only one double-sided volute and a crest of growing plants.

> The Greek, so to say, renounces on [volute] 1 and 2, body and soul. He does this because he is experiencing both and can see them in the highest perfection of their essence while contemplating the body-figures of his ephebes and the representations of male and female beauty accomplished in the form of marble sculpture, on the one hand, and in the works of his poets and thinkers, on the other. However, the spirit and the human ego cannot be grasped by him either, they remain to him action caught in invisibility and pertaining to the world of spirits for whom, in order to render them conceivable he has to rely on symbols. He therefore keeps the third pair of volutes and the crowning crest.[56]

7 The Cultic Function of the 'Trilogy' or the Gem of Babylon (*Das Kleinod von Babylon*) in the Museum of Ancient Near East According to Walter Andrae

Andrae concludes that the purpose behind the master plan of the great initiate Zaratos was the creation of a site and pictorial program for the *Menschenweihe* (consecration of man), the key sacramental element in the rituals of the *Christengemeinschaft*, in a manner that was suitable to the time of Nebukadnezar

55 See footnote 26. Andrae, "Das Kleinod von Babylon," 328. For Andrae the human ego in the Throne Room Façade is symbolised by the half of a lotus flower crest with six leaves on top of the palm tree.

56 "So verzichtet der Grieche gewissermaßen auf 1 und 2, Leib und Seele, denn er erlebt sie und sieht sie in höchster Wesensvollendung an den Leibern seiner Epheben und den marmornen Abbildungen männlicher und weiblicher Schönheit und Formvollendung einerseits und in den Werken seiner Dichter und Denker andererseits. Geist aber und Ich sind auch ihm unfassbar, sind unsichtbares Wirken und Geisteswelt, für das er Symbole braucht, sie wahrnehmbar zu machen. Das Volutenpaar 3 und die krönende Blüte behält er bei." Andrae, *Ionische Säule*, 57.

II.[57] Andrae, who, since the early 1920s, had been an influential member of this community situated in the orbit of the anthroposophical movement, must have fully intended this analogy.[58]

For Andrae, the “functioning” of the ‘Trilogy’ as a historic site of the act of the consecration of man in Babylon relied on the *Bilddenken* (conception of the image) or *Bildbewusstsein* (awareness of the image) specific to the age[59]– the Egypto-Chaldean cultural epoch that stretched from 2907–747 BC, and that

57 Andrae, “Das Kleinod von Babylon,” 324.

58 The “Act of the Consecration of man” within the Christian Community is considered the centrepiece of sacramental life. It is a renewal of the archetypal form of early Christian worship, the Mass. Website of the Christian Community in North America https://www.thechristiancommunity.org/, accessed on September 23, 2018. Like other rituals and sacraments of this community, it has its origins in “the essential source of Rudolf Steiner’s spiritual advice and inspiration” (ibid.). The Community’s foundation dates back to seminars held by Steiner in 1921/22 for interested groups consisting primarily of Protestant and Old-Catholic theologians. These meetings were held in a general mood of discontent at the intellectual bias of the official Protestant worship service and at the teachings of liberal Protestant theology. See Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland*, vol. 2, 1614–1631.

For Friedrich Rittelmeyer (1872–1938), the *Erzoberlenker* (s. fn. 29) of the Christian Community from 1922 who had previously trained as a Protestant theologian, the new cult of the Consecration of Man as prescribed by Steiner was the pivotal reason for leaving the official Protestant church. See Helmut Zander, “Friedrich Rittelmeyer: Eine Konversion vom liberalen Protestantismus zur anthroposophischen Christengemeinschaft,” in *Der deutsche Protestantismus um 1900*, ed. Friederich W. Graf and Hans M. Müller (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser. Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996), 282–283; Helmut Obst, *Apostel und Propheten der Neuzeit: Gründer christlicher Religionsgemeinschaften des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 593–594. In 1926, Rittelmeier likened the “Act of Consecration of Man” to the Catholic Mass, both of which “carry in themselves the age-old revelation of God, coming down to us from distant pre-Christian times”. Obst, *Apostel und Propheten*, 604.

59 The concept of evolution is a feature of Steiner’s thinking in general and of his thinking on history in particular. It originates in his enthusiasm for, and analysis of, the ideas of the German Darwinist Ernst Haeckel. Zander, *Rudolf Steiner,*92–96; Ullrich, *Rudolf Steiner,* 48–53. Essential parts of Steiner’s ideas on history are summed up in, for example, Rudolf Steiner, *Die Weltgeschichte in anthroposophischer Beleuchtung und als Grundlage der Erkenntnis des Menschengeistes*, GA 233, 5th ed. (1924; Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1991). His introductory passages here already betray his evolutionist thinking: “ . . . es kann nicht geleugnet werden, daß das Gegenwärtige dadurch verständlich wird, daß man es in seinem Hervorgehen aus dem Vergangenen zu begreifen versucht” (it cannot be denied that the present can be understood by attempting to comprehend it as emerging from that which has passed) See Steiner, *Weltgeschichte*, 11. The first part of the *Weltgeschichte* contains a description of the different forms of soul-constitution specific to the respective periods of history: “ . . . wie groß der Unterschied in der Seelenverfassung ist zwischen einem heutigen Menschen und einem Zeitgenossen des Mysteriums von Golgatha oder gar einem heutigen Menschen und einem Griechen” (how big the difference is in the soul-constitution between a contemporary human

was, according to Steiner, the "3rd post-Atlantis cultural epoch of human-kind".[60] In this epoch, much of the "knowledge" was still restricted to initiates. The "unknown", as Andrae explains, could only be communicated to "the people" by means of symbolic representations:

> In Babylon, the knowledge about the powers of the soul, which the initiated already had at their disposal, was once more held before the eyes of the people ahead of the decline of the Old Oriental culture. In that more distant time, inner experience had to be conveyed to the individuals from outside by way of the senses through emotion. At the dawning Greco-Roman epoch, the wisdom of those who now would address comprehension and mind [Gemüt], the thinking and feeling of human beings. These now would take in new knowledge with the help of their internal capabilities. They learned to do this in the course of time without images from outside, by way of their very internal capabilities, the new insights; they are gradually able to get along without images from outside (of their minds).[61]

It is rather astonishing to see how these dominant conceptual elements, which linked Andrae's outstanding work as a museum curator to anthroposophical thought, have been ignored over the decades, either consciously or unconsciously. As much as Andrae owed to his predecessors in the museum and his archaeological colleagues, it was his rigid anthroposophical attitude that dominated his reception of the cultures of the Ancient Near East. There can be little doubt that this world view had been completely formed during the second half of the 1920s, when he became more and more involved with the creation of the future exhibition.

As soon as the first halls had opened, Andrae guided a tour for a group of delegates from the Christian Community during a conference in the spring of 1931. One of the delegates wrote a report for the journal *Die Christengemeinschaft* about the tour, during the course of which the director had introduced his guests

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and a contemporary of the mystery of Golgatha, let alone between a human being of our times and a Greek). Steiner, *Weltgeschichte*, 12.

60 Rudolf Steiner, *Der Orient im Lichte des Okzidents: Die Kinder des Luzifers und die Brüder Christi*, GA 113, 3rd ed. (1909; Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990), 149–157, accessed June 20, 2018, http://www.bdn-steiner.ru/cat/ga/113.pdf#view=Fit Datum.

61 "In Babylon wurde das Wissen um die Seelenkräfte, über welches die Eingeweihten längst verfügten, vor dem Niedergang der alten orientalischen Kultur dem Volke noch einmal recht eindringlich vor die Augen gehalten. In jener älteren Zeit musste Innerliches von außen her der Empfindung der Menschen durch die Sinne vermittelt werden, in der aufdämmernden griechisch-römischen Epoche wendete sich die Weisheit der Wissenden an Verstand und Gemüt, an Denken und Fühlen der Menschen, die nun mit ihren inneren Kräften selbst die neuen Erkenntnisse aufzunehmen hatten und nach und nach der Bilder von außen entraten lernten." Andrae, "Dargestelltes und Verschlüsseltes," 251.

to the peculiarities of the Egypto-Chaldean and the Greco-Roman epochs.[62] The tour covered the entire Museum Island, starting with the exhibits relating to the Egypto-Chaldean culture, including the artefacts from Greece, and finishing with the creations of the Middle Ages.[63] Andrae clearly talked during the tour about the developmental stages of humankind as a recurrent theme in history and about how, "(that) all culture of the past humanity is in its essence actually a constantly changing cultus filled with spirit".[64]

The author of the report goes on to give a recapitulation of Andrae's comments concerning the animal images and symbols encountered in the Processional Street and at the Ishtar-Gate Hall, by means of which " . . . one can experience something of this vast cosmic worldview of the ancient Babylonians, of the essence of man, of the four-tiered animal, of the primordial form of the human soul".[65] The delegates had the opportunity to experience, " . . . the reverberations emanating from these ancient Babylonian sites of mysteries, something of the imposing grand effect of the ancient Babylonian culture".[66]

The report suggests that Andrae also took great care during the tour to demonstrate to his audience the characteristic differences of the cultural epochs with the help of the example of the symbol of the palm volutes, apparently in much the same way as he would discuss it two years later in the *Ionische Säule*.

> Having proceeded through the gate of Milet into the world of the Greeks, what a profoundly different world had welcomed us [. . .]. [T]he god, who was still placed in the Babylonian temple in front of the niche of prayer inside a firmly walled temple, and who was mostly represented by the Old Egyptians with an animal head, now appears in human shape in a Greek temple, which also opens to the above as the epitomisation of light-beaming beauty.[67]

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62 Hermann Schuh, "Vom Wandel künstlerischer Weltauffassung," *Die Christengemeinschaft* 7, no. 12 (März 1931): 378–380.

63 Schuh, "Wandel künstlerischer Weltauffassung," 378.

64 Dass "alle Kultur dieser vergangenen Menschheit eigentlich sich ständig wandelnder geisterfüllter Kultus ist, in den alles Leben bis in den Alltag hinein einbezogen ist". Schuh, "Wandel künstlerischer Weltauffassung," 378.

