



INTERNATIONAL  
**THEOSOPHICAL**

HISTORY CONFERENCE 2019

12-13 OCTOBER 2019, ATHENS, GREECE



Since 1986 a series of International Theosophical History conferences (ITHCon) have been held, mostly in London, at which scholars within the Theosophical Movement and from the academic world in general, have gathered together to share and discuss Theosophical History.

This year the ITHCon will be hosted in Athens at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Greece. The conference will count with the participation of fifteen speakers from across the world, offering a unique forum for discussion and exchange of ideas on Theosophical history.

The chairs of the conference are Prof. James Santucci, Dr. Tim Rudbøg and the secretary is Erica Georgiades.

The Conference is convened by the European School of Theosophy with the support of the *Theosophical History* Journal, Theosophical Society in Greece and The Blavatsky Trust.

# PROGRAMME / TIMETABLE

ITHCon, 12-13 OCTOBER 2019

## 12 OCTOBER

- 09:15 Alexandros Bousoulengas**  
*President of TS in Greece*  
Welcome
- 09:30 James A. Santucci**  
Theosophical History and its Future
- 10:30 Chienhui Chuang**  
H. P. Shastri (1882–1956)'s Theosophical movement in the modern Far East
- 11:30** Tea Break
- 12:00 Toshio Akai**  
Tamijuro Kume and International Lodge, Tokyo
- 13:00 Leslie Price**  
Stainton Moses - A Theosophist in spite of himself?
- 14:00 Lunch**
- 15:00 Erica Georgiades**  
Who was Agardi Metrovich?
- 16:00 Bas Jacobs**  
Contextualizing the Mahatma Letters in a Scholarly Context: A New Approach
- 17:00** Tea Break
- 17:30 William Wilson Quinn**  
Archival Notes on the Relation of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy to the Theosophical Society
- 18:30 Karoline Maria Hess**  
Polish Theosophical Society - Domestic Activities and International Cooperation
- 19:30** Break
- 20:00 Anna Kaltseva**  
Bulgarian contribution to the Theosophy history

## 13 OCTOBER

- 09:30 Tim Rudbøg**  
Between Theosophy and Orientalism: debates about an 'Esoteric Buddhism' in the nineteenth century
- 10:30 Julie Chajes**  
Blavatsky's Vedanta: A Case Study in Cultural Entanglement
- 11:00** Tea Break
- 11:30 Boaz Huss**  
Theosophy and Anthroposophy in Israel
- 12:30 Spyros Petritakis**  
Dismembering George Frederic Watts's 'mesmeric dolls': Music and Theosophy in the painter's late works
- 13:30 K. Paul Johnson (*in absentia*)**  
In Search of Zanoni
- 13:45 Lunch**
- 14:45 Jaishree Kannan**  
Adyar Archives-Narrative of a Treasure House
- 15:45 James A. Santucci**  
Closing

## REGISTRATION

**Registration Fee: 50,00 €**

**Student Registration Fee: 30,00 €**

Click here to download the registration form:  
<https://tinyurl.com/y45d9jof>

# James Santucci

## Theosophical History and Its Future

Theosophical History is now in the thirty-fourth year of its existence. This presentation will review its origins, accomplishments over this period, and its plans for the immediate future and for the next decade.

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## GET TO KNOW

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James A. Santucci is Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at California State University, Fullerton. Since 1990, he has been editor of *Theosophical History*, founded by Leslie Price in 1985, and since 1993 editor of *Theosophical History Occasional Papers* (<https://theohistory.org>). He received his B.A. degree in history at Iona College (New Rochelle, N.Y.), M.A. at the University of Hawaii (Manoa campus) in Asian Studies, and PhD in the field of Asian Civilizations at Australian National University (Canberra). He is the author of articles and books in Theosophical history, Buddhism, Hinduism, and the religions of the U.S., including *La società teosofica* and co-author of *America's Religions*. He is also a contributor (Sanskrit language) to *The Intercontinental Dictionary Series* under the editorship of the late Mary Ritchie Key and current General Editor Bernard Comrie (Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology).

