

INTERNATIONAL
THEOSOPHICAL
HISTORY CONFERENCE 2022



THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT INNOVATIONS
IN ESOTERICISM AND SPIRITUALITY

5-7 OCTOBER 2022, NAARDEN, THE NETHERLANDS



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 Naarden, The Netherlands, at the International Theosophical Centre, founded in 1925, offering a unique forum for discussion and exchange of ideas on Theosophical history.

Keynote Speaker

Marco Pasi, PhD “Theosophy in Contemporary Art: Between Innovation and Continuity” (University of Amsterdam).

Conference Committee

- **Conference Chair: Prof. Tim Rudbøg** (Associate professor, Science of Religion, director of the Copenhagen Centre for the Study of Theosophy and Esotericism, University of Copenhagen)
- **Prof. James Santucci** (Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at California State University, Fullerton.)
- **Secretary: Erica Georgiades** (MRes Religious Experience Cand, University of Wales Trinity Saint David; PgD Merit Ancient Religions UWTSU; BA, Hons, Philosophy and Psychological Studies OU).
- **Bjarke Stanley Nielsen, PhD Candidate** (Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies of the University of Copenhagen).

With the support of the Blavatsky Trust.

COVER IMAGE:

1925 When Naarden was donated to the Theosophical Society.

It features Annie Besant and Wedgewood in front of the original small private chapel of Mary Van Eeghen, who donated the centre.

PROGRAMME / TIMETABLE

OCTOBER 05, WEDNESDAY

- 15:00** John L. Crow, PhD **The Invention of Occultism: The Creation and Shaping of an Esoteric Category**
15:30 Alistair Coombs, DPhil **Thresholds and their Dwellers**
16:00 TEA BREAK
16:30 Oleg Yarosh, PhD **Early Receptions of Sufism in the 'Theosophical Orientalism'**
17:00 DINNER BREAK

ONLINE LECTURES

- 19:30** K. Paul Johnson **Madame Blavatsky in Edgar Cayce's Library: Virginia Beach and the Birth of the New Age**
20:00 Ronnie Pontiac **Alexander Wilder, Blavatsky and American Platonism**

OCTOBER 06, THURSDAY

- 10:00** Kurt Leland **How Thought-Forms Came to Be: New Research on Text, Painters, and Paintings**
10:30 Paulina Gruffman, PhD Candidate **"Most Noble Out-pourings of the Soul": The Reception of Ancient Egypt in the Works of G.R.S. Mead**
11:00 TEA BREAK
11:30 Tim Rudbøgg, PhD **Helena P. Blavatsky's Attempt to Innovate Christian Spirituality**
12:00 Bjarke Stanley Nielsen, PhD Fellow **Innovating Theosophical History**
13:00 LUNCH BREAK
15:00 Marco Pasi, PhD **Theosophy in Contemporary Art: Between Innovation and Continuity**
16:00 TEA BREAK
16:30 Arend Heijbroek **The Early history of ITC Naarden**
17:00 DINNER BREAK

ONLINE LECTURES

- 19:30** Brett Forray **The Center Will Not Hold: Division Defined as Innovation Within the Theosophical Society**
20:00 Anna Kaltseva, PhD Candidate **Theosophical Alternatives to the Risk Society**
20:30 Dewald Bester, PhD **Theosophy and Academia: An Historical Moment**

OCTOBER 07, FRIDAY

- 10:00** Shawn Higgins, MTS **The Mathematician: An Analysis of Henry Bedinger Mitchell's Talks on Religion**
10:30 Alexandra Nagel, PhD **Roelf Takens (1862–1930) aka C. Aq. Libra Veterinarian, Dentist, Writer, Esoteric Astrologist**
11:00 Mriganka Mukhopadhyay, PhD Candidate **From Ceylon to Tibet via Calcutta and Darjeeling: Locating the Theosophical Society's Buddhist Networks in Bengal**
11:30 Karolina Maria Hess, PhD **For Body and Spirit: Theosophical Summer Camps in Poland**

