

**2nd International Conference of the
European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE)
Strasbourg, July 2009**

**Capitales de l'ésotérisme européen et dialogue des cultures/
Capitals of European esotericism and transcultural dialogue**

International Conference organized by the University of Strasbourg (Equipe d'accueil d'Etudes germaniques, EA 1341/UDS) and the Maison interuniversitaire des Sciences de l'Homme-Alsace (MISHA) in partnership with the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE).

Thursday 2-Saturday 4 July, 2009

in Strasbourg, Maison interuniversitaire des Sciences de l'Homme-Alsace.

Call for papers

During recent decades, the role and impact of esoteric currents within western culture has elicited a growing number of scholarly works. This study brings into play a complex pattern of intellectual discourses and historical phenomena, in close relationship not merely with political and religious spheres, but also with different fields of knowledge and their processes of elaboration.

In 1998, an international conference on the theme "Mystics, Mysticism and Modernity" was organized by the Marc Bloch University of Strasbourg with the aim of studying the impact of esoteric currents on the construction of modernity in society, art and literature at the start of the twentieth century. Following on this research into the connections between esotericism and culture, the present conference aims to make a lasting contribution to the writing of a "different" cultural history, integrating a detailed analysis of the part that esoteric currents have played in the building, development and interactions of national and of cross-national identities.

Esotericism and Spatiality

Scholarship in the field of esotericism has hitherto often been dominated by a "monographic" bias, a tendency to privilege the study of individual authors or specific currents considered particularly relevant to a given context or period, and therefore stressing the chronological dimension of the topic. Without forsaking historical methods, the conference on "Capitals of European Esotericism and transcultural dialogue" proposes a somewhat different approach, underlining the importance of geographical and intellectual patterns, networks, interactions and exchanges, with the purpose of illustrating the relevance of the "spatial" dimension of culture.

The goal of this conference is, thus, to contribute to the delineation of a landscape of Western esoteric currents by sketching a transhistorical map of their places of emergence and their main centers of diffusion. Following the inaugural conference of the ESSWE held in Tübingen in July 2007 and devoted to "The Construction of Tradition", it has been decided to dedicate

the conference in Strasbourg—itself an important “capital of European esotericism”—to the complementary themes of locality and spatiality.

The concept of “Capitals of European esotericism” finds support—inter alia—in research integrating the “spatial turn” in cultural sciences and history, as well as in geocritical approaches to the study of discourse, more particularly envisaged in their spatio-cultural rooting. The birth and development of a plurality of Western esoteric currents will accordingly be considered as essentially linked to certain privileged loci, where a number of diverse traditions, influences and activities have converged and crystallized, for complex historical and cultural reasons which it will be our task to investigate.

Focus-point: the city as a crucible of cultural identity for European esoteric currents

The various threads of Western esotericism have evolved from and around a number of intellectual centers linked, on the one hand, to local and/or national cultures and, on the other hand, also subject to cultural transfers and exchanges involving elements belonging to foreign horizons, notably oriental ones. Urban communities have been shown to play a major part in these processes of cultural interaction. Certain capitals or cities have acted—sometimes over prolonged periods of time—as diffusion centers for specific currents or disciplines, such as alchemy or Freemasonry (for example, Venice, Avignon, and Marseilles). Of particular relevance in this perspective is the case of “border-towns”, bearing the stamp of a dual culture or acting as intercultural foyers, which appear for these reasons to qualify even better as places of emergence of such currents (for example, Trieste, Strasburg, Prague, and Cordoba).

Interest may also focus on the common trajectories of economic centers and high places of esoteric thought and activity, and on their social imbrications, as well as on the related topic of patronage which, simultaneously attracting and stabilizing persons and activities in certain spots, nonetheless stimulates the circulation of people and ideas between them (the Medici in Florence, Gonzague in Mantua, Rudolf II in Prague, etc). In the same way, major printing and publishing centers (such as P. Perna’s office in Basel, the Beringos Brothers in Lyon, Diederichs in Munich), or the intellectual exchanges between rival cultural poles (such as Venice and Florence at the turn of the sixteenth century), also deserve attention.

The study of such cultural phenomena may be conducted at different levels:

- *On a regional or national scale, emphasizing the many links existing between local cultures, prevailing political conditions, and the historical development of esoteric currents.*
- *On a cross-cultural and supranational scale, taking into consideration the successive phases of the process of globalization of esotericism, notably relations between East and West.*

Another important issue is the literary activity fostered by these “capitals of European esotericism” throughout history, whether they have specifically given rise to a body of literature directly influenced by esoteric speculations and/or practices, or whether they are themselves the object of mythical/literary representation(s) in works of fiction dealing with, or influenced by, esotericism.

Contributors to the conference are invited to use various scholarly methods and approaches from different disciplines: cultural history, art history, history of ideas and of Western

esotericism, investigation of the socio-economic conditions of the production of fictional and literary works, etc.

Examples of themes on which contributions will be welcome:

- *Mapping of Western Esotericism: identification of greater or lesser urban cultural centers linked with one or more specific currents of European esotericism: “masonic capitals”, centers for the diffusion of theosophical doctrines and writings (such as Amsterdam, Berleburg, London, Dornach), etc.*
- *Economic and cultural exchanges, esoteric currents and the city: investigation of the interactions between commercial, intellectual, artistic and publishing activities as linked to the presence, development and productions of European esotericism (Lyon, Venice, Berlin, Florence, Paris). Some attention should also be given to the role and operation of esoteric periodicals or journals per se, as well as-more generally-to the presence of esoteric themes or events in cultural media.*
- *Capitals of European esotericism and multi-cultural dialogue: Western esotericism and the reception of oriental literature and traditions (New York, Paris, Cairo, London).*
- *Esotericism, fictional imagination and the City: artistic and literary works which display an intimate connection between esoteric themes and the (fictional or real) depiction of a given (or imaginary) city (such as Prague in G. Meyrink’s *The Golem*, or London in A. Machen’s *The Three Impostors*).*

Approaches combining several of these themes and/or perspectives are of course welcome.

It should also be kept in mind that “Western esotericism” is by no means construed as limited to Christianity, but includes esoteric speculations and practices belonging to other religious cultures (such as Jewish Kabbalah and Neo-Sufism), whose complex (often long-standing and influential) interactions with Christian culture make them an integral part of “European esotericism”.

Working languages: French, German & English.

Conference Committee: Jean-Pierre Brach (Ecole pratique des Hautes-Etudes, Vème section, Paris, vice-president of ESSWE), Sylvain Briens (UDS), Aurélie Choné (UDS), Christine Maillard (UDS).

Conference Chairman: Christine Maillard

Proposals (title and short abstract) should be send to Christine Maillard, christine.maillard@misha.fr, with your name, academic position, and titles of major publications.

Submission deadline : June 15th, 2008.