65 " . . . man etwas erleben (kann) von jener gewaltigen kosmischen Auffassung der alten Babylonier vom Menschenwesen, vom Viergetier, vom Urbild der Menschenseele". Schuh, "Wandel künstlerischer Weltauffassung," 378.

66 " . . . in einem Nachklang an jene alten babylonischen Mysterienstätten etwas von der ehrfurchterweckenden grandiosen Wirkung der alten babylonischen Kultur". Schuh, "Wandel künstlerischer Weltauffassung," 379.

67 "Trat man hinaus durch das herrliche Tor von Milet in die Welt der Griechen, welch eine ganz andere Welt empfing uns da [. . .] der Gott, der im babylonischen Tempel vor der Gebetsnische im festummauerten Tempel stand, bei den Ägyptern meist noch mit einem Tierhaupt abgebildet, er steht in Menschengestalt im Innern des auch noch nach oben offenen

Since its first opening in 1930, Walter Andrae's museum of the Ancient Near East on the Museum Island in Berlin has survived a number of major upheavals in recent German history. It has not only preserved many parts of his original exhibition unaltered but also provides a physical record of Andrae's knowledge of the Ancient Near East and of his very own spiritual and artistic journey.

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Berliner Museen: Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen. Former: Jahrbuch der Preußischen Kunstsammlungen Neue Folge.
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marru: Studien zur Vorderasiatischen Archäologie/ Studies in Near and Middle Eastern Archaeology. Münster.

Archives

SMB-ZA = Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Zentralarchiv.

Short Biographies

Ayni, Mehmet Ali (1868–1945)

Dilek Sarmis

Born in 1868 and graduated from the Ottoman Higher School of Administration, A. had to leave the career of high-ranking civil servant in 1913 and invested himself in academic life as dean of faculty and professor of history of philosophy; he notably was the first teacher of history of mystics (*tasavvuf tarihi*) at the republican faculty of theology from 1924 to 1933. He translated in 1933 the *History of Religions* by Denis Saurat, and after the closure of the Faculty of Theology, he became the holder of the first chair of History of religions of the short-lived Institute for research on Islam. Connected at different times in his life to scholarly orientalist milieu but also spiritualist and metapsychic networks, he combined an orthodox academic and intellectual career with spiritualist practices of communication with spirits. He may have been at the beginning of the 1900s head of a Muslim spirit group in contact with the *Revue spirite* and participated in mediumnic seances. In 1923, he enjoined the Sufi Society (*Cemiyet-i Sufiye*) to initiate contacts with European Theosophical societies. In 1926 he met the Danish anthroposophist Carl Vett, who proposed him to lead the Turkish branch of the Society of Metapsychic Studies. He maintained his interest in spiritualism and metapsychics until the end of his life, although he did not mention them in his academic works.

Besides his writings on history of philosophy, logic and morals, his academic and hagiographic works about the great saints of Islam and Sufism made A. an important figure of Turkish esotericism. In particular he was a great admirer of Islamic mystic thinker Ibn Arabi and a defender of the esoteric way (*tariqa*) of access to divine truth; his books written in French on the great saints were discussed by Louis Massignon. More importantly, the academic book he published in 1924 devoted to history of mystics gathered Greek, Jewish, Neoplatonician, Christian and Islamic mysticism; the book was indebted to the French tradition of the history of religions of the 19th century and refered to Adolphe Franck and Edouard Schuré. *History of tasavvuf* was taught at the very end of Ottoman period at the superior level of the medrese, taking place in the *Kalam-Tasavvuf-Philosophy* department that was created in 1914, at a time where there were many oppositions

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to the academicization of tasavvuf among many Sufis. A.'s teaching went further in this broad epistemological frame: his syncretic understanding of esotericism combined Sufism, mysticism and spiritualism, whether they were Islamic, Asian or Western. He equated "esotericism" with *batinism* (Islamic currents refering to inner and secrecy). His conceptions were heir of some important developments in the Late Ottoman intellectual field, where institutionnal and epistemological boundaries between spiritualism, philosophy and psychology were not fixed: the analogies made between Western philosophies and mystical thinkers of Islam, the historicization of religion and classical Islamic knowledge, and the huge interest in spiritualism in particular in the 1910s, some Ottoman intellectuals having developed the idea that Western spiritism was part of Islamic tradition and cosmology, and therefore very well represented in Islamic esoteric traditions. With the question of transmigration of souls (*tenasüh*) A. associated bektashism, one of the main Sufi orders, and theosophy; this was also favored by his interest in Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy and his meeting with Carl Vett for whom the initiatory rituals and the modifications of the states of consciousness in Sufi brotherhoods made them similar to Western occult societies. A. remains in the academic literature as one of the artisans of a Turkish esotericism having appropriated Western and Eastern referents and as one representative of the early republican institutional ambiguity between hegemonic religious teachings, esoteric ones, and secularized knowledges.

Aksüt, Ali Kemali. *Profesör Mehmet Ali Ayni ve Eserleri*. Istanbul: Ahmet Sait Matbaası 1944.; Ayni, Mehmet Ali. *Tasavvuf Tarihi*. Istanbul: Orhan matbaasi 1924.; ——. *İntikad ve mülahazalar*: *Tasavvuf Tarihi*. Istanbul: Orhaniye 1923.; Zarcone, Thierry. "Occultism in an Islamic context: The case of Modern Turkey from the nineteenth century to the present time." In *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, edited by Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurjevic, 151–176. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

Beckh, Hermann (1875–1937)

Helmut Zander

Born into the Protestant entrepreneurial family of Eugen B. and his wife Marie, née Seiler. In 1911 he came into contact with Rudolf Steiner, in 1912 he joined the Anthroposophical Society and in the same year became a member of the Esoteric School. In 1922 he belonged to the founding circle of the Christian Community inspired by Rudolf Steiner. Until his death, he was a pastor of this church.

Beckh completed his law studies with an award-winning writing, but then studied Indian and Tibetan philology. In 1907, he received his doctorate and finally wrote his habilitation on Kalidasa's Meghaduta, which he critically edited, translated and commented on; the works were highly praised by many scientific critics. He taught at Berlin University as a private lecturer and edited the Tibetan manuscripts in the Royal Library. After the First World War he declined a teaching position for Tibetan philology and was to be appointed associate professor. In 1921 he renounced his private lectureship. His many publications since the 1920s are spiritual works deeply influenced by anthroposophical ideas.

The comparison between the first (1916), second (1922) and third editions (1928) of his survey of Buddhism (Buddha und seine Lehre) shows the increasing anthroposophical impregnation of his scientific work. In 1916 he took the position that Buddhism and Christianity were categorically different and that the aim of studying Buddhism was "only" "to gain a deepening of religious knowledge and religious life" (p. 16). In the completely revised passage of 1928 Buddhism in its relationship to Christianity is reinterpreted with Steiner's terms. "Golgatha" is now, in taking over an utterance of Steiner in his biography of 1925, a "fact" "which is not attainable to a research working only with external historical documents," thus only by supernatural knowledge (p. 15). It remained still a task of Buddhism to promote the "deepening of religious knowledge" (p. 16), but only classified into the anthroposophical theory of the evolution of cultures. In Christianity "a stage of development beyond the pre-Christian Buddhist can be found" which makes possible the development of the "I-personality" (p. 15). Moreover, the criticism of theosophy is withdrawn from the first edition, but not eliminated.

Kacer-Bock, Gunhild. *Hermann Beckh*; online:

http://biographien.kulturimpuls.org/detail.php?&id=48 (16.2.19).; ——. *Hermann Beckh: Leben und Werk*. Stuttgart: Urachhaus 1997; Beckh, Hermann. *Verzeichnis der tibetischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*.

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Berlin: Behrend & Cie / Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer, 1914; ———. *Beiträge zur tibetischen Grammatik, Lexikographie, Stilistik und Metrik*. Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften 1908; ———. *Buddhismus (Buddha und seine Lehre)*. Berlin/Leipzig: Göschen [1]1916; ———. *Buddhismus (Buddha und seine Lehre)*. Berlin/Leipzig: de Gruyter [2]1922; ———. *Buddhismus (Buddha und seine Lehre)*. Berlin/Leipzig: de Gruyter [3]1928; ———. *Die tibetische Übersetzung von Kālidāsas Meghadūta*. Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften 1906.

Coomaraswamy, Ananda Kentish (1877–1947)

Mark Sedgwick

Born in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to a distinguished Tamil father, Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy, and an English mother. C. grew up mostly in England, returning to Ceylon in 1903 as director of the mineralogical survey of Ceylon. His interests were already wide, however, and his early work reveals him as a Neoplatonist; he was also in contact with Swami Vivekananda through a friend, Sister Nivedita (born Margaret Elizabeth Noble). While in Ceylon C. became interested in South Asian art, to which he devoted the rest of his life. He built up a notable private collection, and moved to the US in 1917, becoming first keeper of Indian art and then research fellow at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where he remained until his death in 1947. During this period he contacted the French esotericist René Guénon, becoming a close collaborator from 1935 until his death.

C. was famous mostly for his work on South Asian art, notably his *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (1927). This and similar works were foundational for an entire field of study, and are not overtly esoteric works, but reflect C.'s conviction that in order to understand it, a work of art should be placed in its cultural, religious and metaphysical context.

C. is known to followers of Guénon for his many articles in *Études Traditionnelles*, Guénon's journal, which contributed to Guénon's project of recovering the perennial tradition. C. shared Guénon's overall vision and contributed his knowledge and scholarship, and was especially important for the incorporation of Buddhism into the Guénonian scheme.

C. also wrote for a broader general audience, notably in *The American Review*. C. applied Guénonian perennialism to both South Asian religion (especially in *Hinduism and Buddhism*, 1943), and to art, in books and articles, and. He argued in "What Is the Use of Art Anyway?" and "Is Art a Superstition or a Way of Life?" (1937) for the understanding of art as "the making well, or properly arranging, of anything whatever that needs to be made or arranged" and lamented that working men had been reduced to brutes because production for profit had replaced production for use (i.e. art). This view fitted with both the views of the Arts and Crafts movement of William Morris, with which C. had been loosely associated, and with the Guénonian vision of traditional society as built around caste, a vision for which C. argued in *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government* (1942). Mircea Eliade wrote appreciatively of C.'s work.