15:00

OCTOBER 05
WEDNESDAY

The Invention of Occultism: The Creation and Shaping of an Esoteric Category

John L. Crow, PhD

The modern category of occultism, as used by scholars of Western Esotericism and occultists alike, was invented and defined by H.P. Blavatsky and early members of the Theosophical Society beginning July 1875. While Blavatsky did not introduce the word “occultism” into English, and there were precursors, such as the French *l’occultisme*, it was Blavatsky and her colleagues that indelibly linked existing Western esoteric practices and ideas, such as the occult sciences, kabbalah, and Rosicrucianism, to Eastern spiritual traditions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, to the notion of hidden or unseen beings influencing the spiritual development of humanity, and to occultism’s compatibility with science. These core characteristics persist even as the category of occultism continues to expand and adapt. This paper tracks the term “occultism” in English, following its first uses, subsequent redefinitions, expansion to include new domains, and concludes by demonstrating that the greatest redefinition and categorical expansion of occultism since Blavatsky occurred in the 1980s by the United States Library of Congress.

bio **John L. Crow, PhD**, is a scholar of Religion at Florida State University, U.S.A. He focuses on the exchange of esoteric ideas and traditions between East and West. He is currently completing a co-authored biography on Allan Bennett, Bhikkhu Ananda Metteyya, a Theosophist who took Buddhist ordination in Burma in 1901 and led a Buddhist mission to London in 1908.

Thresholds and their Dwellers

Alistair Coombs, DPhil

The 'Dweller on the Threshold' became an important pan-theosophical concept articulated in the ideas of H.P. Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, Alice Bailey, Dion Fortune and other esoteric-inspired authors and treated as serious occult lore of deep antiquity. The term first emerged in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's romantic novel *Zanoni* (1842) and entered theosophy via the works of Blavatsky from that source. Various theosophical and esoteric authors have painted the Dweller in various and contrasting hues, from fearsome apparition to universal law of spiritual evolution, following their own agendas which will be evaluated. Special emphasis will be given to spiritualist and inter-cultural analogues of "dwellers" and "thresholds" as sources of Lytton's fictional entity and its theosophical manifestation.

bio

Alistair Coombs is a Doctor of Philosophy currently specializing in aspects of ancient and prehistoric religious movements.

16:30

OCTOBER 05
WEDNESDAY

Early Receptions of Sufism in the 'Theosophical Orientalism'

Oleg Yarosh, PhD

Proposed paper is focused on the early receptions of Sufism in the 'Theosophical Orientalism' (TO) that was an important current in the intellectual history of the 20th century. Theosophical visions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions significantly contributed towards development of the western 'occulture' and contextualization of eastern religious traditions in the West. Karl Baier regards this development as a complex reciprocal process of transculturation within the Theosophical Society (TS) itself.

TO that contributed to the invention of 'Universal Wisdom-Religion' was informed by the essentialist readings of the Eastern religious traditions underlining distinctions between their exoteric and the esoteric aspects that entail internal unity of religions. Christopher Partridge argues that Blavatsky perceived Eastern religious through the prism of pre-constructed occult narrative adopting it to her eclectic occult needs.

Mark Sedgwick claims that Sufism was basically excluded from the theosophical narratives, however some individuals initially connected to theosophy like Ivan Aguéli and Carl Henrik Bjerregard later became engaged with Sufism. Furthermore, TS actively promoted Universal Sufism of Hazrat Inayat Khan in the West as well as in the Russian Empire at turn of the 20th century. On the other hand, TS made significant impact on the revival of religious traditions in South Asia including Sufism. In particular, TS popularized Sufi doctrines through works of some Indian scholars of Sufism who collaborated with TS.

bio

Oleg Yarosh, PhD is associate professor, AUFF-Ukraine research fellow, Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies and Department of the Study of Religion, School of Culture and Society at Aarhus University, Denmark, and previously Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. He has published extensively on Islam and Sufism in the West.