# Chienhui Chuang

## H. P. Shastri (1882–1956)’s Theosophical movement in the modern Far East

In 1919, the society chose Shanghai to establish its first official branch in the Far East. The first president of the Shanghai branch was Hari Prasad Shastri (1882–1956), an Indian professor, Sanskrit scholar, and Raja Yoga proponent. Shastri came to Shanghai in 1918 on Dr. Sun Yat-Sen (1866–1925)’s invitation. Before moving to Shanghai, Shastri taught at the Tokyo Imperial University and Waseda University during 1916-1918. While in Japan, Shastri was also in touch with Paul Richard (1874–1967), the French Indophile and esotericist, and sometime associate of the Theosophical Society. After moving to Shanghai, he was not only active in the Theosophical movement, but also endeavored in promoting the ideal of Asian Unity. In 1924, Shastri established the “Shanghai Pan-Asian Society” in Shanghai with Japanese intellectuals. We may see that Shastri’s residence in the Far East during 1916-1929 was connected with Japanese Pan-Asianism groups; however, if we examine his works in depth, we find that the origin of his movement was related with Theosophy as well.

In this paper, I will like to examine Shastri’s movement about China, India, and Japan by paying attention to his Theosophical background.

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## GET TO KNOW

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Chuang is an Assistant Professor of Kyushu University. Her research covers Theosophical movement in modern China and Japan, as well as postcolonial literature in the modern Far East. Her paper, *The Theosophical Movements in China before W. W. II*, was published by the Japanese Association of Comparative Culture in 2014.

# Toshio Akai

## Tamijuro Kume and International Lodge, Tokyo

This paper is to examine the achievements made by the members of the International Lodge, Tokyo, in particular, a painter named Tamijuro Kume. In spite of the short endurance, this small cell of Theosophical Society, founded by James Cousins in 1920, is important in terms that it formed a knot to bind the movements Besant and Leadbeater then developed worldwide and the indigenous trend of spiritual healing extensively welcomed by interwar Japanese society, and Kume is believed to have been a central figure in the confluence. Kume advocated Reitheism, his own fashion of mediumistic painting, which formed a bizarre merger of modernized Japanese mindcure principle with Theosophical Thought Forms theory. However, Kume's idea was sustained by his profound understanding of Japanese mediumistic art form Noh, the excessively simplified stage performance patronized samurai warrior classes for centuries. Kume's knowledge both of the art and occultism functioned significantly in several cases not only in Japan but in Western world. Kume was acquainted with Irish poet W. B. Yeats in London in 1914 when Yeats sought his new form of mystic plays, and Kume's advice is believed to have crucially assisted to Yeats' creation of his Noh-inspired plays like *At the Hawk's Well*.

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## GET TO KNOW

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Born in 1957 in Kyoto, Japan. Educated in Kwansei Gakuin University, Nishinomiya, Japan, and conferred MA (English Literature) in 1984 there. Humanities Professor, Kobe Gakuin University, Kobe, Japan, since 1999. Specializing Theosophist activities in Ireland and India, and Irish impact on the interwar years Japanese culture.

# Karoline Maria Hess

## **Polish Theosophical Society Domestic Activities and International Cooperation**

The history of Polish activities in the Theosophical Society was understudied for many years. I focused on the historical reconstruction of the Theosophical groups in Poland, as well as their main ideas, in my doctoral dissertation at the Jagiellonian University. The research took altogether almost seven years, and here I want to share the outcome, focusing on two main parts. The first is a description of the main activities of the national Polish branch – Polish Theosophical Society and its regional specifics. In 1918 Poland regained independence after 123 years; PTS was registered as a society in Polish lands in 1921, and became the official National Branch in 1923. The historical and cultural situation had great impact on the main interests of Polish Theosophists, who connected Theosophical teachings with National Messianism rooted in Romanticism. The second part comments on their international activities, connections, and collaborations with well-known Theosophical figures.