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Coomaraswamy, Ananda Kentish. *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*. New York: Dover, 1956. Lipsey, Roger. *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers, Traditional Art and Symbolism*. Vol. 1. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977; ———. *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers, Metaphysics*. Vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977; ———. *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work*. Vol. 3. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

Ehrenfels, Baron Omar (Umar) Rolf von (1901–1980)

Reinhard Schulze

1901 born in Prague to Baron Christian von Ehrenfels (1859–1932) professor of philosophy at Prague University, and his wife Emma (1862–1946, née André). 1922–1923 he had to attend the forestry schools in Tharandt near Dresden and in Eberswalde near Berlin to prepare for the planned takeover of the family estate. At the same time, he worked as recording director of an American-German film company and thus travelled the Balkan states and Turkish territories, which arose his ethnological interest. He also met his first wife Ellen Feld there and married her shortly afterwards. This marriage did not last long; already in 1925 he married Elfriede (von) Bodmershof (1894–1982); E. still tried to make a career as author and journalist in Berlin. In 1927, he converted to Sufi Islam in the Ahmadi context in Berlin and called himself Omar (later Umar). In Berlin, the couple intensively studied Christian E.'s major work *Kosmogonie* (Jena 1916). This work, which E. wanted to follow with a book entitled *Theogonie* as the basis of a new religion, claimed to be a world explication "from within." In 1932 he travelled to India for a year to process his father's death; after his return he studied ethnography at the University of Vienna. In Vienna he also presided over the Orientbund till 1938. After completing his anti-aryanist dissertation on *Mother-right in India* (1937), he had to flee first to Greece, then to India in 1938/9. Elfriede did not follow him. The marriage was divorced at the end of the 1940s. In India, he had to live in an internment camp from 1940 to 1946. He married the French social scientist Mireille Abeille (1924–2007) in 1948. From 1949 to 1961 E. was head and professor of the Department of Anthropology at Madras University. In 1961 he settled to Germany and helped to establish the South Asia Institute at the University of Heidelberg. E. died in Neckargemünd (Heidelberg, Germany) in 1980.

E. initially published numerous smaller works in the *Prager Tageblatt*, published by Max Brod (1884–1968). He translated his dissertation *Mutterrecht in Vorderindien*, (typescript, Vienna 1937) and published it as *Mother-right in India* in Hyderabad in 1941; he further developed and elaborated his anti-aryanist reconstruction of a primordial Matriarchal System in India (cf. "Traces of Matriarchal civilization among the Kolli Malaiyalīs", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 3:9 Letters, 1943, 29–82). In Madras, he wrote his monograph on Kadar of Cochin which he called a *Tribal monograph*. Later in 1960, he published his book *The Light Continent*, in which he described his experience as an ethnographer in East Africa in the 1950s. As his father, E. seldom hid his esoteric understanding of scientific worldviews. He clearly defined a primacy of a primordial matriarchical

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order which left its traces in particular in Indian societies. For him, the East represented the female principle still represented in Yantra, mandala and yoga traditions ("Mandala und das weibliche Prinzip", in: *Esotera* 26 (1975), 212–219). In this, he followed his father's interpretation of "Motherright" which reflected the neo-matriarchical views as promoted by Johann Jakob Bachofens (1815–1887) and others (Christian von Ehrenfels, "Die Ehe nach Mutterrecht", in: *Politisch-Anthropologische Revue* 11 (1906) 4, 633–647).

Ehrenfels, Christian von. *System der Werttheorie*. Vol. 1. *Allgemeine Werttheorie: Psychologie des Begehrens*. Leipzig: Reisland, 1897; Jonker, Gerdien. "In Search of Religious Modernity: Conversion to Islam in Interwar Berlin." In *Muslims in Interwar Europe: A Transcultural Historical Perspective*, edited by Bekim Agai, Umar Ryad, and Mehdi Sajid, 18–46. Leiden: Brill, 2016; Polzin, Julia. "Matriarchale Utopien, freie Liebe und Eugenik: Der Bund für Mutterschutz im Wandel zeitgenössischer Ideen und politischer Systeme." PhD diss., Univ. Hamburg, 2016; Ryad, Umar, "Salafiyya, Ahmadiyya, and European Converts to Islam in the Interwar Period." In *Muslims in Interwar Europe: A Transcultural Historical Perspective*, edited by Bekim Agai, Umar Ryad, and Mehdi Sajid, 4787, Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Faivre, Antoine (*1934)

Helmut Zander

Antoine Faivre was born in Reims in 1934. Raised as a Catholic, he became a convinced Christian during his military service in Algeria in 1961. F. studied amongst others German literature and history of religions at the Sorbonne. He earned his doctorate with two works on the German romantic natural philosophers Niklaus Anton Kirchberger and Karl von Eckartshausen (1966/1969). In 1969 he became Freemason in the *Grand Loge Nationale Française* and practiced the Martinist Rite Ecossais Rectifié; he had been referred to Freemasonry by the Jesuit Michel Riquet, a member of the French resistance who was very well known in France at that time. Two members of the Eranos Circle, Henry Corbin and Gilbert Durand, both of whom he introduced to his Masonic tradition, became formative academic teachers for him. F. himself had participated in meetings of the Eranos Circle since 1967, but as "homme de gauche" he had developed a distance to the political positions in this circle. Especially under the influence of Corbin, whom F. called his "maître", he developed the conviction of an independent spiritual reality. In 1974 he co-founded the *Université Saint Jean de Jérusalem*, where scholars sought to combine their religionist positions with excellent scientific research. Nevertheless, F. considered himself a Catholic Christian. In 1979 Faivre was called upon to the *Chaire d'Histoire des courants ésotériques et mystiques dans l'Europe moderne et contemporaine* at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, where he prevailed against Michel de Certeau.

In the course of his academic life, F. increasingly distanced himself from perennialist positions. F. himself sees an important stimulus in the 1968/1969 student movement in Paris, but his stays at the University of Berkeley and his encounter with contemporary esotericism on the American West Coast in the 1980s probably played a decisive role. F. became a scholar who applied historical and critical methods and distinguished strictly between normative and analytical approaches to his field of research. Wouter Hanegraaff sees this reorientation of F.'s understanding of science, which approached a break with his older positions, accomplished in the book *L'ésotérisme* of 1992. With the conception of esotericism developed there, F. became the founder of scholarly research on esotericism.

Faivre, Antoine. *L'ésotérisme* (Que sais-je 1031). 6th ed. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 2019. First published 1992 by Presses Universitaires de France (Paris); Hanegraaff, Wouter Jacobus. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, 339–355. Cambridge: Cambridge University

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Press 2012. Additional information derives from an interview with F. on June 8th, 2019, and from documents from the estate of Henry Corbin at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Collections patrimoniales, Fonds chiite, whose insight was enabled by a scholarship from the EU-project “Research Infrastructure on Religious Studies”; I especially thank Alfonsina Bellio and Morgan Guiraud for their help.

Johnston, Charles (1867–1931)

Yves Mühlematter

J. was born in 1867 and grew up in a loyalist Protestant environment. His father was an Orangeman, and later became the order's Deputy Grand Master of Ireland and a Member of Parliament for Belfast. J. was educated at Derby, then studied at the University of Dublin, where he learned Sanskrit and Russian. He was probably awarded a BA and an MA from the University of Dublin. In 1884, when he was 17, he read Sinnett's *The Occult World*. Shortly after, he joined the Theosophical Society. His first article appeared in 1886 in *The Theosophist*, when he was only 19 years old. Throughout his life J. translated numerous Indian texts, among them the *Bhagavadgītā* and several *Upaniṣads*. In 1912 he translated Paul Deussen's *Das System des Vedânta*[1] into English.

At an occasion at Blavatsky's house, J. met Vera (née de Zhelihovsky, 1864–1923), the niece of Madame Blavatsky. He married her in 1888, shortly before he departed to India to participate in the Civil Service. The Johnstons only stayed in India for two years, because J. came down with malaria. After the schism within the Theosophical Society, J. remained loyal to Quan Judge. After Judge's death, the Johnstons finally relocated to New York City. J. and his wife became leading members of the Hargrove branch of the Theosophical Society. He lectured on many occasions for the Theosophical Society and therefore travelled on a regular basis between America and Europe.

In addition, he taught private Sanskrit classes, was a "Special Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Wisconsin", delivered "a number of addresses at Columbia University in New York," "was a valued member of the Linnaean Society" and "served as Captain in the Military Intelligence Division at Washington".[2] The influence of J. on Religious Studies is difficult to trace. However, his translations of numerous Indian texts into English are believed to have had a major influence on the American reception of Indian religion, both inside and outside academia.

The Johnstons were active members of the Russian Orthodox Church in New York. They gave courses at the seminary of the Church. In addition, Vera Johnston was responsible for the shop of the church at the Russian bazar in New York (New York Times, 3/28/1915). J. died in 1931 at St. Luke's Hospital in New York City from heart disease.

1 "The System of the Vedanta"

2 H.B.M. [Mitchell Henry Bedinger] 1932, S. 211.

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Bedinger Mitchell, Henry. “Charles Johnston.” *The Theosophical Quarterly* (1932): XXIX; Fergus, Jon W. *Charles Johnston: A Biography*. Accessed March 5, 2019, http://www.universaltheosophy.com/bios/charles-johnston; Namee, Matthew: *Orthodoxy and Theosophy: The Vera Johnston Story*. Accessed March 5, 2019, http://orthodoxhistory.org/2010/08/05/orthodoxy-and-theosophy-the-vera-johnston-story; Mühlematter, Yves. “Charles Johnston’s Interpretation of “Yoga”: Theosophy, Consciousness, and Spiritual Progress.” In Contemporary Yoga and Sacred Texts, edited by Susanne Scholz and Caroline Vander Stichele. London: Routledge, forthcoming.