Madame Blavatsky in Edgar Cayce's Library: Virginia Beach and the Birth of the New Age

K. Paul Johnson

Edgar Cayce in Context (1998) remains the only academically published study of the Virginia Beach "sleeping prophet" (1877-1945) whose trance discourses influenced the growth of the New Age movement. Paul's encounter with a large collection of Theosophical books at the Association for Research and Enlightenment Library, opened in 1975, led to his growing interest in Blavatsky and the influence of her writings on those of later twentieth century authors. One focus of this talk, not discussed in the book, is the intricate web of family connections between his Virginia Beach cousins and the Cayces. This presentation will open with a view of Cayce seen by friends, neighbors, and relatives in a small community, and close with a discussion of the influence of Theosophical literature on the 14,000+ "readings" now preserved in Virginia Beach.

ONLINE

bio **K. Paul Johnson** is author of three books in the SUNY Press Western Esoteric Traditions series. A retired public library director, he was most recently co-editor of the Letters to the Sage two volume correspondence of Thomas Moore Johnson, and editor of the Sarah Stanley Grimke Collected Works.

19:30

OCTOBER 05
WEDNESDAY

20:00

OCTOBER 05
WEDNESDAY

Alexander Wilder, Blavatsky and American Platonism

Ronnie Pontiac

Alexander Wilder, an all but forgotten giant of American metaphysics and holistic medicine, was also a political hero who helped break the political machine of Boss Tweed in New York City. *Letters of the Sage* vol. 2 contains never before available letters by Wilder which include correspondence from him that sheds light on his relationship with Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, his profound influence on her Neoplatonic views, his editing of *Isis Unveiled*, and how and why the book received that title when Blavatsky had planned to name it *A Skeleton Key to the Mysteries*. We also ponder the unlikely popularity of prairie Platonism, and *The Platonist*, a newspaper devoted to Platonism published in St. Louis around the time of the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral.

ONLINE

bio Ronnie Pontiac is author of *American Metaphysical Religion: Esoteric and Mystical Traditions of the New World* (Inner Traditions, 2023), and author of the biographical introduction to *Letters to the Sage: Selected Correspondence of Thomas Moore Johnson. Volume Two: Alexander Wilder, the Platonist. History of the Adepts* (CreateSpace, 2018). For seven years in the 1980s he was mentored by Manly Palmer Hall, becoming his research assistant and designated substitute lecturer.

Gary Lachman: “In *American Metaphysical Religion*, Ronnie Pontiac does his readers an inestimable service, surveying and summarising an immense amount of academic material that would be too expensive and dull for them to take on themselves.

How *Thought-Forms* Came to Be: New Research on Text, Painters, and Paintings

Kurt Leland

Annie Besant's and Charles Webster Leadbeater's 1905 book *Thought-Forms* is widely recognized by art historians as a seminal influence on the development of early twentieth-century modernism. Yet the conditions under which the book was produced have never been successfully traced, including the identities of two of the three painters who contributed to it. The diaries of Basil Hodgson Smith (1887–1929), one of Leadbeater's traveling companions during his 1902 to 1905 tour of North America, provide a day-by-day account of the production of the book's text and images. This paper unfolds that story, supplying provenance and context for the diaries and revealing that the "Miss Macfarlane" mentioned in the foreword was Eugenia Hargous Macfarlane (1868–1921), an American artist trained in Europe and a frequent exhibitor in the Society of French Artists' biennial Salons (1894–1900), who was responsible for the frontispiece and music-form illustrations; and that "Mr. Prince" was Thomas Tertius Prime (1856–1929; *Prince* was a misprint), the scion of a British electroplating company, who was responsible for most of the non-musical images. It also discusses the "clairvoyant investigations" from which the music-forms were developed.

bio

Kurt Leland is an international lecturer for the Theosophical Society (Adyar). He is the author of *Rainbow Body: A History of the Western Chakra System from Blavatsky to Brennan* (2016). Last year, his article "'Friendly to All Beings': Annie Besant as Ethicist" appeared in the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*.

