



**THE
RECEPTION OF EGYPT
AND THE ANCIENTS**

in Theosophy and Related Esoteric Currents

ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT

13–14.10.2023

INTERNATIONAL THEOSOPHICAL
HISTORY CONFERENCE



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

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This year, the ITHCon will be hosted in Alexandria Egypt, offering a unique forum for discussion and exchange of ideas on Theosophical history.

Keynote Speakers

- **Henrik Bogdan** “The Lure and Romance of Ancient Egypt: John Yarker, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, and the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Freemasonry” (Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Gothenburg).
- **Eleanor Dobson** (Online lecture) “Egyptians on Mars: Science, Science Fiction and the Theosophical Imagination at the *Fin de Siècle*” (Associate Professor in Nineteenth-Century Literature at the University of Birmingham).

Conference Committee

- **Conference Chair: Prof. Tim Rudbøg** (Associate professor, Study of Religions, 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.)
- **Paulina Gruffman, PhD candidate** (History of Religions, Lund University, Sweden).
- **Erica Georgiades** (MRes Religious Experience Cand, University of Wales Trinity Saint David; PgD Merit Ancient Religions UWTSO; BA, Hons, Philosophy and Psychological Studies OU).

Brochure Design by George Georgiades

With the support of the Blavatsky Trust.

PRESENTATIONS

• The Timetable will be released in September.

■ BLAVATSKY & ANCIENT EGYPT

Bogdan, Henrik	(Keynote) The Lure and Romance of Ancient Egypt: John Yarker, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, and the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Freemasonry.
Georgiades, Erica	Thutmose III in the Country of Senzar.
Nielsen, Bjarke Stanley	Blavatsky and Egypt's Place in Universal History.
Rudbøg, Tim	'The Triple-Crocodile of Egypt': On Initiation and the Real Purpose of the Pyramids in the Theosophical Current.

■ THEOSOPHY, ESOTERIC EGYPTOLOGY & CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Bezerita, Adina	Atlantis. Place or Myth?
Coutard-Evangelista, Mayssa	Anna Kingsford and Lady Caithness Hermetic Reading of Genesis: The Fall, from Eve to Marie, or the Story of the Soul.
Gruffman, Paulina	Victorian Egyptology and Hermetic Gnosis in the Works of G.R.S. Mead.
Kousoulis, Panagiotis	Who Seth is this? The Sethian Identity of the Esoteric Current and its Egyptological Perplexed Antecedent.
Winterberg, Alberto Alfredo	After the Pharaohs: Late Ancient Egyptian Heterodox Christianity's and Coptic Studies' impact on the 19th century's Neo-Gnostic Movement.

■ THE RECEPTION OF ANCIENT EGYPT IN LITERATURE & THE ARTS

Dobson, Eleanor	(Keynote-Online) Egyptians on Mars: Science, Science Fiction and the Theosophical Imagination at the <i>Fin de Siècle</i> .
Kausch, Jack	Aretalogy.
Magus, Simon	Rider Haggard and the Imperial Occult: Christian Egyptosophy, Romanticism, and Theosophy.
Steiner, Pål	The Egyptian Mysteries of Marta Steinsvik.

■ GENDER, EMBODIMENT AND RITUAL IN THEOSOPHY & RELATED ESOTERIC CURRENTS

Adamo, Ayesha	Egypt is a Woman: Florence Farr's Imagined Egypt Embodied within the New Woman.
Cantú, Keith Edward	Solar Sphinx on the Human Spirit: Esoteric Embodiment in the Writings of T. Subba Rao.
Cejvan, Olivia	The Papyrus of Ani in Theosophy and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.
White, Manon Hedenborg	Be thou Hadit, My Secret Centre: Gender and Egyptosophy in Aleister Crowley's Thelema.
Prieto, Maria	The Embodied Architectures of Egyptian Wisdom: Exploring the Aesthetic, Theosophical, and Esoteric Elements in Alexandria and the Alexandrian Library.

■ HERMETICISM, THE ANCIENT WORLD & THEOSOPHY

Bull, Christian	The Secret Books of the Egyptian Hermes.
Horowitz, Mitch	Hermeticism in Early Theosophy and the Contemporary Search.
Nasser, Mervat	Hermopolis and the Geo-hermetic World: Itineraries of the Min.
Valentini, Luca	Her-Bak: Hermetic Egypt in the works of Isha and Schwaller de Lubicz.

■ THE RECEPTION OF EGYPT IN THEOSOPHY & MODERN ESOTERIC CURRENTS

Fraikin, Nathan	Jung's Blame of the Theosophical Reception of the Ancient Wisdom: Towards a Critical Lecture of this Criticism.
French, Aaron	'Attaching to Egyptian Freemasonry': Rudolf Steiner, Theosophy, and the Egyptian Mysteries.
Kiseliova-El Marassy, Ina	"On the Perennialist reception of Ancient Egypt in Lithuania".



BLAVATSKY & ANCIENT EGYPT

KEYNOTE

The Lure and Romance of Ancient Egypt: John Yarker, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, and the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Freemasonry

On 24 November 1877 the British freemason and occultist John Yarker (1833-1913) issued an honorary diploma or certificate to Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1981), for the Rite of Adoption of the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Freemasonry. The certificate triggered a certain amount of controversy among freemasons, which caused Blavatsky to print a statement about her stance on Freemasonry in *The Franklin Register*, on 8 February 1878, in which she in no uncertain terms stated that she did not consider herself a *Western* Freemason. The Ancient and Primitive Rite had grown out of two so-called Egyptian rites of Freemasonry, the *Rite of Memphis* and the *Rite of Misraïm*, both of which appeared at the beginning of the 19th century, and which reflected the rampant egyptosophy that followed in the wake of Napoleon's campaign in Egypt 1798-1801. Egyptian Freemasonry can be described as a particular type of High Degree Freemasonry that places the origins of Freemasonry in ancient Egypt and that draws on Egyptian themes, rather than on myths associated with the building of Solomon's Temple or the Knight Templars. In this keynote lecture, the rituals of the Ancient and Primitive Rite will be discussed. More specifically, the Egyptian themes contained in the rituals will be analyzed in the light of 19th-century esotericism.