Kamensky, Anna (1867–1952) (Anna Alexeyevna Kamenskaya)

Florence Pasche Guignard

1867 born in Pavlosk, in Russian nobility. 1869, after her father's death, women of her family left Russia and established themselves first in Germany, then in Geneva. 1875–1882 K. studied in Geneva, then returned to Saint Petersburg. Due to the dire financial situation of her family, she worked as a teacher. She engaged in activism for social justice and women's issues. 1896–1900 K. took up her studies again. 1887 onwards, K. started turning away from Orthodox Christianity. Around 1890, her friend Nina Gernet introduced K. to the Theosophical Society (TS). K. became an independent member of the English section. 1902 K. attended lectures by Annie Besant in London. 1904 K. started a theosophical circle in Petersburg. 1908 she founded an official Russian section of the TS and acted as its first general secretary. K. maintained and expanded her national and international networks, attended conferences, gave lectures, and published numerous articles. She launched the Vestnik Teosofii (Theosophy Messenger) magazine. 1916 K. and her sister Margarita lived for over one year in Adyar (India) at the general headquarters of the TS. She translated the *Bhagavadgītā* from Sanskrit into Russian. After the October Revolution, the situation deteriorated for members of the TS and in 1918 their activities were forbidden. 1921 K. fled with her friend and associate Cecilia Helmboldt to escape arrest. Settled in Geneva, K. and Helmboldt became involved in the Swiss section of the TS, with K. presiding the lodge "Paix et Lumière." 1924 K. organized the "Russian Theosophical Society out of Russia."

Under her leadership and influence, many of K.'s theosophical activities took place in collaboration with other women who formed around her professional, social, and spiritual networks. Such moral and material support was more significant than that of academic institutions. K. died in Geneva in 1952.

K. published mostly in non-academic venues. Her most significant scholarly contributions are her translations and her academic teaching. In 1926, after a two-year process involving administrative struggles, the University of Geneva granted K. her doctoral degree for her translation into French of the *Bhagavadgītā* with considerations on "its role in the religious movement of India and its unity." Her own spiritual inspirations were noticeable in this dissertation. 1927–1951 K. taught courses in religious studies at the Faculté des Lettres as a "privat-docent" but never had the title of professor. The detailed list of titles of her courses, found in the University's archives, gives some indications on her epistemology, methodology, and on her phenomenological perspective: "Introduction to the comparative study of religions: history of religions, philosophy of Religion, science of religions, comparative study of religions,

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fraternity of religions, religious experience." K. taught other courses on Vedic and classical India, the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Mahābhārata*, spiritualities in modern India, philosophy, and aesthetics. The notion of "fraternity" or "brotherhood" of religions points out to how her theosophical ideas influenced the way she taught about religions in academic settings.

Carlson, Maria. *'No Religion Higher Than Truth:' A History of The Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993; Fedorovna Pisareva, Elena, and Algeo, John, ed., *The Light of the Russian Soul. A Personal Memoir of Early Russian Theosophy*. Translated by George M. Young. Wheaton: Quest Books, 2008; Mayer, Jean-François. *Les nouvelles voies spirituelles: Enquête sur la religiosité parallèle en Suisse*. Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1993.

Mead, George Robert Stow (1863–1933)

Helmut Zander

M. was born in 1863 to British Army Colonel Robert Mead and his wife Mary (née Stow). In 1883 he read Sinnett's Esoteric Buddhism. One year later he received the BA degree in Classics (Greek, Latin) and became a member of the Theosophical Society. In 1889, he was appointed Blavatsky's private secretary and joint-secretary of Esoteric Section. In the same year he married to the Theosophist Laura Mary Cooper. 1909 M. left the Theosophical Society because of the reinstatement of Leadbeater. As a response, he founded the Quest Society to continue esoteric and scholarly research. M. died in London 1933.

M. was a translator of many gnostic writings into English, including those that had not previously been translated (such as: Pistis Sophia 1896, ^{2}1921; Thrice Greatest Hermes, 3 vol., 1906; The Complete Echoes from the Gnosis, 1906–1918). As a trained classical philologist, he had important prerequisites. M. became particularly famous through the translation of the Pistis Sophia. There are no studies on the academic reception of his works. However, his translations were widely used, in part due to the fact that they were often without alternatives. Already at the end of the 19th century, but finally in the 20th, his works were increasingly less state-of-the-art.

There is no analysis of his translations with regard to their theosophical implications. The theosophical relations are in particular visible in the comments. In addition to correct scientific analysis, such as codicological descriptions, theosophical ideas are included here. For example, gnostic writings are for M. documents of mystery communities with secret knowledge and initiated disciples. Thus he writes (but only in the second edition of the Pistis Sophia): "It is evident, however, that the P.S. was never intended to be circulated as a public gospel. . . . Certain mysteries . . . the recipients were to bestow under certain conditions, but others were to be reserved. . . . The P.S. was intended for already initiated disciples, for chosen learners, though no pledge of secrecy is mentioned." (p. xlviii f.) The concept of interpreting Jesus in the context of a story of reincarnation (p. xlv f.) also originated from theosophical ideas.

In the Quest Society, he attracted a lot of well-known intellectuals, as Martin Buber, Robert Eisler, Gustav Meyrink, and William Butler Yeats. 1931 he was invited to the Eranos Circle, but did not attend. M. was a member of the Royal Asiatic Society, where he gave his last public lecture before his death.

Godwin, Joscelyn. "Mead, George Robert Stowe." In *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, edited by Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek and Jean-Pierre Brach. Vol. 2, 785–786. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005;

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Mead, George Robert Stow. *Pistis Sophia: A Gnostic Gospel*. 2nd rev. ed. London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896; ———. *Pistis Sophia: A Gnostic miscellany*. London: Watkins, 1921.

Méautis, Georges (1890–1970)

Léo Bernard

Georges Méautis was born in 1890 in Montreux (Switzerland) and pursued an education in Classical Studies (Lausanne, Neuchâtel, Munich, Paris). He was registered as a member of the Theosophical Society on the 7th of February 1918 and as a member of the Order of the Eastern Star on the 9th of April. He defended his thesis in papyrology in July of the same year under the title *Une métropole égyptienne sous l'empire romain. Hermoupolis-la-Grande,* a city considered to be the cradle of Hermeticism, and quickly found a position at the University of Neuchâtel: as *privat-docent* in 1919, then professor of Greek language and literature and classical archaeology (1920–61), dean (1930–35), and rector (39–41). He also held responsibilities in the Swiss Section of the Theosophical Society: branch president, archivist and general secretary (1926–29), and was admitted into the E.S. around 1922, before being baptised in the Liberal Catholic Church in September 1923. He distanced himself from the T.S. during the early 1930s, but still maintained, although intermittently, a certain level of contact. He left behind him a substantial bibliography in 1970.

M. was first and foremost a respected professor of Classical Studies who specialised in Greek religion and received many academic distinctions: doctor honoris causa from Athens University (1937), Schiller award (1950), and corresponding member of the Institut de France (1952). His prominent position at Neuchâtel University led several professors to pay him tribute through a book published for the centenary of his birth in 1990. His academic credentials notwithstanding, M. was during the early stages of his career a devoted theosophist. Under the pen name of Archytas, he published in a theosophical periodical a collection of four articles entitled "Ancient Theosophy" whose goal was to assemble "some fragments from the theosophists of ancient Greece which may be difficult for the layman to access and which confirm the teachings of our instructors." In a similar vein, his interest in the question of the verifiability of clairvoyance led him to the investigation of the eventual proximity between an obscure treatise by Plutarch and the writings of Leadbeater and Besant on the topic of the aura. He later cautiously expanded this historical comparison in his own translation of the treatise published in 1935, and perhaps surprisingly, the book was well-received even in academic journals. Moreover, in his translation of *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, M. acknowledged his scholarly indebtedness to "the secret tradition passed down by a certain esoteric school, a tradition which inspired these two treasures of initiatory literature: *Light on the Path* and *The Voice of the Silence*." He employed these two often mentioned theosophical

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books to help him in the translation of the original text and to justify some corrections made to earlier scholarly translations. While underlining this influence, the American scholar Edith Owen Wallace (1892–1976), who positively reviewed M.'s work in *The Classical Weekly*, made the following assessment: "However daring that argument may be in construction of a text, it comports with M. Méautis' comparative method." Indeed, parallels of this nature were a common feature of M.'s celebrated works on Greek philosophy and mystery cults.

Fonds Georges Méautis, GMEA ms 2121. Bibliothèque publique et universitaire de Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel, Switzerland; Archytas [Méautis, Georges]. "Une vérification historique [des enseignements théosophiques]." *Le Lotus Bleu* (January 1921): 432–439; ———. "La Théosophie antique." *Le Message Théosophique et Social* (7 December 1919): 135; Bertrand, Paul [Méautis, Georges]. *Theosophy and Theosophism: Response to a Criticism of Theosophy by René Guénon*. Translated by Joscelyn Godwin. FOTA Special Edition, Autumn 2016; Knoepler, Denis, ed. *Mnêma pour Georges Méautis*. Neuchâtel: Séminaire des sciences de l'antiquité classique de l'Université de Neuchâtel, 1991; Méautis, Georges, trans. *Plutarque: Des délais de la justice divine*. Lausanne: Les amitiés Gréco-Suisses, 1935; ———. trans. *Le Livre de la Sagesse pythagoricienne*. Paris: Durbon Ainé, 1938; Schneider, André. "Georges Méautis (1890–1970)." In *Histoire de l'Université de Neuchâtel*. Tome 3, 353–356. Hauterive: Université de Neuchâtel et Editions Gilles Attinger, 2002; *The International Theosophical Year Book 1937*. Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1937; Wallace, Edith Owen. Review of *Le Livre de la Sagesse pythagoricienne*, by Georges Méautis. *The Classical Weekly* 34, no. 18 (24 March 1941): 211–212.