10:30

OCTOBER 06
THURSDAY

“Most Noble Out-pourings of the Soul”: The Reception of Ancient Egypt in the Works of G.R.S. Mead

Paulina Gruffman, PhD Candidate

Ancient Egypt played an important but perhaps understated role in early Theosophy, with frequent references to Egyptian Cabala in Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and George Henry Felt’s early papers. Significantly, Blavatsky planned for the early Theosophical Society (TS) to be “composed of learned occultists and cabbalists, of *philosophes hermétiques* of the nineteenth century, and of antiquaries and Egyptologists generally ... following literally the instructions of the old Cabalas, both Jewish and Egyptian (Hanegraaff 2021:37). While TS clearly made a shift in favor of Indian philosophy and religiosity in the 1880s, (the imagined) ancient Egypt remained an important source for some later Theosophists. G.R.S. Mead, who regarded much of the Western esoteric tradition, including astrology and the hermetic corpus to originate there, is one such Theosophist. This paper aims to give an overview of the theme of ancient Egypt in the early as well as latter Theosophical Society. Additionally, I will analyze some of the leading theoretical concepts that have been used to locate and understand this theme in Theosophy, including Hornung’s Egyptosophy (2001), Lehrich’s magical Ægypt (2007), and Magus’ Christian Egyptosophy (2021). Lastly, I will briefly consider the reception of Mead’s Egypt in C.G. Jung’s psychoanalysis and spirituality.

bio

Paulina Gruffman is a PhD student at Lund University, focusing on the role of ancient Egypt in the works of G.R.S Mead as well as the reception of his writings in C.G. Jung’s psychoanalytic theories and spirituality.

Helena P. Blavatsky's Attempt to Innovate Christian Spirituality

Tim Rudbøg, PhD

Blavatsky is well known as a modern spiritual innovator, but most often in connection with her promotion of Buddhist and Hindu traditions. This paper aims to show how Blavatsky also was highly interested in Christianity and created a platform for a new emerging esoteric Christianity. The entire second volume of *Isis Unveiled* (1877) was a foundational stone in deconstructing and reconstructing Christianity in light of the growing critical scholarship of the day and the comparative study of mythology. One primary aim was to distinguish Jesus from the Christian church(s) in order to show that his true nature and his secret teachings had been distorted. Blavatsky believed that it in fact was the distorted doctrines of church-Christianity that now were easy targets for the new critical scholarship, whereas the true nature of Jesus' teachings could withstand the critique. The distinction between exoteric and esoteric became a key hermeneutic tool for Blavatsky to deconstruct the distorted elements and save what she considered to be the true Christian spiritual aspirations. Another key would be to contextualize Christian teachings in alignment with "gnostic" material available at the time. Several others would continue in these footsteps, such as G.R.S. Mead and James M. Pryse.

bio

Dr. Rudbøg is Associate Professor and director of the Copenhagen Centre for the Study of Theosophy and Esotericism at the University of Copenhagen. Rudbøg has published widely in the field of esotericism and the history of religions, particularly on Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and The Theosophical Movement. His more recent co-edited volumes include "Innovation in the Study of Esotericism from the Renaissance to the Present" (2021, Palgrave) and "Imagining the East: The Early Theosophical Society" (2020, Oxford).

11:30

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THURSDAY

12:00

OCTOBER 06
THURSDAY

Innovating Theosophical History

Bjarke Stanley Nielsen, PhD Fellow

In the 19th century, the German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) invented the historical empirical method focusing on *Quellenkritik* (the critical analysis of sources). However, the 19th century was rich in innovations in historical thinking, which used similar concepts and approached similar historical questions. Amongst the less explored in the context of the emerging mainstream historiographical tradition, one can find Blavatsky's significant interpretation of history as a mixture of Indian and European ideas of history.