Henrik Bogdan

bio

Henrik Bogdan, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Gothenburg. His main areas of research are Western esotericism, New Religious Movements and Freemasonry. He is the author of *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (SUNY Press 2007) and editor of *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism* (Oxford University Press 2012), *Occultism in a Global Perspective* (Acumen/Routledge 2013), *Sexuality and New Religious Movements* (Palgrave MacMillan 2014), *Handbook of Freemasonry* (Brill 2014), and *Western Esotericism in Scandinavia* (Brill 2016), etc. Bogdan is the editor of the Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism Book Series, co-editor of the Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities Book Series, and Secretary of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE).

Thutmose III in the Country of Senzar

According to Helena Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence* is based on excerpts from *The Book of the Golden Precepts*, and *The Secret Doctrine* is based on *The Book of Dzyan*, both of which belong to the same series and were originally written in Senzar, a mysterious hieratic language, supposedly unknown to scholars and general public. Blavatsky claims she learned Senzar during her occult training. Scholars have debated the origin of the word Senzar. Some suggest that it is a phonetic or figurative language, or perhaps even a hermeneutic key to deciphering secret wisdoms. Regardless of their interpretations, however, these studies offer no historical context for the word “Senzar.” This paper endeavors to bridge the aforementioned hiatus by tracing Senzar in the literature on the Middle Kingdom, thereby making a significant contribution to the comprehension of the historical and cultural milieu in which one of the fundamental concepts in Blavatsky’s writings is anchored.

Erica Georgiades

bio

Erica Georgiades is a MRes Religious Experience Cand at the UWTSU; Post Graduate Degree (Merit) Merit in Ancient Mediterranean Religions UWTSU; BA (Hons) Philosophy and Psychological Studies OU.

Bjarke Stanley Nielsen

bio

Bjarke Stanley Nielsen is a historian who just turned in his PhD-thesis at the University of Copenhagen. His research investigates Theosophy from global historical perspectives, with an emphasis on global ideas and related historiographical concepts.

Blavatsky and Egypt’s Place in Universal History

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky’s (1831-1891) writings include many discussions of Egypt’s history, culture, and religions, but sources about the only time she supposedly visited the country remain scarce. Our primary source for understanding her knowledge of Egypt is therefore the authors she referenced when discussing Egypt. One of these was ‘Baron von Bunsen’ (1791—1860), a German philologist and diplomat, who published on religious and theological history in the 19th century. This paper discusses Blavatsky’s use of Bunsen’s work *Egypt’s Place in Universal History: An Historical Investigation in Five Books* (1848-67), which she referred to across her major works and in several articles, citing and referencing concrete places in the text. Central to this discussion are the questions; how Blavatsky’s use of Bunsen can be understood, and did she read him at all? While William Coleman (1843-1909) argued that Blavatsky plagiarized Bunsen, her many references to him and her knowledge of the themes he treated, such as universal history and the idea of historical cycles, provide ground for questioning his critique. This might make Blavatsky’s reading of Bunsen’s work appear in a different light, but does it also help understand how she acquired knowledge of Egypt?

Tim Rudbøg, PhD is Associate Professor and Director of the Copenhagen Centre for the Study of Theosophy and Esotericism at the University of Copenhagen. Rudbøg has published on an array of topics, but he has primarily focused on esotericism and The Theosophical current. Recent publications include the handbook on the *Academic Study of Western esotericism: Foundational Theories and Methods* (2022) and the co-edited volumes *Imagining the East: The Early Theosophical Society* (2020) and *Innovation in Esotericism from the Renaissance to the Present* (2021).

‘The Triple-Crocodile of Egypt’: On Initiation and the Real Purpose of the Pyramids in the Theosophical Current

Throughout her life, Helena P. Blavatsky emphasized that the real purpose of the pyramids was to serve as facilitators of initiation into the mysteries. In both *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), Blavatsky argued that the design and symbolism of the pyramids and the Egyptian writings and practices all point to this fact of initiation or spiritual transformation. Egyptologists on the other hand most often view the pyramids as burial chambers serving royal funerary purposes. This discrepancy, however, did not stop an extensive literature from emerging as an important part of the theosophical current, which continue to uphold the esoteric purposes of the pyramids, including many titles, among others C. W. Leadbeater’s *Glimpses of Masonic History* (1926) and William Kingsland’s *The Great Pyramid* (1932). This paper will outline and analyze theosophical interpretations of the purpose of the pyramids by reading their views into the broader history of pyramid interpretations, including possible significant sources—both ancient and contemporary—that might have inspired the theosophical points of view and works that were inspired by theosophy and continue this line of thinking, including works by René Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz and modern bestsellers, such as Graham Hancock and Robert Bauval’s *The Message of the Sphinx* (1996).



Image source:
C. W. Leadbeater, *The Hidden Life in Freemasonry*, Madras: Theosophical Pub. House, 1926, plate II.



THEOSOPHY, ESOTERIC EGYPTOLOGY & CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Atlantis: Place or Myth?

Mystery surrounds 'Atlantis', a place or a myth? Schwaller de Lubicz drew parallels between physical and metaphysical territories in the Egyptian lore, indicating the esoteric symbolism on this theme. John West argues that de Lubicz used analogy to reconcile opposites in the thought patterns of the past (1993, 70). The legend of Atlantis appears in Plato's *Timaeus*, based on Solon's documented account and in the *Critias*, as an allegory on the hubris of nations.

The upcoming method of 'synthesis' in research combines theoretical and empirical notions and ties my investigations together in a focused manner, while rendering a cohesive, yet concise narrative on this topic.

Robert Schoch proposed that the dating of the Sphinx may be closer to 10,000 BCE (2017), to hint at a "forgotten civilisation" (2012). Some criticise such feeble "pseudo-scientific claims" (Feder 2011, 169). Clay Diskin calls Atlantis a fabricated "fiction" in a "long history of credulity" (2000, 1-2).

Therefore, I aim to inquire into the historical and implicit theosophic undercurrents (Smoley 2019) on this long-debated issue. The problem of a myth/place can inform our state of knowledge. A critical exploration on this subject seeks to avoid the finality of premature conclusions and to support an ongoing discovery.

Adina Bezerita

bio

Adina Bezerita is an Oxford-Cambridge philosopher and scholar who works on interdisciplinary topics in ancient philosophy with its relevance in contemporary thought and application across the humanities and the sciences.