Rousselle, Erwin (1890–1949)

Karl Baier

R. had a Huguenot family background. In 1911 he became a freemason. Eight years later he was accepted into the Swedish Rite, a Christian high degree system, by the Coronata lodge in Mannheim. He reached the highest degree of this rite in 1921. R. also functioned as orator of the Johannis lodge Zum flammenden Schwert in Darmstadt. Within this lodge he got into close contact with Carl Happich and Karl Bernhard Ritter who belonged to a German protestant reform movement called Berneuchener Bewegung. During his stay in Darmstadt R. also held a leading position as teacher and a kind of master of the ceremonies in Hermann Keyserling's School of Wisdom. Within this context he developed a system of spiritual practices that was inspired by the Ignatian exercises and focussed on Parsifal and the mystery of the Holy Grail. The School of Wisdom regularily offered retreats on this basis between 1921 and 1924. R.'s book on the mystery of transformation (Mysterium der Wandlung, 1923), a comparative study of the stages of spiritual development within different religions, was meant to be a theoretical foundation of his exercises. Additionally, R. participated in the conferences of the School of Wisdom and contributed to Keyserling's journals Der Leuchter and Der Weg zur Vollendung. During his first stay in China he was initiated into a Daoist secret society. In the 1930ties Rousselle became an important lecturer within the Eranos conferences. At the end of his life he converted to the Catholic Church.

After doctorates in Semitic studies and law as well as extended studies of an impressive number of languages, R. got a habilitation degree in oriental and occidental comparative philosophy (Vergleichende Philosophie des Morgen- und Abendlandes) from the University of Darmstadt in 1923. He thus became the first German university lecturer with a qualification in comparative philosophy. From 1924 to 1930 he worked as lecturer and professor for German philosophy at the Imperial University of Beijing and the Tsing Hua College, Beijing. Before his return to Germany in 1929 he twice spent several months in Japan to deepen his Japanese studies. In 1930 he became the successor of Richard Wilhelm as head of the China Institute, University of Frankfurt, in 1935 associate professor for sinology and Buddhist studies also at the University of Frankfurt. Between 1938 and 1940 he again stayed in China to investigate the Chinese religions. Back in Germany, he had to suffer from severe repressions through the Nazi regime. He lost the allowance to teach and his post at the China Institute. Additionally he was forbidden to speak in public.

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R.'s life-long academic interest in meditation practices, spiritual direction and personal transformation can only be understood against the background of his involvement within esoteric societies and the School of Wisdom.

Fenske, Wolfgang. "Rousselle, Erwin." In *Biographisch-bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon (BBKL)*, vol. 31. Sp. 1160–1163. Nordhausen: Bautz, 2010; Hakl, Thomas. *Eranos: An Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*. Sheffield and Bristol: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2013; Rousselle, Erwin. *Mysterium der Wandlung: Der Weg zur Vollendung in den Weltreligionen*. Darmstadt: Otto Reichl, 1923; ———. "Grundriss der Ordenswissenschaft." In *Zirkelkorrespondenz der Großen Landesloge der Freimaurer von Deutschland* 1926, 5, 111–120 and 8, 169–179 (n.d.); ———. *Zur seelischen Führung im Taoismus: Ausgewählte Schriften*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962; Walravens, Hartmut. "Erwin Rousselle (Hanau 8. April 1890 – Eschenlohe/Obb. 11. Juni 1949). Notizen zu Leben und Werk." *Monumenta Serica* 41 (1993): 283–298.

Schrader, Friedrich Otto (1876–1961)

Judith Bodendörfer

S. was born on March 19th, 1867 in Hamburg. He studied Philosophy, Indology and comparative linguistics in Göttingen, Kiel and Strasbourg, where he received a doctorate summa cum laude with a dissertation on Indian philosophy in 1902. After that, S. spent some time in Leipzig and Berlin. During this time, if not before, he came in contact with members of the Theosophical Society. In 1905 he went to London, where he was subsequently appointed librarian of the theosophical library in Adyar by H. S. Olcott. Before his departure to India in the same year, he married Lucie Bennoit from Neuchâtel (CH), who followed him to India in 1907. With the beginning of World War I in 1914, S. was interned by the British while his wife and children returned to Switzerland. S.'s friend and deputy, the Dutch Tibetologist Johan van Manen, took over the direction of the theosophical library during this period. In 1916, S. officially resigned from his position. After his release in 1920, S. joined his family in Switzerland. In 1921, he was appointed professor for Indology at the University of Kiel. S. retired as a professor in November of 1945 but was the head of the Indo-Germanic seminary in Kiel from 1947 until 1950. He died on November 3rd, 1961 in Kiel.

S. was a well-connected Indologist who strengthened the links between the Adyar library and "western" academic researchers. All his life he stayed committed to the Theosophical Society. In 1904, before his time as a librarian at Adyar, S. wrote the article *Maya-Lehre and Kantianismus* (Maya Teachings and Kantian Philosophy), which was published in the magazine *Theosophisches Leben* and as offprint by the theosophical publisher Paul Raatz in Berlin. The article pleads for the acceptance of the epistemological concept of "feeling". S. argued that, from the standpoint of the Maya teachings, reason (unlike "feeling") was not able to discern truth, as it confused sensory perception with reality. Very similar arguments against "Western" science and especially against the "father of the science of religion", F. M. Müller, had been produced by theosophists before, notably by the pandit G. Krishna Sastri, who was to be S.'s colleague at the Adyar library. Although *Maya-Lehre and Kantianismus* was heavily criticized by S.'s former teacher, the famous Indologist Paul Deussen, related claims became common in the phenomenological branch of the study of religion during the first half of the 20th century.

Bodendörfer, Judith. "Friedrich Max Müllers 'Science of Religion' in Auseinandersetzung mit der Theosophischen Gesellschaft" (PhD. diss. University of Fribourg, working title, forthcomming); Deussen, Paul. "Maya-Lehre und Kantinismus." *Indogermanische Forschungen* 17,1 (1905): 7–8; Krishna Sastri,

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Ganapati: “Prof. Max Müller on the Secret Doctrine.” *Theosophist* 23 (1902): 727–733; Schrader, Friedrich Otto. “Maya-Lehre und Kantianismus.” *Theosophisches Leben* VII (1904/1905): 17–19, 76–81, 131–135; Sprockhoff, Joachim Friedrich. “Friedrich Otto Schrader zum Gedächtnis.” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 113,1 (1963): 1–11.

Seidenstücker, Karl Bernhard (1876–1936)

In memoriam Heinz Mürmel (1944–2019)

Yves Mühlematter

S. was born in 1876 near Halle and Leipzig. His father was “Superintendent” and “Oberpfarrer” of the Protestant church and educated S. until 1894, when he joined the “Königliche Domgymnasium.” He studied, among other subjects, philosophy and “indische Philologie,” under such well known professors as Franz Kielhorn, August Conrady, Richard Pischel, Ernst Windisch and Theodor Zacheriae.[3]

S. called himself a Buddhist from 1902 onwards. In 1903 he was a co-founder of the “Buddhistischer Missionsverein für Deutschland.” In these years he published *Die Greuel der christlichen Zivilisation* and *Buddha und Christus: Eine buddhistische Apologetik* under a pseudonym. In 1903 and 1904, S. gave talks on Buddhism in a vegetarian restaurant in Leipzig which was frequented by Theosophists. S.’s wife was a Theosophist and he worked as an editor for Theosophical periodicals. In 1907, S. and his fellow Buddhists established the “Maha-Bodhi Centrale” (1911: “Deutsche Zweig der Mahabodhi-Gesellschaft”). Thanks to international contacts and the mediation of Paul Carus and C.T. Strauss, it was officially recognized by Anagarika Dharmapala. The boundary work against the Theosophical Society became one of S.’s major issues. In 1913 he left the “Mahabodhi-Gesellschaft”.

S. returned to academic work and finished his dissertation on the *Udāna* under the supervision of Ernst Windish. S.’s translation of the *Udāna* is still a standard translation in German. In the following years, he worked for Georg Thilenius at the “Völkermuseum Hamburg.” He became a member of the “Leipziger Institut für Kultur und Universalgeschichte” and planned to write a *Habilitation*, most likely under the supervision of Walter Goetz (Leipzig). During World War I, S. served in the battle of Verdun. His war experience, in addition to an illness, might explain why he never finished his *Habilitation*.

After the war, S. and Georg Grimm launched the Buddhist journal “Buddhistischer Weltspiegel.” For S., who was interested in Buddhist contemplation techniques, Grimm’s teaching led him to place more emphasis on inner spirituality. In 1928, S. moved to Munich, had himself and his daughters baptized in

3 Ulrich Steinke, “Karl Bernhard Seidenstücker (1876–1936) Leben, Schaffen, Wirken.” accessed May 13, 2019, http://www.payer.de/steinke/steink00.htm.

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the Catholic church, and attended mass regularly. In 1934, he suffered a stroke from which he never fully recovered and died in 1936.

Mürmel, Heinz. “Vortragsmanuskript: Der Beginn des institutionellen Buddhismus in Deutschland: Der Buddhistische Missionsverein in Deutschland (Sitz Leipzig).” In *Erneuerungsbewegungen im Buddhismus*. Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart 11. Universität Hamburg, Asien-Afrika-Institut, Abteilung für Kultur und Geschichte Indiens und Tibets. (Weiterbildendes Studium), 2006. https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/4-publikationen/buddhismus-in-geschichte-und-gegenwart/bd11-k10muermel.pdf. Accessed March 18, 2019.; ——. “Buddhismus und Theosophie in Leipzig vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg.” In *Buddhisten und Hindus im deutschsprachigen Raum: Akten des zweiten Grazer Religionswissenschaftlichen Symposiums (2.-3. März 2000)*, edited by Manfred Hutter, 123–36. Religionswissenschaft Bd. 11. Frankfurt am Main, New York: Lang, 2001; Steinke, Ulrich. *Karl Bernhard Seidenstücker (1876–1936): Leben, Schaffen, Wirken*, 2007. Accessed July 29, 2016. http://www.payer.de/steinke/steink00.htm.; Usarski, Frank. “Merkmale der frühen deutschen Buddhismusrezeption: Ein revidierter systematischer Aufriss.” In *Mauss, Buddhismus, Devianz: Festschrift für Heinz Mürmel zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by Thomas Hase, 233–52. Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 2009; Zotz, Volker H. M. *Auf den glückseligen Inseln: Buddhismus in der deutschen Kultur*. Berlin: Theseus, 2000.