This paper argues that Blavatsky's historical thinking can be understood in the context of 19th century European historical scholarship and her Indian travels. Like her contemporary Ranke, she discussed "universal history" and theorized about the distinction between particular and universal historical units. However, this paper also argues that by introducing Indian ideas – for example, karma as a form of historical agency – Blavatsky's historical thinking was quite different from that of Ranke. Blavatsky's historical ideas were therefore an original invention made in the broad context of Indian ideas of history and the historical scholarship emerging in Europe. An invention in which Indian ideas played a key role but also an invention that challenged the framework in which it was conceived.

bio

Bjarke Stanley Nielsen is a PhD-fellow at the University of Copenhagen, with an MA in history. His research project aims to investigate Theosophy from a global historical perspective, with an emphasis on global ideas and related historiographical concepts.

Theosophy in Contemporary Art: Between Innovation and Continuity

Marco Pasi, PhD

A considerable amount of research has been devoted to the relationship between Theosophy, or more generally esotericism, and modern art, especially in the first half of the 20th century. The role that Theosophical ideas, images and experiences are still playing today in contemporary art has been on the other hand much less studied. In this lecture, I would like to compare the role of esotericism, and more particularly Theosophy, in art at the turn of the 20th century and at the turn of the 21st century. Such a comparison may show how this role has taken on different forms and functions in different contexts, which, to a large extent, depends on the changing statuses of both art and esotericism in contemporary societies. For many artists in the early 20th-century Theosophy acted as a very powerful stimulus to develop innovative artistic forms, such as abstraction. This seems to be less the case in contemporary art. Contemporary artists who make reference to Theosophy or other forms of alternative spirituality are rather inscribing themselves into what has become a solid, recognised tradition of artistic expression, in which formal innovation seems to be more difficult to achieve. While this confirms the relevance of esoteric ideas for understanding certain aspects of modern and contemporary art, it also points to significant changes, through which radical innovation turns into a desire for continuity.

bio **Marco Pasi** is Associate Professor (UHD) in History of Hermetic philosophy and related currents. He holds a Laurea degree in Philosophy from the University of Milan, and a DEA and a PhD in Religious studies from the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Sorbonne, Paris). He has focused his research mainly on the relationship between modern esotericism and politics, modern esotericism and art, the history of the idea of magic, and on methodological issues related to the study of western esotericism. He is the editor in chief of the *Aries Book Series* (Brill), founding member of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE). He has been co-chair of the Western Esotericism Group at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the General Secretary of the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR).

16:30

The Early history of ITC Naarden

Arend Heijbroek

Round 1925 there was a lot of fire in the TS, including ITC Naarden. What have we learned from that? What is the connection with today? A presentation based on old pictures, including not earlier disclosed from the private photo album of Leadbeater.

OCTOBER 06
THURSDAY



Naarden, 1938.

The picture shows the placing of part of the ashes of Annie Besant in the Garden of Remembrance.

bio

Arend Heijbroek is currently chairman of the ITC. He was General Secretary of the Dutch section for 6 years.

The Center Will Not Hold: Division Defined As Innovation Within the Theosophical Society

Brett Forray

Tensions between the study and practice of Eastern and Western esoteric and occult knowledge within the Theosophical Society has existed since the early 1880s; for example, when Anna Kingsford sought to emphasize a Christian Hermeticism rather than focus on A.P. Sinnett's Esoteric Buddhism within the London Lodge. This paper will explore how this tension also contributed to the American Section declaring their "autonomy" from the Theosophical Society's Indian International Headquarters in 1895. This paper does not discuss techniques Theosophists used to explore Eastern and Western esoteric knowledge, but rather will provide examples of the differing perceptions they held about Eastern and Western esoteric knowledge and approaches to that knowledge. These perceptions played a role in the American Section's separation. After a brief overview of the incidents sparking the American Section to declare their separation, areas to be discussed as factors motivating this division will include: an overview of the American Section's "Historical Sketch," which became the document rationalizing their declaration of "autonomy" and giving birth to a renewed "Theosophical Movement;" William Q. Judge's awareness of the conflict between H.P. Blavatsky and H.S. Olcott in the later 1880s culminating in Blavatsky becoming the President of the European Section; and finally we will discuss Judge's goal for the separation that was meant to bring to fruition what he considered to be Blavatsky's true mission for the Society — the development of a Western style of occultism.