Anna Kingsford and Lady Caithness Hermetic Reading of Genesis: The Fall, from Eve to Marie, or the Story of the Soul

Anna Kingsford and Lady Caithness, two theosophists and mediums of the 19th whose closeness is known, had in common to develop a new approach of the sacred texts. They mainly focused on the Bible, and more precisely on the Book of Genesis. According to them, hermeticism did not die out in Egypt, but still live through Christian esotericism, allowing us to understand spiritual message of the Bible. Lady Caithness even hypothesized that the burning of the Alexandrian Library is due to some «hierarchs», who would have destroyed bibliographical sources that could have confirmed the true origin of the New Testament. My paper will focus on their spiritual interpretation of the Fall. The soul or the feminine principle, first subject to its centrifugal force, namely Eve eating the forbidden fruit, is «regenerated», thanks to its centripetal force, through the figure of Marie or the divine soul, as Isis for the Ancient Egyptians. Even if the two theosophists consider that the feminine principle belongs both to man and woman, their interpretation aims to support the feminine cause. As Anna Kingsford proclaimed: a society which tends to suppress woman, also rejects its own connection to the soul.

Mayssa Coutard-Evangelista

bio

Mayssa Coutard-Evangelista is a student at Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris, preparing a degree in religious sciences under the supervision of Jean-Pierre BRACH and whose subject of research is the work of Lady Caithness, especially her exegesis of the Bible.



Paulina Gruffman

bio

Paulina Gruffman is a PhD student in the History of Religions at Lund University. Her dissertation considers the intellectual and social activities of G.R.S. Mead and his Quest Society as well as the reception of his writings in the early History of Religions school at Eranos (1933–61).

Victorian Egyptology and Hermetic Gnosis in the Works of G.R.S. Mead

Before joining the Theosophical Society in the 1880s, G.R.S. Mead (1863–1933) studied at St John's, Cambridge (between 1881 and 1884), completing the Classical Tripos and earning his Bachelor's Degree in classics the last year of his studies. While his English translation of the Gnostic texts of *Pistis Sophia* (first published in 1889, with notes by H.P. Blavatsky) has received some scholarly attention as of late, little research exists on Mead's other research interests, including the *Hermetica*. Mead traced the contents of the Hermetic writings to ancient Egypt rather than to Hellenistic Greece, as most of his contemporaries would have it, and as his interest in ancient Egypt came to deepen, he eventually tried his hand at Egyptology. Spending many hours at the reading room of the Oriental Department at the British Museum, Mead accessed an enormous collection of Egyptological writings and was eventually not shy at assessing such scholarship as that of the keeper of the museum's Egyptian collection, E. A. Wallis Budge (1857–1934). This paper offers a historical overview of Mead's scholarship on ancient Egypt, with a special emphasis on his understanding of the Egyptian origins of the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus.

Who Seth is this? The Sethian Identity of the Esoteric Current and its Egyptological Perplexed Antecedent

Seth is characterised with a variety of aspects and roles in the Egyptian mythology and the pharaonic belief system. Although his malign behaviour is most evident in the Osirian myth, where he is portrayed as the murderer of his brother, Osiris, and the enemy of Horus, at times he appears to be a friend of Osiris (as for example in certain Pyramid spells, where Seth is called upon to give life to Osiris) or protector of the sun god Re against his serpentine archenemy, Apep, during his night journey in the underworld. This perplexed identity is well documented in the Late Antique Egypt, where Seth continuous his prominent position in both temple and private cults. Alongside with the Egyptological scholarly research, a Sethian revival in the esoteric community is witnessed from 1960 onwards, which culminated in the Typhonian current and challenged earlier views of Seth in academia. The scope of this presentation is to analyse the esoteric roots and development to the Sethian identity and ontology and to trace certain aspects of the latter's transformation and osmosis within the magical revival of the 20th century.

Panagiotis Kousoulis

bio

Panagiotis Kousoulis, Professor of Egyptology, Director of the Aegean Egyptology Research Group and the Laboratory for the Ancient World of the Eastern Mediterranean at the Department of Mediterranean Studies of the University of the Aegean (Rhodes, Greece, <http://aegeanegyptology.gr>). He has researched extensively on the Egyptian magic and demonology and its cultural reception, on the archaeology of death, the Egyptian language and script and the cross-cultural interactions in the ancient Mediterranean. Among his current projects include the project *MAG.I.A.M - MAGical Interactivity in the Ancient Mediterranean: phenomenology, semantics, performativity*. His latest monograph *Apep and the Anti-god Perception in the Egyptian Belief System* will soon appear in Hans-Bonnet Studien zur Ägyptischen Religion, Eb-Verlag, Berlin.

Alberto Alfredo Winterberg

bio

Alberto Alfredo Winterberg has read Egyptology and Coptic Studies at the University of Göttingen. By 2016, he worked on Graeco-Coptic lexicography at the Freie Universität Berlin, Department of Egyptology. Since 2020, he investigates the reception of Coptic and Patristic texts amongst the French Neo-Gnostics in his PhD project at the University of Groningen.

After the Pharaohs: Late Ancient Egyptian Heterodox Christianity's and Coptic Studies' impact on the 19th century's Neo-Gnostic Movement

The 19th century was not only marked by several breakthroughs in the study of Pharaonic Egypt. Also, Coptic Studies evolved significantly and conveyed knowledge about late ancient Egyptian Christianity—especially in its heterodox 'gnostic' forms – beyond the borders of academia. Not only the French translation of the Coptic *Pistis Sophia*, but also excerpts from the Bruce Codex, were made accessible by the scholarly work of the Egyptologist and Coptologist Émile Amélineau (1850–1915). Consequently, heterodox Christians and occultists such as Jules Doinel drew on Coptic texts, on the Alexandrian legacy of the heterodox church teacher Valentinus, and their surrounding scholarship, as to consolidate their own claims: to represent a primeval and esoteric form of Christianity, allegedly in direct continuation of the same Alexandrian heterodox tradition.

Whereas the reception of Pharaonic Egypt in modern esotericism has received some initial considerations, the impact of Coptic Egypt remains understudied. An initial exploration of the *sitz im leben* of late ancient Egyptian texts in the Long Nineteenth-Century's esotericism, exemplified by the French Neo-Gnostic Movement, shall be provided by this paper.