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## GET TO KNOW

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Karolina Maria Hess is a philosopher, cultural anthropologist and pedagogue, doctoral student at the Institute of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University (thesis about Theosophy in Poland soon to be finalized) and the Institute of Sociology at the University of Silesia (thesis about Polish researcher on Medium-related phenomena, Julian Ochorowicz).

# Boaz Huss

## Theosophy and Anthroposophy in Israel

The lecture will discuss the reception of Theosophy and Anthroposophy in Israel. I will discuss the early circles that were interested in Theosophy and Anthroposophy in Palestine/Land of Israel in the Mandate period, the foundation of the first Theosophical and Anthroposophical lodges and branches in Israel, and their later developments. I will describe the different activities of the Israel Theosophists and Anthroposophist, their integration within Israeli society, and their role in the history of alternative spiritual and religious movements in Israel.

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## GET TO KNOW

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Boaz Huss is professor of Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, where he is currently serving as chair of the department.

His research interests include the Zohar and its reception, the genealogies of Jewish Mysticism and the history of Kabbalah Studies, Kabbalah and the Theosophical Society and Contemporary Kabbalah.

Boaz Huss was born in Jerusalem, in 1959. He is married, and has three children.

# Jaishree Kannan

## Adyar Archives-Narrative of a Treasure House

This presentation is about the Archives situated at the international headquarters of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai, India. We will explore the story of the Adyar Archives and Museum; how the collections started. The Archives collections include correspondences, photographs, and manuscripts and more; the Museum collection include artifacts from various countries visited by presidents and leaders of the Theosophical Society. I will also comment on the manner successive officers informed members all over the world about the important of preserving documents and artifacts. After that, we will discuss about the present condition of the archives, as well as future plans and needs of the Archives.

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## GET TO KNOW

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Jaishree Kannan worked at the Adyar Library and Research Centre, Adyar, Chennai for nearly 25 years. For the last 3<sup>1/2</sup> years I have been working in Adyar Archives trying to help the researchers & help in scanning & digitizing the Archives. She is a member of Theosophical Society Adyar since 1975 and a longtime resident at the Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai India. Both her father and grandfather also worked for the Theosophical Society, without whom she wouldn't have been in the T.S.

# Bas Jacobs

## Contextualizing the Mahatma Letters in a Scholarly Context: A New Approach

In the early nineties, the publication of K. Paul Johnson's *The Masters Revealed* sparked a lively debate. Johnson's book was an impressive attempt to discover the reality behind the myth of the Masters. Johnson proposed that the Masters were covers for real-life acquaintances of Blavatsky and Olcott. To make his case, Johnson had no choice but to rely on testimony offered by early Theosophists. Their testimony is, however, unreliable from a scholarly point of view. The subsequent debate showed that it is almost impossible to separate myth from reality when independent testimony is absent. In his important 2002 dissertation "The Theosophical Masters," Brendan French focused on what the Masters meant to Theosophists and avoided the question of historical reality altogether.

Because of their problematic status, the Masters and their letters have received little attention in academia, where research tends to zoom in on H. P. Blavatsky. This paper suggests that we should shift the focus from what early Theosophists say about the Masters to the letters themselves. The letters have a lot to tell us about the authors, their immediate context and the issues that concerned them. This paper proposes a philological approach to unearth this information.

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### GET TO KNOW

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Bas Jacobs (b. 1986) is a Research Masters (RMA) student in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Amsterdam. He specializes in Western Esotericism. He also has BSc in Psychology and an MA in Interfaith Dialogue. Theosophy is his primary research interest.