ONLINE

bio Brett Forray is an independent researcher of Theosophical history. A student of Theosophy and its history since the mid-1980s, he has contributed articles to the journal *Theosophical History*. He is the author of *Troubled Emissaries: How H.P. Blavatsky's Successors Transformed the Theosophical Society from 1891-1896*. Turlock: Alexandria West, 2016. Brett is also a founding board member of *Alexandria West*, a 501(c)(3) non-profit in California dedicated to the exploration and application of the *Philosophia Perennis* as it appears in its many forms, which also maintains an extensive library and archives.

19:30

OCTOBER 06
THURSDAY

20:00

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THURSDAY

Theosophical Alternatives to the Risk Society

Anna Kaltseva, PhD Candidate

This presentation states in the most abbreviated form the main statements and conclusions of the author's defended dissertation. This justifies the approach of simply marking the theses of the exposition without expounding them in detail. They are based on the socio-philosophical aspects of Theosophy presented in Helena Blavatsky's Opus magnum work *The Secret Doctrine* and her *Key to Theosophy*, as well as the concept of the Risk Society, developed by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck.

ONLINE

bio Anna Kaltseva is a PhD student in the Department of Philosophy and Political Science of Southwestern University Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. The topic of her dissertation is "Theosophical Alternatives to a Risk Society". She has a master degree in Bulgarian Philology and Journalism. She lives in Sofia, Bulgaria, and writes articles for a newspaper named "Weekend".

Theosophy and Academia: An Historical Moment

Dewald Bester, PhD

I believe the Theosophical Society is facing a challenge from Academia that it has not fully understood and has failed to engage with. I try to capture this historical moment from a broad perspective. The Theosophical Society faces, and has been facing, an existential threat to its project as a meaningful enterprise along the lines of its founding impulse. I work here to uncover some of the Academically inspired challenges facing the Society in this arena in the hope that it will spur conscious engagement among those who feel so moved. I illustrate my position by presenting brief, specific examples drawn from Theosophical and Academic literature, including Alexandre Koyré, Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm, and Urs App, among others. I conclude with some possible strategies the Theosophical Society will present in response to this challenge.

ONLINE

20:30

OCTOBER 06
THURSDAY

bio

Dewald Bester is a member of the Theosophical Society, both Adyar and Pasadena, having joined in the early 1990's. He has a Phd in Religious Studies from the University of Cape Town, focusing on Theosophy as an enterprise in Comparative Religion. Currently, he is a Lodge President in Cape Town.

10:00

OCTOBER 07
FRIDAY

The Mathematician: An Analysis of Henry Bedinger Mitchell's *Talks on Religion*

Shawn Higgins, MTS

During the academic year on 1906/1907, in New York's Greenwich Village, Henry Bedinger Mitchell, a young math professor at Columbia University, and President of the New York Branch of the Theosophical Society (Griscom-Hargrove,) hosted a monthly salon on the topics of science, philosophy, and religion, in his rooms in the *Benedick Hotel*.

The fifteen participants of this forum, an alloy of Theosophists, and fellow professors from Columbia, which "presented unusual contrasts," were: Henry Bedinger Mitchell (Mathematician,) James Harvey Robinson (Historian,) Frederick J. E. Woodbridge (Philosopher,) Henry S. Crampton (Zoologist,) Charles Johnston (Author,) Percy S. Grant (Clergyman,) Clement A. Griscom, Jr. (Editor,) Gary N. Calkins, (Biologist,) William Pepperell Montague (Social Philosopher,) John F.B. Mitchell (Banker,) John Dewey (Pragmatist,) Livingston Farrand (Anthropologist,) Dickinson S. Miller (Oxonian,) Harold Chapman Brown (Logician,) and Max Eastman (Youth.)