THE RECEPTION OF ANCIENT EGYPT IN LITERATURE & THE ARTS

ONLINE KEYNOTE

Egyptians on Mars: Science, Science Fiction and the Theosophical Imagination at the *Fin de Siècle*

For several years – likely fuelled by the success of television series such as the History Channel’s *Ancient Aliens* – media outlets have brought fringe-theories of pyramids and sphinxes supposedly visible in NASA images of the surface of Mars into the mainstream. This lecture unearths the much longer cultural history of popular imaginings of ancient Egyptians as extra-terrestrial travellers stretching back to the late nineteenth century. Taking as its primary focus Fred T. Jane’s 1897 novel *To Venus in Five Seconds* and Garrett P. Serviss’ 1898 novel *Edison’s Conquest of Mars*, it examines the first literary and artistic representation of a Martian sphinx, as well as depictions of ancient Egyptian astronauts, and pyramids as landing pads. Reading these novels in light of contemporaneous astronomical theories (such as Percival Lowell’s entertainment of the idea that the ‘canali’ [‘channels’] first observed on Mars’ surface by Giovanni Schiaparelli in 1877 were actually engineered ‘canals’) and Theosophical thought (including Helena Blavatsky’s speculations as to the lost technologies of ancient Egypt and Ignatius Donnelly’s influential 1882 work *Atlantis: The Antidiluvian World*), this lecture illuminate a historic moment in which science, esotericism and fiction collided in the popular imagination.

Eleanor Dobson

bio

Eleanor Dobson is Associate Professor in Nineteenth-Century Literature at the University of Birmingham. She is a specialist in the reception of ancient Egypt in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and is the author of *Writing the Sphinx: Literature, Culture and Egyptology* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020) and, most recently, *Victorian Alchemy: Science, Magic and Ancient Egypt* (UCL Press, 2022).

Aretalogy

This paper is a work of research creation, a novel called “Aretalogy” which is a fictionalization of Jan Assman’s “mnemohistorical” approach to Egyptology. Aretalogy is a novel about Alexandria, libraries, memory and the legacy of Ægypt. It is the story of Psammethichus, who encounters the mysterious Library of the Ulterior within the Musaion of Alexandria, and travels to Upper Egypt, to Hermopolis Magna, to discover a destiny which includes the past, and the future. It is also a story about texts, both real and imaginary, as Psa searches for the legendary Book of Thoth, which never existed, but has inspired countless pens in the Hermetic tradition down through the ages. As Psa leaves the Greek world of Alexandria for Upper Egypt, he comes closer and closer to one essential question: who was Imhotep, and how did that man become a god?

Jack Kausch

bio

Jack Kausch is a PhD candidate in Information Science at the Western University of Ontario. His work spans research creation, graphic design, human computer interaction, and neuro-symbolic computation. His literary fiction explores ways in which Egypt has been remembered in the Western tradition, with a particular emphasis on the Ptolemaic reception of the cult of Imhotep.

Simon Magus

bio

Dr Simon Magus is a psychiatrist practising in London, and holds an MA and PhD in Western Esotericism. He is the author of *Rider Haggard and the Imperial Occult: Hermetic Discourse and Romantic Contiguity*, Volume 31 in the ARIES Series; ‘Texts and Studies in Western Esotericism’; Brill, Leiden Publishers (2022).

Rider Haggard and the Imperial Occult: Christian Egyptosophy, Romanticism, and Theosophy

Sir Henry Rider Haggard (1856-1925) was one of the most prolific and popular author-novelists of his age. Although now remembered principally as the author of *She* and *King Solomon’s Mines*, he penned fifty-six other novels and numerous works of non-fiction. This paper elucidates the influence of ideas circulating within the nineteenth-century occult milieu on Haggard’s oeuvre, and what I have termed the ‘Imperial Occult’ - reflecting ideas drawn from the colonial periphery, including Egypt and Tibet. I consider there to be three main intellectual currents which comprise this Imperial Occult: Christian Egyptosophy, Romanticism and Theosophy, and this paper will consider each of these in relation to Haggard’s literature. Haggard was fascinated by Egypt in particular, and his Egyptian romances mirror the academic biases and political agendas of Victorian Egyptology, including the search for evidence of biblical narratives in Egypt in the face of the rise of Darwinian evolutionary theory. His literature frequently contains references to reincarnation and other specifically Theosophical ideas, with Victorian constructions of an ‘esoteric Buddhism’, conflating notions of Karma and rebirth with a Christian soteriology of sin and redemption. Rather than being simple adventure stories, I argue that Haggard’s novels employ the leitmotif of an esoteric quest.

The Egyptian Mysteries of Marta Steinsvik

This paper examines how Egyptian mysteries are presented in the fictional and non-fictional writings of anthroposophist and Egyptologist Marta Steinsvik (1877-1950). Steinsvik was a remarkable figure in Norwegian cultural life in the first half of the 20th century, best known for being the first woman to preach in a Norwegian church and for agitating anti-Catholicism and antisemitism.

Before turning to theology, Steinsvik was a pioneer of Norwegian anthroposophy. As a follower of Rudolf Steiner, she attended his lectures and reported on his work. She became co-editor of the cultural journal *Kringsaa* (1910) to spread Steiner's theosophy to a broader audience. In it, Steinsvik wrote on Egyptian discoveries and mysteries, combining her growing Egyptological knowledge with theosophical influences. In the years that followed, Steinsvik earned her living touring Norway, giving popular lectures. Among her publications is a non-fiction lecture, "Egyptian Mysteries" (1917), an Egyptian-themed novella, "The Prince of Thebes" (1919), and a play, "The Veil of Isis" (1921).

In this paper, I first briefly overview Marta Steinsvik's career as an Egyptologist and anthroposophist. Then, I ask how she negotiated her historical knowledge with the influential theosophic contributions on ancient mysteries by Eduard Schuré and Rudolf Steiner.

Pål Steiner holds a Ph.D. in religious studies from the University of Bergen. His focus is on ancient Egyptian ritual texts and practices. He is currently employed as a senior academic librarian at the University of Bergen.

bio



Image source:
The America Theosophist, A Journal of Occultism, August 1913, p. 888.