# William Wilson Quinn

## Archival Notes on the Relation of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy to the Theosophical Society

This paper is narrowly based on a published misstatement by Rama P. Coomaraswamy, the son of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (“AKC”), where he stated that while his father was “acquainted” with Annie Besant, AKC “was never directly involved in the Theosophical movement.” The historical facts do not support this statement. Accordingly, of the relevant historical facts, this paper sets forth a copy of AKC’s application for membership into the Theosophical Society; a 1906 letter by AKC from the Ceylon Observer defending the Theosophical Society and praising H.S. Olcott; AKC’s own words from his letters declaring his admiration for Annie Besant; an account of his long friendship and association with Bhagavan Das; a list of AKC’s many publications in The Theosophist together with a book through the Theosophical Publishing House; an account of his communication with Fritz Kunz, a prominent member of the Theosophical Society and editor of Main Currents in Modern Thought. The reader will thereafter be able to judge accurately either the probity of Rama Coomaraswamy’s statement, or the converse based on the weight of historical evidence, and determine which is correct.

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### GET TO KNOW

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William Quinn, M.A., Ph.D. (University of Chicago), J.D. (Arizona State University), was formerly an editor of Quest magazine and the Theosophical Publishing House in Wheaton, Illinois. He joined the Theosophical Society in 1969, has lectured widely, and has published two books and many articles on the *philosophia perennis*.

# Julie Chajes

## Blavatsky's Vedanta: A Case Study in Cultural Entanglement

Exploring the discussions of Advaita Vedanta provided by Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) in *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) and acknowledging her Idealist, neo-Platonist and Orientalist influences, the objective of this paper will be to show that an over-emphasis on Europeans and their colonialist distortions in the history of early Theosophy can itself result in a misrepresentation. I will show, for example, that such a perspective runs the risk of obscuring the influence, on Blavatsky's Vedanta, of early Indian members of the Society such as Mohini Mohun Chatterjee (1858-1936) and Tallapragada Subba Row (1856-1890). It might also blind us to the place of the Sanskrit texts that lay behind the translations Blavatsky used, and I will speak in particular about the 1875 edition of the *Vedantasara* published by the Bengali scholar Jivananda Vidyasagara, among other things. Exploring the interconnections between individuals, ideas, and texts across international boundaries, I argue that the history of early Theosophy is best understood not solely as a form of Orientalist misunderstanding, but as representing a collaboration, and as a mutual entanglement of Indian and European actors and elements.

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### GET TO KNOW

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Julie Chajes (b. 1979) is an intellectual and cultural historian interested in the ways religion, science, and scholarship intersected in nineteenth-century Britain and America. She is particularly interested in the literatures of Spiritualism and occultism and what they reveal about the overlaps between heterodox religiosity and “mainstream” culture. Born in Brazil and raised in the UK, Dr. Chajes teaches at Tel Aviv University. Her articles have dealt with such topics as gender, Orientalism, emergent critical categories and the appropriation of scientific and medical theories in modern forms of religion. Her book, *Recycled Lives: A History of Reincarnation in Blavatsky's Theosophy* will be published by Oxford University Press in March 2019.

# Leslie Price

## Stainton Moses A Theosophist in spite of himself?

In 1875, Stainton Moses, the leading English Spiritualist began corresponding with Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky , who shortly formed the Theosophical Society in New York. At some point, Moses became a Fellow, but soon resigned. In his “Old Diary Leaves” Col. Olcott wrote warmly about their discussions and experiments, which had suggested a relationship between the powers of Moses and those of H.P.B.

Moses later became an important character in “The Mahatma Letters”, mostly received in India. And in “The Theosophist “ founded in 1879; the Spiritualist newspaper “LIGHT” (from 1881), and elsewhere, he and HPB debated for over a decade the strengths and weaknesses of their differing interpretations of the powers latent in man.

Using archival material kindly made available in 2019 by the Adyar Archives, and the papers of Moses preserved in London at the College of Psychic Studies (founded in 1884 by Stainton Moses as “The London Spiritualist Alliance”) an attempt is made to explain why Moses first joined, and then left the T.S., and to what extent he was part of “The Theosophical Enlightenment” postulated by Joscelyn Godwin in his 1994 study.