The transcript of these talks, as published in the *Theosophical Quarterly*, and later in *Talks on Religion*, preserved the anonymity of the participants. Using inter-textual analysis, and media "speleology," it is the aim of this paper to "unveil" the true identities of these participants, and subsequently add to the corpus of their philosophies, as recorded elsewhere.

bio

Shawn Higgins (MTS, Harvard Divinity, '18) is a historian based in New York. His current project is a multi-volume, narrative non-fiction book series chronicling the first century of the American Theosophical Movement as told from the perspective of the Griscom-Hargrove Theosophical Society.

Roelf Takens (1862–1930) aka C. Aq. Libra Veterinarian, Dentist, Writer, Esoteric Astrologist

Alexandra Nagel, PhD

In 1976 two publishing companies independently took *Astrology, Its Techniques and Ethics* (1914) off the shelf, reissued it, and presented it to the public as a classic. Praised as an ‘important occult work ... to those interested in the role of the stars in man’s spiritual evolution’, it has remained in print ever since. However, about the author, Roelf Takens (1862–1930), Dutch, penname C. Aq. Libra, not much is known. Hence, the book has lost the connection to its roots in time and place.

In this paper Takens’ whereabouts are unraveled. It will be shown that he traveled widely (the Dutch East Indies, Europe, the US), and was in contact with men like François Charles Barlet (1838–1921) and Émile Coué (1857–1926). Taken’s astrology was highly influenced by theosophy. Compared to the astrologists Alan Leo (1860–1917) and Adolph E. Thierens (1875–1941), Takens, a trained veterinarian and dentist, was able to merge the celestial bodies (macrocosm) with the human body (microcosm) in a much more profound and holistic manner. This is precisely why *Astrology, Its Techniques and Ethics* became a classic.

10:30

OCTOBER 07
FRIDAY

bio **Alexandra Nagel** studied History of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam and finished in 2020 her PhD at Leiden University on the psychochirologist (hand-reader) Julius Spier. She is currently affiliated with the Allard Pierson, care taker of the collections of the University of Amsterdam.

11:00

OCTOBER 07
FRIDAY

From Ceylon to Tibet via Calcutta and Darjeeling: Locating the Theosophical Society's Buddhist Networks in Bengal

Mriganka Mukhopadhyay, PhD Candidate

This paper aims to discuss the hitherto unknown networks between the Theosophical Society and Buddhism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal. The talk will be based on one of the chapters of my PhD dissertation where I have studied the Theosophical Society's transnational connections to the different Buddhist groups, individuals, and some of the South Asian and European sympathisers of Buddhism in the context of the Theosophical movement in Bengal. Here, investigations will be made on the groups such as the Mahabodhi Society, the Bengal Buddhist Association and the individuals such as Sarat Chandra Das, Neel Comal Mukherjee, Kripasaran Mahastavir, and Beni Madhab Barua whose activities collectively gave rise to a Bengali chapter in the transnational networks between Theosophy and Buddhism. Besides, lights will be shed on eminent individuals such as Anagarika Dharmapala and Alexandra David-Neél and their presence in Bengal thus creating common connections between Bengal, Ceylon, and Tibet. The talk will also highlight the significance of the town of Darjeeling in the global history of occultism and will try to understand why this place was so important for the Theosophists.

bio

Mr **Mriganka Mukhopadhyay** M.A., M.Phil., is a PhD candidate at the HHP Centre, University of Amsterdam. He is interested in the history of esotericism in South Asia and its global intersections. He is currently working on his PhD dissertation titled *The Occult World of Bengal: Theosophy in Colonial South Asia and its Global Entanglements*. Mukhopadhyay is one of the co-founders of OSAN (Occult South Asia Network), the elected Student Representative and ex-officio Board Member at the ESSWE, and the Assistant Academic Director of the summer school *Arcane Worlds: New Frontiers in the Study of Esotericism* at the University of Amsterdam.