GENDER, EMBODIMENT AND RITUAL IN THEOSOPHY & RELATED ESOTERIC CURRENTS

Egypt is a Woman: Florence Farr's Imagined Egypt Embodied within the New Woman

Florence Farr, a Grand Praemonstrator of the original Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and later an active member of the Theosophical Society, was a successful actor and artist in her time, not only performing for the stage, but directing and writing as well. *The Shrine of the Golden Hawk* is one of a pair of Egyptian-themed plays written by Farr, along with Olivia Shakespear, in 1901. By boldly looking into the face of the god Heru, Farr's character in the play becomes both Heru and Egypt itself: "Heru has put his finger upon me and marked me for his own, and I am Egypt"—all within the context of a story that sees the gods, as well as the kingdom of Egypt, as heightened states of being. This Egypt is ruled by a Woman whose mysticism conquers masculine magic, though the presence of the physical body is not neglected. Triumph is a dance. Through Farr's text, not only do we discover an imagined Egypt as a space and beingness for the flourishing of the Female; we also discover the Woman as a space for the preservation of the spiritual kingdom of Egypt as a mystical state.

Ayesha Adamo

bio

Ayesha Adamo is an academic, performing artist, filmmaker, and occultist from New York City currently studying at University of Amsterdam's Centre for History of Hermetic Philosophy & Related Currents. She is Grand Praemonstrator and an ordained Hierophant in Temple of Thelema, and has several occult books in the works.

Solar Sphinx on the Human Spirit: Esoteric Embodiment in the Writings of T. Subba Rao

T. Subba Rao (1856–1890) was one of the most enigmatic Indian theosophical authors. He was probably best known for his interpretations of the *Bhagavadgītā* and debates with Helena Blavatsky over cosmological principles. Yet often overlooked are his writings under the penname “Solar Sphinx,” a reference to the Egyptian solar deity Harmachis, “Horus in the horizon.” These writings, as Solar Sphinx, often contained a great number of esoteric interpretations that reveal his deep engagement with Egyptian theosophical writings and willingness to compare embodiment in the “ancient Hermetic philosophy” with that of Vedānta and Buddhism. This paper introduces the Solar Sphinx by analyzing his critical review of *The Virgin of the World* (1884), an interpretive translation by Anna Kingsford (1846–1888) and Edward Maitland (1824–1897) of Hermetic texts. His review provoked a published response by both Kingsford and Maitland, to which he responded, the record of which shows Subba Rao’s engagement with Greek and Egyptian mythology as well as Christianity. It then analyzes other examples in which the Solar Sphinx was able to present alternatives to more established theosophical views on embodiment, such as his piece ‘Notes on Hata Yoga’.

Keith Edward Cantú

bio

Dr. Keith Edward Cantú is a Visiting Research Fellow at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, in the DFG-funded project “CAS-E: Alternative Rationalities and Esoteric Practices from a Global Perspective.” He is the author of *Like a Tree Universally Spread: Sri Sabhapati Swami and Śivarājayoga* and co-editor of *City of Mirrors: Songs of Lālan Sāi*.

Olivia Cejvan

bio

Olivia Cejvan is an anthropologist of religion, focusing on esotericism in past and present forms with particular interest in how initiatory teachings are taught and practiced within esoteric communities. In 2023, Cejvan earned her PhD with the thesis *Arts and Crafts Divine: Teaching and Learning Ritual Magic in Sodalitas Rosae Crucis*.

The Papyrus of Ani in Theosophy and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

The Theosophical Society and The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn were influential esoteric societies founded by prominent freemasons and occultists in New York and Victorian London. Both incorporated Egyptian mythology into their teachings and practices, especially the so-called Egyptian Book of the Dead gained prominent status in Blavatsky’s writings and in the in the system of magical correspondences in the Golden Dawn.

Blavatsky regarded the work as a book of initiation and by working with the deities and symbols of ancient Egypt, initiates in the Golden Dawn were taught how to tap into the divine energies associated with the Egyptian gods and goddesses, each representing different aspects of the universe and human experience.

With special attention to Blavatsky’s initiatory interpretation of the *Book of the Dead* and how the founders of the Golden Dawn assimilated this, this paper untangles how and why Egyptian mythology underpinned the practice of initiatory development. Central Egyptian deities for the Golden Dawn were Isis and Osiris, serving as a mythic personification for the initiatory process of the outer order. They carried symbolic significance for initiates seeking personal transformation and spiritual growth, something that also is emphasized in Theosophy. The use of Egyptian mythology within the Golden Dawn was at the time a part of a broader syncretic occult approach and while it drew from Blavatsky and Theosophy in general it also drew from various other esoteric traditions, such as Kabbalah, astrology, and alchemy. By incorporating elements from different systems, the Golden Dawn wrought a comprehensive framework for spiritual exploration and personal development with a particular Egyptian aesthetic.

Be thou Hadit, My Secret Centre: Gender and Egyptosophy in Aleister Crowley's Thelema

This paper analyses the reception of Egyptian antiquity in the central sacred text of the religion Thelema, founded by the British occultist Aleister Crowley. In spring 1904, Crowley was sojourning in Cairo when his wife Rose surprised him by channeling a message from the god Horus. At Crowley's behest, Rose substantiated her revelation by leading Crowley to an offertory tablet in the Boulaq museum, showing a Theban priest presenting offerings to the god Ra-Horakhty (a melding of Horus and Ra) alongside the goddess Nut and the winged solar disk (Horus Behdety/Horus of Edfu). On April 8–10, Crowley then transcribed a revealed text: *The Book of the Law*. Proclaiming the advent of a new aeon, which Crowley later called the Aeon of Horus, the text comprises three chapters, ascribed, respectively, to the deities Nuit, Hadit, and Ra-Hoor-Khuit. Contrary to ancient Egyptian cosmologies, *The Book of the Law* posits an erotic, dialectical ontology whereby the ecstatic union of Nuit (the Thelemic cosmic feminine principle) and Hadit (the masculine principle) gives rise to Ra-Hoor-Khuit, identified with the liberating energies of the new aeon. In this paper, I will highlight the gendered connotations of Egyptological reception in *The Book of the Law*.