Suzuki, Daisetsu Teitarō (1870–1966)

Hans Martin Krämer

Born to a physician in Northern Japan in 1870, S. was an ardent practitioner of Zen, even while he was enrolled at Tokyo Imperial University to study languages in the 1890s. It was at this time that he was introduced to Zen meditation by Imakita Kōsen and Shaku Sōen at Kamakura's Engaku-ji temple, where he also met the Theosophist Beatrice Lane, whom he would later marry. In 1897 S. moved to the United States, where he worked at Paul Carus's publishing house Open Court. During his stay in the United States, S. came into contact with Swedenborgianism; in the 1910s, he became a member of the Japanese Swedenborg Society. In 1920, S. joined the Theosophical Society, becoming president of the International Lodge in Tokyo. Shortly thereafter, this lodge was disbanded and a new one, Mahayana Lodge, was founded in Kyoto in 1924, run by his wife. S. himself remained a member of that lodge until its demise in 1929. Since 1921, S. had been a professor at the Buddhist Ōtani University in Kyoto. He remained active scholarly until his death in 1966, with long spells of teaching in the United States.

S. is famous for having pursued the scholarly study of Buddhism and – most successfully – its propagation at the same time. He published scholarly works such as his translation of the Lankavatara Sutra from the original Sanskrit (1932), but the bulk of his numerous publications both in Japanese and in English are introductions to Zen Buddhism aimed at a larger audience. This popular strand of his may also have been responsible for his affirmative attitude towards Swedenborgianism and Theosophy, which he viewed as legitimate paths to spiritual fulfillment, by and large compatible with Buddhism.

At least this is true during the biographical phase of the "Occult Suzuki" (Tweed), beginning with his lecture before the Theosophical Society of San Francisco in 1903. Also, between 1910 and 1915, S. produced four book-length translations into Japanese commissioned by the Swedenborg Society, and in addition a monograph on Swedenborg in 1913. Next to the similarities to Buddhism he saw, S. was interested in Swedenborg because "there seems to be a spiritual realm separate from that of the five senses; and when we enter a certain psychological state, we apparently can communicate with that realm like we do with our own." To S., Swedenborg offered a new way to tackle the question of the afterlife, which had vexed modern Japanese Buddhists, by reaffirming its concreteness and a spiritual way of gaining access to it.

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In contrast, Theosophy received nary a mention in S.'s publications, and in his private correspondence, he is rather critical of it, despite his association with the movement (mainly through his wife) in the 1920s.

Algeo, Adele S. "Beatrice, Lane Suzuki and Theosophy in Japan." *Theosophical History* 11/3 (2005): 3–16; Tweed, Thomas. "American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism: Albert J. Edmunds, D. T. Suzuki, and Translocative History." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 32, 2 (2005): 249–281; Yoshinaga, Shin'ichi. "Suzuki Daisetsu and Swedenborg: A Historical Background." In *Modern Buddhism in Japan*, edited by Hayashi Makoto et al., 112–143. Nagoya: Nanzan, 2015.

van Manen, Mari Albert Johan (1877–1943)

Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz

1877 born to engineer R. O. van Manen and his wife Maria Albertina Johanna van Tricht at Nijmegen. From early youth interest in Asian philosophy and religions. Since 1895 active member of the Dutch Theosophical Society. 1897 translator for H.S. Olcott. 1898 meeting and collaboration with Annie Besant. In the same year he published a short life-account of her (Een korte levensschets). Representative of the Dutch branch at the Theosophical Society-Convention in London 1902. 1904 to 1906 Honorary Secretary of the first three Conventions of the TS. 1906 to 1916 private secretary to Leadbeater. 1908 to 1916 assistant director of the Library in the Theosophical Headquarters at Adyar, India. V. M. left Adyar because of grave differences with Annie Besant. In their book The Lives of Alcyone, Leadbeater and Besant constructed a reincarnation line for van Manen, which he rejected. In vain he tried to block the publication. In addition, Besant engaged politically during the First World War for the Allies, while van Manen was convinced that the Theosophy should remain neutral in worldly conflicts. After his move to Calcutta in 1918, employment by the Imperial Library, the Indian Museum and the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. He collected Tibetan texts and artefacts, his scholarly research focused on Tibetan Buddhism. V. M. probably remained a member of the Theosophical Society until his death in Calcutta 1943.

As a scholar, V. M. was mainly interested in the languages and religions of the Himalayan peoples. Although never formally educated at a university, he can be considered the first Dutch tibetologist. His scholarly interests covered Tibetan book production as well as oral literature. The van Manen collection of Tibetan books is nowadays kept at the Kern Institute at Leiden/Netherlands. He encouraged three of his Tibetan assistants to write down their life-stories, of which an edited English version was published in 1989. V. M. is nowadays mainly remembered for his Tibetan book collection and his bibliography of Tibetan literature (A Contribution to the Bibliography of Tibet, 1923).

No assessment of his scholarship with regard to theosophical influence exists. His first articles about Tibetan Buddhism are critical evaluations of H. P. Blavatsky's views on Tibet. During his years at Adyar, his scholarship was influenced by theosophical ideas. Thus, he relied on Leadbeater's clairvoyance with regard to the dating of a Tibetan folio: "Psychic researchers may note down the case here related as an interesting document for study, and those interested in this problem will find a good illustration of a chance

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example of clairvoyance" (A Mysterious Manuscript, n.p.). His later tibetological works do not show any particular relation to theosophical ideas.

Richardus, Peter. *The Dutch Orientalist Johan van Manen. His Life and Work*. Leiden: Kern Institute, 1989; Van Manen, Johan. *Annie Besant. Een korte levensschets*. Amsterdam: Uitgave van de Theosofische Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1898; ———. "A Mysterious Manuscript." *The Theosophist*, January 1911, available online at: http://www.cwlworld.info/A_MYSTERIOUS_MANUSCRIPT.pdf (13.1.2019). ———. A Contribution to the Bibliography of Tibet. *Journal & Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, New Series. Vol. XVIII, 1922, No. 8, 445–525 (Published separately, November 16th, 1923).

Contributors

Baier, Karl Professor Dr., Professorial Research Fellow, University of Vienna, Austria, Department of Religious Studies

Karl Baier studied philosophy, cultural anthropology and Catholic theology at Vienna University. Between 1987 and 2009 he worked as assistant and assistant professor at the Institute of Christian Philosophy at the faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Vienna. In 2008 he submitted his habilitation thesis on the history of modern meditation and subsequently became professor at the Institute of Religious Studies, Vienna University. Besides his university employment he works since several decades as certified Iyengar Yoga teacher.

His current research interests include: Alternative religion, esotericism and occultism, Mesmerism, modern yoga, Psychedelia

Most important/recent publications: *Meditation und Moderne*. 2 vols. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann 2009; Karl Baier, Philipp A. Maas, Karin Preisendanz, eds. *Yoga in Transformation. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Göttingen: V&R unipress 2018.

Bernard, Léo Dr., LEM – UMR 8485, École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE), Université PSL, Paris, France

Léo Bernard holds a PhD in history and religious studies from the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Université PSL – Paris). His doctoral thesis (defended in 2021) was focused on the relations between esoteric currents and medical holism in France during the interwar period. He is the co-founder and president of the Association Francophone pour l'Étude Universitaire des Courants Ésotériques (FRÉSO).

His current research interests include: Modern esoteric currents and medical holism

Most important/recent publications: Léo Bernard, "La médecine néo-hippocratique des années 1930: le temps d'une rencontre," edited by Olivier Faure and Hervé Guillemain. Pour en finir avec les médecines parallèles, *Histoire, médecine et santé*, no.14 (hiver 2018): p.63–81.

Bodendörfer, Judith, Doctoral candidate, Université de Fribourg, Freiburg, Switzerland

Judith Bodendörfer (*1987) studied religious studies, philosophy and sociology at the Ludwig-Maximilians Univeristät in Munich. Since April 2015 she is a PhD candidate in the project Die Geschichte der Religionswissenschaft in Auseinandersetzung mit nicht hegemonialen, insbesondere theosophischen Strömungen at the Université de Fribourg in Switzerland.

Her current research interests include: History of science, intellectual history of occult ideas, occultism and literature, Theosophical Society, Society for Psychical Research.

Most important/recent publications: Friedrich Max Müllers Science of Religion in Auseinandersetzung mit der Theosophischen Gesellschaft (PhD. diss., working title, forthcoming)

Böhme, Sabine M.A., Independent researcher, Berlin, Germany

Sabine Böhme studied Near Eastern Archaeology, Cuneiform and Prehistory at Albert-Ludwigs University, Freiburg. Then a sequence of several excavations in Syria followed: Tell Bi'a, Tell Sheich Hamad, Medinat al-Far, Tell Knedig. After living in Istanbul 1996–2000 she received vocational training in cultural management and started working on different projects

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(f.e. Assur exhibition 2004, Jordan exhibition 2006) with the Museum of Ancient Near East, Berlin from 2002 until now. In 1997 her daughter was born. In 2006 her first children's book about the museum was published. Around that time she started to work with schools in Berlin and different museums with the aim of a sustainable cooperation (last project: Gartenzwerg trifft Nebukadnezar 2016/17). She acted as a consultant for the primary school curriculum in Berlin-Brandenburg with the focus on establishing cooperation between schools and museums. During her second stay in Istanbul (2008–2012) she published several articles on topics connecting Ancient Near Eastern archaeology and the history of Istanbul. Since 2014 Sabine Böhme has devoted herself to research on the work and life of Walter Andrae, the founder and first curator of the Vorderasiatische Museum (Museum of Anceint Near East, Berlin). He is best known for his pain-staking reconstruction of the famous Ishtar Gate out of glazed and colourful brick fragments from the German excavations in Babylon before World War I. His professional friendship with the remarkable Gertrude Bell was to be crucial for securing these findings for Germany after the War. Sabine Böhme has made it her aim amongst others to find out more about the esoteric aspects of Walter Andrae's vision of a museum which he implemented in form of the Ancient Near Eastern exhibition in the Vorderasiatische Museum since 1928–1936.