For Body and Spirit: Theosophical Summer Camps in Poland

Karolina Maria Hess, PhD

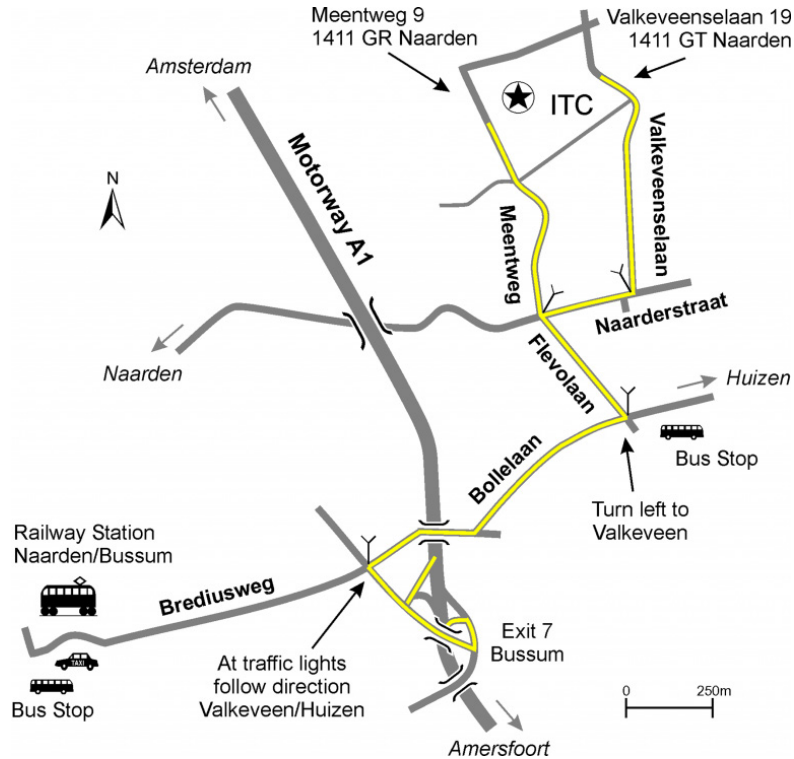
In interwar Poland there were several centres associated with esoteric circles, which served as a meeting place for their members, but also for alternative therapies or summer recreation for people who belonged to various initiatory structures. One of them was the manor house in Mężenin on the Bug River, where summer camps were organized for entire families, and where the meditations of Theosophists were intertwined with the ritual work of members of the Le Droit Humain – Order of International Co-Freemasonry. Members of the Order of the Star in the East and priests of the Liberal Catholic Church dealt with organizational matters. Their meeting point was Theosophy, which was not only at the centre of the activities of the Polish Theosophical Society, but also structured the practices of the LDH in the 1920s. The participants of the meetings were, among others General Michał Tokarzewski-Karaszewicz or the well-known pedagogue Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldszmit). On the basis of extensive archival research, as well as interviews with the descendants of the participants of these meetings, I have created a colourful reconstruction of those summer activities along with an overview of the profiles of the participants, which is supplemented by rich photographic material. Based on the example of the summer camps, I will introduce the health-related issues that were in the center of Theosophical thought in Poland in five decades - focusing on what, when and why was innovative or seen as such.

bio

Karolina Maria Hess, PhD - Assistant Professor in Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations at the Jagiellonian University, Poland, researcher in Western esotericism, alternative spirituality, and new religious movements. Her 1st PhD thesis was devoted to reconstructing the history and ideas of Polish Theosophical Society and related organizations.

11:30

OCTOBER 07
FRIDAY



ADDRESS: Besant Hall, International Theosophical Centre, Meentweg 9, 1411 GR Naarden, The Netherlands

The ITC is located approx. 20 km east of Amsterdam, close to the old, fortified city of Naarden.

ARRIVE BY PLANE: Fly into Schiphol airport, Amsterdam. The railway station is under the airport. Buy a ticket to station Naarden/Bussum.

ARRIVE BY TRAIN: Buy ticket to station Naarden/Bussum. Go by regular taxi to ITC (see plan to the right) or by bus (Regioliner 100. From bus stop Flevolaan it is a 20 minutes' walk. See plan to the right).

ARRIVE BY CAR: Take exit Bussum/Naarden off Motor way A1 between Amsterdam and Amersfoort. Then follow description of the plan.

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