Manon Hedenborg White

bio

Manon Hedenborg White is Associate Professor of History of Religions at Malmö University (Sweden). She is the author of *The Eloquent Blood: The Goddess Babalon and the Construction of Gender in Western Esotericism* (OUP, 2020) and serves on the board of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism.

Maria Prieto

bio

Maria Prieto is currently co-developing the field of somatic psychology internationally at the California Institute of Integral Studies. With research experience in science studies at Columbia University and The University of Manchester, her research pursuits in theosophy encompass Egyptian ancient futures, science, alchemy, sacred geography, architecture, and the body.

The Embodied Architectures of Egyptian Wisdom: Exploring the Aesthetic, Theosophical, and Esoteric Elements in Alexandria and the Alexandrian Library

This paper delves into the interplay between architecture and the intricate elements of Egyptian aesthetics, theosophical beliefs, esoteric practices, and their profound relationship to the human body. Focusing on the history of Alexandria and its renowned library, the study examines how architectural design and spatial configurations were deeply intertwined with the felt dimension of the body experience. It explores how Egyptian aesthetics, far beyond mere adornment, conveyed profound religious and cosmological meanings, serving as tangible expressions of metaphysical beliefs and influencing the embodied experience within architectural spaces. Theosophy, deeply rooted in ancient Egyptian spirituality, treasured hidden truths and universal principles that governed the cosmos, with a focus on their impact on the human body and consciousness. This study also explores the role of esoteric practices in shaping architectural forms, highlighting the quest for inner knowledge and spiritual enlightenment through the built environment. Through the lens of sacred geography, certain centers of wisdom and spiritual power underscore the reciprocal relationship between architecture and the embodied experiences of individuals. By examining these architectural elements in Alexandria and the Alexandrian Library, this research offers profound insights into the synergies between architecture, the body, spirituality, and the pursuit of wisdom in ancient Egyptian civilization.



HERMETICISM, THE ANCIENT WORLD & THEOSOPHY

The Secret Books of the Egyptian Hermes

In Pharaonic Egypt we find the common literary motif of secret knowledge in rubrics of ritual texts safeguarded in temples and presented to the king by priests. In Graeco-Roman period, we find the same motif in Greek texts attributed to the Egyptian Hermes and presented by priests to kings. Such a literary motif can be considered as a rhetorical strategy to give prestige and authority to literary motifs. This paper explores how claims to secret knowledge in the technical and theoretical Hermetica were conducive to social formation and how legitimate kingship was conceived in this dialectic of secrecy. Following the work of Hugh Urban, discursive secrecy can be deployed as a strategy of concealment and revelation to negotiate power and knowledge. I will also briefly discuss the enduring fascination with Egyptian temple secrets as witnessed by H. P. Blavatsky's reception of the motif in her *Isis Unveiled* (1877), which devotes a chapter to Egyptian wisdom.

Christian Bull

bio

Christian Bull holds a PhD in the Study of Religions at the University of Bergen (2014; thesis published at Brill, 2018). ERC postdoc at the University of Oslo (2014-2016) and COFUND researcher (2016-2019; visiting at Princeton 2016-2018). Associate professor at MF Norwegian School (2019-2022); permanent faculty at the University of Bergen from 2022.

Hermeticism in Early Theosophy and the Contemporary Search

The Greek-Egyptian amalgam of Hermeticism played a critical role in early Theosophy and other facets of the late-19th century occult revival. Soon after HPB's journey to India, however, the primacy of Hermeticism within Theosophy and offshoots shifted to Vedism and Buddhism. Yet the early 20th century work of Theosophical scholar-translator GRS Mead proved vital in preserving a broadly defined Hermetic literature. Indeed, Hermeticism—or variants of it—figured centrally among aspirants who sought to recover or recreate a Western esoteric and magickal tradition drawing upon late-ancient Egyptiana. In this paper, I explore the efforts of 20th century seekers to reassemble Greek-Egyptian fragments into a working philosophy—including those that might be considered novelty, such as the 1908 occult work *The Kybalion*.

Mitch Horowitz

bio

Mitch Horowitz is a writer-in-residence at the New York Public Library and a PEN Award-winning historian whose books include *Occult America*, *One Simple Idea*, *The Miracle Club*, *Uncertain Places*, and the forthcoming *Modern Occultism*. *The Washington Post* says Mitch “treats esoteric ideas and movements with an even-handed intellectual studiousness that is too often lost in today’s raised-voice discussions.” He has written on alternative spirituality for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *Time*, *Politico*, and a wide range of ‘zines and scholarly journals. Mitch’s books have been translated into French, Arabic, Chinese, Italian, Spanish, Korean, and Portuguese. His work is censored in China.

Mervat Nasser

bio

Dr Mervat Abdel Nasser, MD, MPhil, FRCPSych (Consultant Psychiatrist, writer and researcher in Egyptology, Founder of New Hermopolis / www.newhermopolis.org) is a graduate of Cairo Medical School and fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists; London. She has master's in philosophy and a doctorate in psychiatry from London University. She served as a clinical psychiatrist and university academic in England from 1977-2007 and all her publications in this field are on the interface between Mind and Culture. She has as well a long-standing interest in Egyptology and has written on the subject in the Arabic language several books addressed to the young reader, including 40-part illustrated series that won an award for best children writing in 1998. She took an early retirement in from her job as a consultant psychiatrist and senior lecturer, Kings College London in 2007 and returned to Egypt to pursue her dream of establishing the project of New Hermopolis. She has since dedicated herself entirely to this cause (www.newhermopolis.org). Her latest book 'The Path to the New Hermopolis: The History, Philosophy and Future of the City of Hermes'. Rubedo Press. August 2019.

Hermopolis and the Geo-hermetic World: Itineraries of the Mind

Hermopolis is the name given by the Greeks to the city of 'Thoth' that lies in El Minia governorate, middle Egypt. It was named after 'Hermes', the Greek equivalent of 'Thoth', the lord of time, the guardian of thought and the ultimate communicator of art and knowledge.

The sum of knowledge produced by the ancient Hermopolis (*Hermetica*) was brought to Florence from Alexandria in the 15th century and had a great influence on the philosophy of Europe from the renaissance till our present time. However, this was not the only route that this knowledge had travelled, some of the Hermetic scholars headed instead for the newly emerging Arab Moslem world and were the intellectual force behind the famous 'House of Wisdom' that epitomised the great days of Islamic learning and scientific achievement.