Her current research interests include: The reception of the Ancient Near East in the beginning of the 20th century in Germany and its important impact by Walter Andrae and his anthroposophical leanings.

Most important/recent publications: "Die Goldene Leibniz-Medaille, eine Grußblatt-Sammlung, eine 'Festschrift' sowie ein Exlibris und die 'deutsche Wissenschaftstradition': Späte Ehrungen für Bruno Güterbocks (1858–1940) unendliche Arbeit als Schriftführer der DOG im Jahr 1928." *Marru* 6, 2018, 311–29.; "Ein Anthroposoph lässt in Berlin den Alten Orient wiedererstehen: Aus dem Gemessenen das Unermessliche." *Antike Welt* 4, 2017, 35–39.; "Katalog der neuassyrischen Siegelzylinderabrollungen und Stempelabdrücke auf Tontafeln, aufbewahrt im Eski Şark Müzesi, Istanbul (Nr. Ist.1–89)." In *Die neuassyrische Glyptik aus Assur*. Evelyn Klengel-Brandt. Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 140, 2014, 37–65.; *„Männer jagen, Frauen sammeln?" Der Weg einer Archäologin in den Orient*. Verlag Hans Schiler.2012; together with Karen Bartram. I*slamische Kunst für junge Leser. Eine Reise durch die Geschichte*. E.A. Seemann.

Cyranka, Daniel Professor Dr., Professor of Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology, Martin-Luther -University Halle-Wittenberg, Halle, Germany

Daniel Cyranka, born 1969, studied Protestant Theology, Philosophy and Contemporary History in Naumburg, Tübingen, Berlin and Halle (1989–1997). (1997: Diploma (Evangelical Theology); 2004: Doctorate to Dr. theol. ("Lessing in reincarnation discourse"; summa cum laude); 2010: Habilitation as Dr. theol. habil. ("Studies on the German Image of Mohammed in the 18th Century"), Grant of the venia legendi for ecumenics, denominational studies, religious studies). 2011–2012 he was (temporary) Chair of Mission Studies and Religious Studies at the Faculty of Theology, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. In 2012 he was appointment as University Professor for Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology at the Faculty of Theology, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. From 2014 to 2017 he was chairman of the Section "Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology" of the Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft für Theologie/Academic Society of Theology (WGTh) and since 2017 he is Member of the Executive Board of the Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft für Theologie/Academic Society of Theology (WGTh). Since 2015 he is coopted member of the

Philosophical Faculty I (Social Sciences and Historical Cultural Studies) of Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. From 2016 to 2018 he was Director of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Pietism Research (IZP) and from 2018 to 2020 he was Dean of the Faculty of Theology.

His current research interests include: Modern History of Religion, Contextual Theologies, Study of Esotericism, Enlightenment/Pietism and Religions, History of Protestant Mission, (Post-) Colonialism and the History of Religions

Most important/recent publications: *Mahomet. Repräsentationen des Propheten in deutschsprachiger Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 566. Göttingen: BERG, 6, 2018; *Lessing im Reinkarnationsdiskurs. Eine Untersuchung zu Kontext und Wirkung von G. E. Lessings Texten zur Seelenwanderung*, 522. Göttingen: KKR, 49, 2005; "Von der ‚protestantischen Revolution' in den ‚religionslosen Osten'. Überlegungen zur Macht von Repräsentationen." In *Religion – Macht – Raum. Religiöse Machtansprüche und ihre medialen Repräsentationen*. Edited by Daniel Cyranka and Henning Wrogemann, 141–154. Leipzig: VWGTh, 56, 2018; "Glaube als Gegenstand der Religionswissenschaft." In *Glaube*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm Horn, 197–229. Tübingen: TdT, 13, 2018; Religious revolutionaries and Spiritualism in Germany around 1848. *Aries* 1 (2016): 13–48.

Frenschkowski, Marco Professor Dr., Professor of New Testament Studies and ancient Graeco-Roman religion (chair), Leipzig, Germany

Born 1960, studied Protestant Theology and Greek language and literature 1978–1983 at Mainz and Tübingen, teaching at a number of universities, since 2011 at Leipzig University.

His current research interests include: Early Christianity, magic both in antiquity and in modern times, religions in antiquity, new religious movements, religious pluralism in modern societies and interreligious dialogue, imaginative literature, library science.

Most important/recent publications: *Magie im antiken Christentum: Eine Studie zur Alten Kirche und ihrem Umfeld*. Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 2016; *Prophetie. Innovation, Tradition und Subversion in spätantiken Religionen*. Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 2018; *Gustav Meyrink, Gesammelte Werke*. edited by Marco Frenschkowski. Wiesbaden: Marix 2014. (4 of 8 volumes have appeared, annotated edition); *Zauberbücher: Die Leipziger Magica-Sammlung im Schatten der Frühaufklärung. Katalog zur Ausstellung der Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig 15. 11. 2019–16. 02. 2020*. Leipzig: Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig 2019

Huss, Boaz Professor Dr., Professor, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Be'er Scheva, Israel

Boaz Huss teaches at the Goldstein-Goren Department of Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He is the vice-President of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism and a co-Director of MEIDA Centre (Israeli Information Centre on New Religious Movements).

His current research interests include: The history of Kabbalah, Contemporary Kabbalah, Western esotericism, New Age Culture and New Religious Movements in Israel.

Most important/recent publications: *The Zohar: Reception and Impact*. The Littman Library of Oxford: Jewish Civilization, 2016; *The Genealogy of Jewish Mysticism and the Theologies of Kabbalah Research*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2016; "'The Quest Universal:' Moses Gaster's Interest in Kabbalah and Western Esotericism," *Kabbalah* 40, (2018).

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina Professor Dr., Full professor and chair, Institute for the Science of Religion, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland

Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz is full professor and chair of History of Religions and Central Asian Studies at the Department of the Arts and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Bern, Switzerland. Having earned her M.A. degree in Tibetan Studies from Bonn University/Germany, she did her graduate work in Tibetan and Mongolian Studies at Bonn University and was awarded the Ph.D. in 1991 for a dissertation on the Zhi byed- and gCod school of Tibetan Buddhism. She was a postdoctoral lecturer at the universities of Bonn, Marburg and Moscow, and in 1999 received her habilitation in Central Asian Studies from Bonn University for a study of the Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur, an early 17th century Mongolian chronicle. Among her research awards have been grants from the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes, the German Research Foundation, the Swiss National Science Foundation, and the Gerda Henkel Foundation. She has conducted extensive fieldwork among exile Tibetans in Northern India and, in recent years, in Mongolia. She has authored and edited eleven books and has written numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals.

Her current research interests include: History of Inner Asian knowledge cultures, Global history of religion, The Tibet-Mongolia Interface, religion and politics in Inner Asia, reception of Buddhism in Europe.

Most important/recent publications: *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur: Die Biographie des Altan qaγan der Tümed-Mongolen; Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der religionspolitischen Beziehungen zwischen der Mongolei und Tibet im ausgehenden 16. Jahrhundert*. Asiatische Forschungen, 142. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2001; „Lamas und Schamanen: Mongolische Wissensordnungen vom frühen 17. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert; Ein Beitrag zur Debatte um aussereuropäische Religionsbegriffe.“ In *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs* edited by Peter Schalk, Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger, Christoph Kleine and Astrid van Nahl, 151–200. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2013; „Systematically Ordering the World: the Encounter of Buriyad-Mongolian, Tibetan and Russian Knowledge Cultures in the 19th century.“ In „L'orientalisme des marges: éclairages à partir de l'Inde et de la Russie”. Edited by Philippe Bornet and Svetlana Gorshenina. *Etudes de Lettres*, 2–3, (2014): 123–146.; “Of Yellow Teaching and Black Faith: Entangled Knowledge Cultures and the Creation of Religious Traditions.” In *Dynamics of Religion: Past and Present*. Edited by Christop Bochinger and Jörg Rüpke, 231–250. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2016.

Krämer, Hans Martin Professor Dr., Full Professor, Heidelberg University, Heidelberg, Germany

Hans Martin Krämer (born 1972) studied History, Japanese Studies, and Philosophy at Heinrich Heine University (Düsseldorf, Germany), Sophia University (Tokyo, Japan), and Ruhr University (Bochum, Germany). After research stays at the University of Tokyo, Harvard University, and the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Kyoto, Japan), he was assistant professor for Japanese Studies in Bochum. Since 2012, he is professor for Japanese Studies (History/Society) at Heidelberg University in Germany. His work has appeared in *The Journal of Asian Studies, Monumenta Nipponica, Social Science Japan Journal*, and a number of other German-, Japanese-, and English-language venues.

His current research interests include: social, cultural, and religious history of early modern and modern Japan

Most important/recent publications: With Julian Strube, eds. *Theosophy Across Boundaries: Transcultural and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Modern Esoteric Movement*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020; With Björn Bentlage, Marion Eggert, and Stefan Reichmuth, eds. *Religious Dynamics under the Impact of Imperialism and Colonialism: A Sourcebook*. Leiden: Brill, 2017; *Shimaji Mokurai and the Reconception of Religion and the Secular in*

Modern Japan. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015; "Pan-Asianism's Religious Undercurrents: The Reception of Islam and Translation of the Qur'ān in Twentieth-Century Japan." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, 3 (2014): 619–640.

Mühlematter, Yves Research and Teaching Assistant, Department for Teacher Education, University of Freiburg, Switzerland; Lecturer in Teacher Training, PHBern, Switzerland.