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## GET TO KNOW

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Leslie Price was the founder editor of the quarterly journal “Theosophical History” in 1985, and secretary of the theosophical history conferences held regularly in London since then. He was part of the group which re-examined the 1885 SPR report on Theosophical phenomena, culminating in Dr Vernon Harrison’s SPR journal paper of April 1986 which cleared Madame Blavatsky of forging the Mahatma Letters; his own lecture to the S.P.R. “Madame Blavatsky Unveiled?” was published by the Theosophical History Centre in 1986.

Leslie is librarian of the College of Psychic Studies in London, founded under the name London Spiritualist Alliance, by HPB’s friend, the medium Stainton Moses in 1884. Leslie was also the first editor of the on-line historical journal Psypioneer ( 2004-2016) N, now archived at: <http://www.iapsop.com/psypioneer/>

# Tim Rudbøg

## **Between Theosophy and Orientalism: debates about an 'Esoteric Buddhism' in the nineteenth century**

This paper discusses the origin and meaning of the notion “esoteric Buddhism” as it was used in the early Theosophical Society, especially in the works of Helena P. Blavatsky and Alfred P. Sinnett. Both Sinnett and Blavatsky primarily conceptualized Buddhism in relation to the notion of an esoteric doctrine, while scholars of Buddhism disregarded the existence of any esotericism in Buddhism. Based on a renewed historical analysis of the published debates about “esoteric Buddhism,” this paper argues that the differences between Orientalists and Theosophists should be placed in their specific “imaginings” of what Buddhism was at the time and in their reception of different Buddhist traditions.

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### GET TO KNOW

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Dr. Tim Rudbøg is associate professor at the University of Copenhagen and Director of *The Copenhagen Center for the Study of Theosophy and Esotericism*. Many of Rudbøg’s publications, including his PhD thesis from the University of Exeter have specifically focused on H. P. Blavatsky and Theosophy.

# Erica Georgiades

## Who was Agardi Metrovitch?

One of the most difficult problems in Theosophical history concerns the identity of Agardi Metrovitch, thought to be the *nom de guerre* of a *carbonari* and purportedly a famous opera singer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The problem is that researchers on Theosophical History have been unable to trace, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a famous opera singer named Agardi Metrovitch. This is because when engaged in revolutionary activities H.P.B.'s friend was known as Agardi Metrovitch, but when performing opera he was known under a different name. Focusing on the question "Who was Agardi Metrovitch," this paper explores his identity, whilst attempting to trace both his and Blavatsky's whereabouts in the 1860's and early 1870's. It also, briefly, explores the relationship between Blavatsky, Metrovitch and Yuri by analysing the passport of the latter. Finally, it outlines a brief biography of Metrovitch, suggesting that more research is necessary to unveil his *carbonari* activities and important connections during the 1860's and early 1870's.

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## GET TO KNOW

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Erica Georgiades PgD (Merit) Ancient Mediterranean Religions  
UWTSD; BA (Honours) in Philosophy and Psychological Studies  
(Open).

# Anna Kaltseva

## Bulgarian contribution to the Theosophy history

The report presents the specific Bulgarian contribution to the history of Theosophy through basic ideas of the Bogomil movement during the Middle Ages, the White Brotherhood in the 20th Century, and the reading of messages of Mahatmas in the crop circles by architect-writer and Ambassador of the Masters Mariana Vezneva.

The Bogomil movement is created as a response to dogmatism and the distortion of the teaching of Jesus Christ by the official church. This is also the main reason for the creation of the White Brotherhood movement in the first decades of the 20th century by Peter Dunov, named by his followers Beinsa Duno. The basic ideas of both movements relate to the need for Universal Brotherhood, love, tolerance, and understanding between people, mutual assistance and respect. And this is the basic idea of the Theosophical Society. Both the Bogomils and the White Brotherhood follow the Laws of Karma and Reincarnation as leading for human life and society.

Mariana Vezneva relies on messages in the crop circles through a telepathic link with the Shambhala Mahatmas, who have been the Creators of crop circles in the fields for the last 30 years. The figures provide information about the past, present, and future of the Fifth Race.