The focus of this presentation therefore is on the pathways of human thought and the various routes travelled by this Hermetic idea.

The hermetic heritage that had its birth in Egypt clearly goes beyond the territorial specificity of this heritage to include all the minds that were inspired and influenced by it and whose creativity informed and developed this tradition and contributed to its continual regeneration and reproduction. Those intellectuals, as well as the different hermetic societies and fraternities need to be seen as carriers and transmitters of this heritage and major contributors to the World Hermetic Memory.

Luca Valentini is the editor of the website *Pagine Filosofali*, an expert in ancient philosophy, hermetic-alchemical doctrine and mysterious archaic and Mediterranean: contributor to Italian magazines such as *Elixir*, *Vie della Tradizione*, *Sothis*. He is the Director of the Journal of Hermetic Philosophy, *Aiòn*, for Editions “Stamperia del Valentino” in Naples. He is one of the organizers of the International Symposia of Hermetic Studies that cyclically take place in the city of Naples and is among the organizers of a series of conferences on archaic Roman. He’s a member of European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism, participates in national and European level research seminars.

Her-Bak: Hermetic Egypt in the works of Isha and Schwaller de Lubicz

The works of Schwaller de Lubicz on esoteric archaeology, ancient Egyptian sacred architecture, initiation and alchemy and the novels written by his wife Isha Schwaller D, *Her-Bak Cecio* and *Her-Bak Discepolo* are full of symbolism related to crossing the profane threshold of rational thought, and penetrating the deep and ancestral roots of Egyptian mystery initiation. De Lubicz, in their work, delve into the depths of ancient Alexandrian alchemy, Neoplatonic theurgic practices, as expressed in Iamblichus’ *De Mysteriis*. This paper investigates the methodological, symbolic, and hermetic foundations of De Lubicz and their relationship to the Egyptian studies on Hermeticism of the Neapolitan magician Giuliano Kremmerz of the Nilensian. Finally, a parallel will be established between the Egyptian studies indicated and the Nilense and Italic hermeticism of the Neapolitan magist Giuliano Kremmerz.

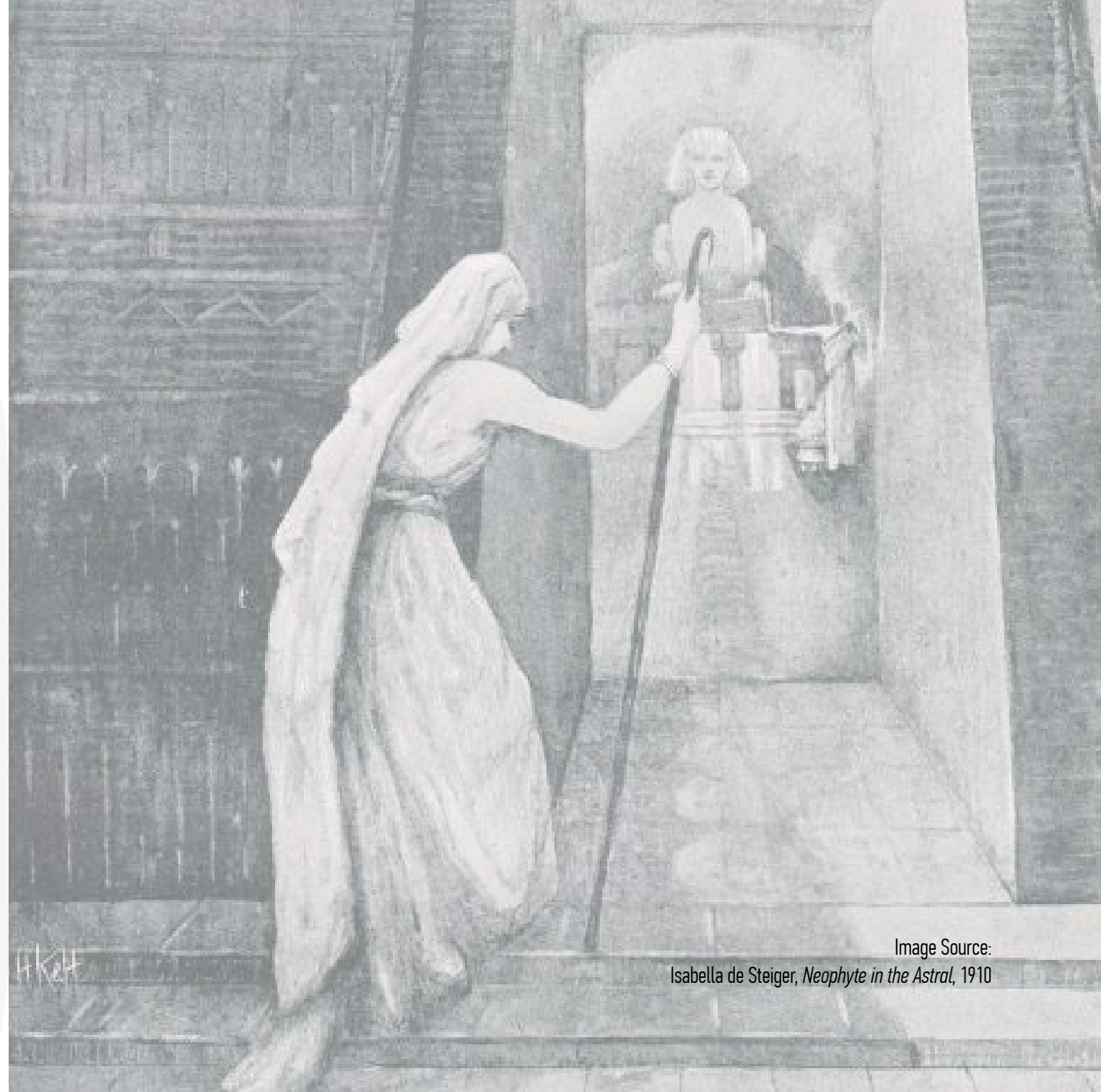
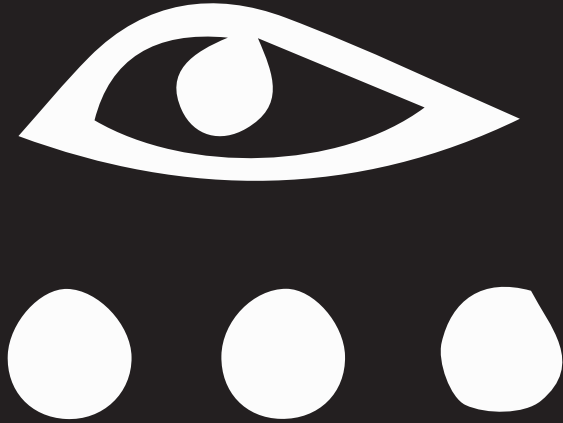