In his doctoral dissertation (2021), Mühlematter examines hybridization processes between Theosophy and "Hinduism." These processes resulted in the publication of two textbooks which were used in several schools in India and became the basis for religious instruction in the Benares Hindu University. In his new project, he examines the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development in German-speaking countries while following up on his interest in textbook research and classroom communication.

His current research interests include: Education for Sustainable Development, intercultural communication and education, textbook research, religious studies, translational studies, esotericism, and postcolonial studies.

Most important/recent publications: "The Stages of Initiation in the Grand Scheme of Theosophical Evolution as the Basis for Ethical Education: Annie Besant's "Quickening of Evolution" as a Paradigmatic Example of Meshing Processes of Hybridization in the Global Colonial Discursive Continuum Around 1900" (PhD. diss., forthcoming); "Translation Between Theosophy, Yoga, Kant and Evolutionism: Annie Besant's *Bhagavadgītā* Translations around 1900" In *ScriptUM: la revue du colloque VocUM* (forthcoming); "Philology as an Epistemological Strategy to Claim Higher Knowledge: Translational Endeavors within the Theosophical Society; A Case Study of Annie Besant's Bhagavad-Gita." In *ESSWE 6 Proceedings, Aries Book Series*, Brill (forthcoming); "Charles Johnston's Interpretation of Yoga: Theosophy, Consciousness, and Spiritual Progress." In *Contemporary Yoga and Sacred Texts*. Edited by Susanne Scholz and Caroline van der Stichele. London: Routledge, forthcoming.

Pasche Guignard, Florence Dr., Assistant Professor, Faculté de théologie et de sciences religieuses, Université Laval, Quebec City, Canada

Florence Pasche Guignard holds a PhD in religious studies from the Université de Lausanne (Switzerland). Her research explores issues at the intersection of religion and ritual, digital and material cultures, embodiment, and gender. Her most recent publications focus on motherhood, parenting and religion in a variety of past and present cultural contexts. She brings her interdisciplinary scholarship in conversation with anthropology, ritual studies, media studies, as well as with gender and women's studies.

Her current research interests include: Religious studies, religion and gender, religion and motherhood, religion and media

Most important/recent publications: "Back Home and Back to Nature? *Natural Parenting and Religion in Francophone Contexts*." *Open Theology* 6/1 (2020): 175–201; "Religions and Mothers." *In The Routledge Companion to Motherhood*. Edited by Lynn O'Brien Hallstein, Andrea O'Reilly and Melinda Vandenbeld Giles, 156–164. London-New York: Routledge, 2020. With Giulia Pedrucci "Motherhood(s) and Polytheisms: Epistemological and Methodological Reflections on the Study of Religions, Gender, and Women." *Numen* 65/4 (2018): 404–434; "The Academic Study of Religions and Mothering, Motherhood and Mothers." In Maternità e Politeismi – Motherhood(s) and Polytheisms. Edited by Florence Pasche Guignard, Giulia Pedrucci and Marianna Scapini, 61–88. Bologna: Pàtron, 2017; "A Gendered Bun in the Oven. The Gender-

Reveal Party as a New Ritualization during Pregnancy." *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 44 (2015): 479–500.

Sarmis, Dilek Dr., Post-doctoral Fellow, EHESS (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris), Paris, France

Dilek Sarmis is a post-doctoral fellow at Ecole des Hautes études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and lecturer at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INaLCO). She is specialist in intellectual history and history of knowledge in ending Ottoman empire and Republican Turkey. Her PhD was devoted to the reception of French philosopher Henri Bergson in Turkey. She is currently working on the history of social sciences in Turkey and on the place of religious knowledges within them, analyzing the epistemological and political functions of mysticist and spiritualistic discourses in academy.

Her current research interests include: Intellectual History, History of knowledge

Most important/recent publications: "L'essor du bergsonisme en Turquie: une lecture de la guerre d'indépendance à travers la revue Dergâh (1921–1923)." In *Turcs et Français. Une histoire culturelle, 1860–1960*. Edited by Güneş Işiksel and Emmanuel Szurek, 115–132. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014; "Conceptualiser le mysticisme dans une perspective académique: la constitution d'une histoire générale du mysticisme chez Mehmet Ali Ayni (1868–1945)." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [Online], 25 | 2017, Online since 20 December 2017, connection on 27 December 2017. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/5451 ; "Variations bergsoniennes dans les écritures intellectuelles et littéraires turques." In *Annales bergsoniennes IX – Bergson et les écrivains*. Paris: PUF, "Epiméthée", forthcoming; "Psychologies ottomanes et turques. Un laboratoire pour les partages savants", *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines et sociales* 34 (forthcoming)

Schlieter, Jens Professor Dr., Extraordinary Professor, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland

Trained in Western Philosophy, Comparative Religion, and Buddhist Studies, MA 1994; PhD (Philosophy) in 1999 (Comparative Philosophy of Language, Buddhism and Western Philosophy), Habilitation in 2006 (Buddhism and Bioethics). Research and publication comprise history of religions (especially Indian and Tibetan Buddhism), Theory of Religion, Near-death Experiences and the Discourse on Religious Experiences, and on Bioethics of Buddhism. Methodologically, research includes Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Philosophy of Language applied to the Study of Religion.

His current research interests include: Theory of Religion, Discourse on Religious Experience, Metaphors, Buddhist Ethics

Most important/recent publications: *What is it like to be Dead? Near-death Experiences, Christianity, and the Occult*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018; "Buddhist Insight Meditation (vipassanā) in Religious Settings and Kabat-Zinn's 'Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction': An Example of Dedifferentiation of Religion and Medicine?" *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 32, no. 3 (2017): 447–463; "Religiöse Symbole im öffentlichen Raum: Symbolwirkung als kollektive Intentionalität einer Deutungsgemeinschaft." *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 25, no. 2 (2017): 196–232.

Schulze, Reinhard Professor Dr., Prof. em., Director Forum Islam and the Middle East, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland

After studying Islamic Studies, Semitic Studies, Linguistics and Romance Studies at the University of Bonn, Reinhard Schulze earned his doctorate in 1981 and then held positions at

the universities of Hamburg, Essen and Bonn. He completed his habilitation at the University of Bonn in 1987 and was appointed Professor of Oriental Philology at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum the same year. From 1992–95 he was Professor of Islamic Studies and Arabic Studies at the University of Bamberg. In 1995 he was appointed Professor of Islamic Studies and Modern Oriental Philology at the University of Bern. Since his retirement in 2018 he has been Director of the transdisciplinary Forum Islam and the Middle East at the University of Bern.

His current research interests include: History of knowledge in the Muslim world

Most important/recent publications: *Islamischer Internationalismus im 20. Jahrhundert: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der islamischen Weltliga*. Leiden: Brill 1990; "Was ist die islamische Aufklärung?" *Die Welt des Islams* 36 (1996): 276–325; "On Relating Religion to Society and Society to Religion." In *Debating Islam*. Edited by Samuel M. Behloul, Susanne Leuenberger, and Andreas Tunger-Zanetti, 325–348. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013; *Der Koran und die Genealogie des Islam*. Basel: Schwabe, 2015; *Geschichte der islamischen Welt: Von 1900 bis in die Gegenwart*. München: Beck, 2016.

Sedgwick, Mark Professor Dr., Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark

He taught previously for many years at the American University in Cairo. He is convener of the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE) and a former secretary of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE). He studied history at Oxford University in England and then did his PhD at the University of Bergen in Norway.

His current research interests include: Islam; Sufism; esotericism; terrorism; Egypt

Most important/recent publications: "Western Sufism and Gnosis." In *The Gnostic World*. edited by Garry Trompf, Gunner B. Mikkelsen and Jay Johnston, 527–536. New York: Routledge, 2019; Ed., *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019; "Sufi Religious Leaders and Sufi Orders in the Contemporary Middle East." *Sociology of Islam* 6 (2018): 212–32; *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the New Age*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016; *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004

Strube, Julian Postdoctoral researcher at the Cluster of Excellence "Religions and Politics" at the University of Münster, Germany. PhD in Religious Studies and History from the University of Heidelberg. The leading themes of his research are the relationship between religion and politics from a global historical perspective, with a focus on India, Europa, and North America. He recently finished a project about "Tantra in the Context of a Global Religious History" and is now working on the exchange between Bengali, European, and North American reformers in the nineteenth century. He held positions, among others, at the University of Amsterdam, and recently replaced a professorship at the University of Hamburg.

His current research interests include: Global Religious History, Religion and Politics, Esotericism, Tantra

Most important/recent publications: With Egil Asprem, New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2021; with Hans Martin Krämer, ed. Theosophy Across Boundaries: Transcultural and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Modern Esoteric Movement. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020; Sozialismus, Katholizismus und Okkultismus im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts: Die Genealogie der Schriften von Eliphas Lévi. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2016 ....; "Socialism and Esotericism in July

Monarchy France." *History of Religions* 57, no. 2 (2017): 197–221; "Occultist Identity Formations Between Theosophy and Socialism in fin-de-siècle France." *Numen* 64, no. 5–6 (2017): 568–595; "Socialist Religion and the Emergence of Occultism: A Genealogical Approach to 'Secularization' in 19th-Century France." *Religion* 46, no. 3 (2016): 359–388.

Zander, Helmut Professor Dr., Professor of comparative history and interreligious dialogue at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Trained in political science, history and Catholic theology, PhD in political science and Catholic theology, habilitation in history of science.

His current research interests include: Comparative history of religions, especially the stability of differences; history of Anthroposophy.

Most important/recent publications: *„Europäische" Religionsgeschichte: Religiöse Zugehörigkeit durch Entscheidung – Konsequenzen im interkulturellen Vergleich*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016; "Hieroklasmus – Die okzidentale Reformation in religionsvergleichender Perspektive: Explorative Überlegungen." In *Kirchengeschichte und Religionswissenschaft: Methoden und Fallstudien*. Edited by Klaus Fitschen, Wolfram Kinzig, Armin Kohnle, and Volker Leppin, 175–220. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2018; *Rudolf Steiner: Die Biographie*. 3rd ed. München: Piper 2016. First published 2011 by Piper (München, Zürich).

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