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## GET TO KNOW

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Anna Kaltseva is a third-year Ph.D. student in the Department of Philosophy and Political Science of Southwestern University “Neophyte Rilski” Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria.

The topic of her dissertation is “Theosophical Alternatives to a Risk Society”.

She has a master’s degree in Bulgarian Philology and Journalism.

She lives in Sofia, Bulgaria, and writes articles for a newspaper named “Weekend”.

# Spyros Petritakis

## **Dismembering George Frederic Watts's 'mesmeric dolls': Music and Theosophy in the painter's late works**

Since David Stewart's publication in 1993 on the impact of theosophical ideas on Frederic Watts's (1817–1904) oeuvre, little scholarly attention has been directed toward the affinity between these ideas and the evolution of the painter's late style. Indeed, Watt's late paintings, which evinced a certain tendency toward the dissolution of form through hazy and evanescent auras, have often been regarded to depict 'mesmeric dolls' (Arthur Symons). Drawing on archival research carried out at the Watts Gallery in Compton as well as on scholarly works discussing the historical presuppositions that enabled the cross-fertilization between theosophical or heterodox religious movements and painters, I would like to illuminate the way Watts wove together theosophical or other religious ideas —such as those expressed by the Greek priest and philosopher Theophilus Kairis— with scientific theories on sonorous and luminous vibrations. More specifically, I would like to contend that, through the novelist Emilie Barrington, Watts had been acquainted with the experiments carried out around 1890 by the Welsh soprano Margaret Watts-Hughes (1842-1907). Respectively, Frederic Watts often described the draperies of the ancient statues or fragments as “tremulous, palpitating beauty [...] music of form, light and colour”. However, Watts-Hughes's experiments and Watts's formal innovations were both underlined by specific religious convictions that held sound as a visual manifestation of God's act of weaving the cosmos and, on a deeper level, society as a field where art could offer alternatives to restrictive political attitudes and outworn practices.

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### GET TO KNOW

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Spyros Petritakis is presently finishing his PhD thesis in Art History at the University of Crete, in Greece. He obtained his Master Degree in History of Art from the same University, after graduating from the History and Archaeology Department of the University of Ioannina, in Greece. His studies were supported by several scholarships, which allowed him to attend courses in art history at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich and later in Berlin, where he currently carries out his research activity in the context of several projects and programmes related to German and East European Symbolism. He has also pursued music theory, piano and composition studies in Greece and later in Berlin. His research interests and publications include the convergence between painting and music as well as the reception and appropriation of colour-music theories by the theosophical and anthroposophical milieu.

# K. Paul Johnson

## In Search of Zanoni

Johnson's presentation, "In Search of Zanoni" concerns his research and writing about a literary mystery concerning an author who was thought to have died in 1894 but in fact lived until 1943.

Thomas Henry D'Alton, who wrote under the pseudonyms Zanoni and Thomas Henry Burgoyne, was thought to have died in 1894. Forensic handwriting analysis and historical evidence has established that D'Alton in fact lived until 1943. He took the name Norman Astley upon his marriage to New York author and socialite Genevieve Stebbins in 1892. Paul's presentation will present the literary detective work which he undertook to solve this mystery.

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## GET TO KNOW

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K. Paul Johnson is a retired librarian (MLS, University of Alabama) who has authored four books and contributed chapters to two collections. His first two books from SUNY Press were groundbreaking studies of the Theosophical Society's early years. His chapter in the current collection *Imagining the East* reports new research findings on the Bengali Renaissance as a background for the TS mission in India. As coeditor of *Letters to the Sage: The Selected Correspondence of Thomas Moore Johnson*, he helped to transcribe, annotate, and index letters from dozens of early TS members as well as members of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor. His presentation *In Search of Zanoni* reports on an investigation of the most mysterious of the sixty correspondents who appear in the two volume collection.

# LOCATION / THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY in GREECE

## Voukourestiou 25, Athens (First Floor)

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