Image Source:
Isabella de Steiger, *Neophyte in the Astral*, 1910



THE RECEPTION OF EGYPT IN THEOSOPHY & MODERN ESOTERIC CURRENTS

Jung's Blame of the Theosophical Reception of the Ancient Wisdom: Towards a Critical Lecture of this Criticism

A number of quotes attests the criticism that Jung addresses to the Theosophists, regarding their appropriation of ancient knowledge and wisdom. By reviewing the jungian *Collected Works*, the main grief he seems to formulate against Theosophy concerns the belief in an Absolute Truth dispatched through the different ancient religions and esoteric knowledge. He reproches them to accept some ancient metaphysical assumptions, without any critical evaluation. Jung criticizes the reception of this transposition of ancient wisdom to the modern mind, whose psychic determination is totally different from what it was centuries ago, in the time of Ancient Egypt for example. We will study, in turn, this specific blaming of theosophy, by outlining a paradox inherent to such a critic : Jung also appears to use ancient knowledge in a sort of syncretism, closely similar to the theosophical approach. He claims that his lecture only relies on a rigorous psychological analysis and does not implies any metaphysical statement at all. By noticing the different references to Theosophy in Jung's work, this papers aims to shine a light on the paradoxical view that Jung articulates against the theosophical reception of the Ancients.

Nathan Fraikin

bio

Nathan Fraikin is a PhD candidate in Philosophy at the École Pratique des Hautes études (Paris), working on a thesis untitled « Towards a philosophical archeology of the synchronicity's concept ». His researches are focused on jungian and post-jungian studies, notably regarding their connections with ancient traditions and western esotericism.

'Attaching to Egyptian Freemasonry': Rudolf Steiner, Theosophy, and the Egyptian Mysteries

Rudolf Steiner became leader of the German Section of the Theosophical Society (TS) in 1902 but left in 1913 to establish his Anthroposophical Society (AS). Much of what Steiner learned from the TS was carried over into anthroposophy, including elements of freemasonry, ideas of involution and evolution, and an embrace of ancient Egypt. In 1906, Steiner abruptly purchased a patent from Theodor Reuß to open O.T.O. / Memphis-Misraim masonic lodges, a decision that remains controversial. Steiner claimed it was necessary for him to "attach" to this current of freemasonry. Why? Steiner had already inherited a tradition of Memphis-Misraim through his work with the Esoteric Section of the TS (coming from John Yarker and H. P. Blavatsky), which he described at length in his lectures. So perhaps as Annie Besant shifted the TS toward *Le Droit Humain* and the Order of the Star in the East Steiner felt compelled to reconnect to "Egyptian" freemasonry via Reuss as a way of restoring a connection to ancient Egypt. This is one possibility, but there is no easy answer to the question. This presentation will therefore explore Steiner's adoption of Memphis-Misraim in the context of the significance he placed on ancient Egypt.

Aaron French

bio

Aaron French, PhD, is Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Erfurt. His monograph *Max Weber, Rudolf Steiner and Modern Western Esotericism* is under contract with Routledge to appear in 2024. He regularly presents at international conferences on esotericism and religious studies and has published articles in peer-reviewed journals.

Ina Kiseliova-El Marassy

bio

Ina Kiseliova-El Marassy is a PhD student at the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute and a lecturer at Arabic Culture Forum. She is an active member of Lithuanian and international academic community, the author of numerous articles in scientific journals and book series, attending both national and international conferences and presenting research in the fields of Islamic esotericism and 20th century Traditionalism. Member of ENSIE and ESSWE.

"On the Perennialist reception of Ancient Egypt in Lithuania"

Lithuanian philosopher and famous Traditionalist Algis Uždavinys (1962–2010) is notable for his hermeneutical comparative studies in Ancient Egyptian, Greek religions and Islamic esotericism. Following the Perennialist school and being in a direct collaboration with the most prominent traditionalists: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Frithjof Schuon, Martin Lings and others, in his works of philosophy, theurgy and religion, he asserted that Hermetic, Hellenic, Semitic esoteric (especially Sufi) traditions are being continuous and interconnected.

By relying on his work "Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth: From Ancient Egypt to Neoplatonism" and Lithuanian translation of Egyptian Book of Dead, followed by his detailed appendixes, I will try to show that Algis Uždavinys developed a unique perception of universal esoteric worldview, by emphasizing that *philosophia* is directly or indirectly based on the hieratic patterns of ancient cults and may itself be regarded as a rite of transformation and noetic rebirth (Uždavinys, 2008). By returning to the very roots of philosophy in Ancient Egypt, suggesting that Entities of Egyptian myth were precursors of Platonic metaphysics and discussing the "proto-Hermetic and proto-Neoplatonic strand", Algis Uždavinys challenges the popular understanding of philosophy, pointing out that even if discrete pathways of transmission might never be mapped, the structural resonances between Egyptian and Greco-Roman philosophical aims are striking (George, 2010), which is yet another proof for *philosophia perennis*.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

■ REGISTRATION & FEES

REGISTRATION FEE: Euro 60,00

REGISTRATION FEE for STUDENTS: Euro 40,00

■ CONFERENCE DATES

OPENING: October 13, morning.

CLOSING: October 14, evening.

■ LOCATION

Alexandria, Egypt

■ VISA

Please, check if you need a visa to Egypt and if it can be given upon arrival at the airport or if you need to visit the Egyptian Embassy in your country. You should also check the visa cost, which may vary from country to country

For Registration and further Information, please contact:

E-mail: eustheosophy@gmail.com

Website: <https://theosophicalhistoryconference.eu>