



ENSIE
European Network for the
Study of Islam and Esotericism



CALL FOR PAPERS
COMMON AND COMPARATIVE ESOTERICISMS:
WESTERN, ISLAMIC, AND JEWISH

International Conference

Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, 12–14 June 2018

Organisers:

Francesco Piraino (Fondazione Cini)
Mark Sedgwick (Aarhus University)
Dilek Sarmis (CETOBaC - EHESS)

Fondazione Giorgio Cini in collaboration with the Centre d'Études Turques, Ottomanes, Balkaniques et Centrasiatiques (CETOBaC - EHESS) will host the inaugural conference of the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE) to be held on San Giorgio Island, Venice, on 12-14 June 2018.

Over recent decades, Western Esotericism has become ever more accepted as a field of study, established by the work of scholars such as Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraaff. Questions remain, however, over to what extent “Western” Esotericism is actually Western. The Christian Kabbalah, for example, is clearly an important part of Western Esotericism, but what of the mainstream Jewish Kabbalah? And what of Islamic esotericism?

In contrast to Western Esotericism (written with two capital letters), Islamic esotericism (with only one capital letter) is not an established field of study. The term “esotericism” is rarely used, save sometimes with reference to Ismaili theology, and in the writings of members of the Traditionalist school, a Western intellectual movement that inhabits the academy but has origins in Western Esotericism. Islamic phenomena that would be considered “esoteric” in a Western context are certainly studied, but they are generally understood in other terms, or even in isolation.

Again in contrast to Western Esotericism, the question of to what extent “Islamic” esotericism is Islamic has been asked, though in slightly different terms. During the nineteenth century, the Antique and Christian origins of Sufism were often explored. In reaction to this, and also as a reflection of critiques of Orientalism famously articulated by Edward Said, much twentieth-century scholarship emphasized the Islamic origins of Sufism, as for example in the work of Henry Corbin. A parallel development was increasing emphasis on the Jewish origins of the Kabbalah, for example in the work of Gershom Scholem.

The conference will explore the relationship between Western, Islamic, and Jewish esotericism in both historical and contemporary contexts. It will help answer the topical question of to what extent Western Esotericism is Western, and reopen the old question of the extent to which Islamic esotericism is Islamic. It will further bring Jewish esotericism into the discussion, importantly given the long history of Judaism in both Western and Muslim worlds. The conference will thus contribute to understandings of phenomena within each of the three main monotheistic traditions, to understanding the relationships between them, and to the theoretical development of our understanding of esotericism in general, drawing on and developing recent work on Western Esotericism.

Proposals are therefore invited for papers dealing with any aspect of relations between Western, Islamic, and Jewish esotericism

At least two traditions must be considered, i.e. papers dealing with esotericism within only one tradition will not be accepted. Antique and Hellenistic esotericism will be treated as part of Western Esotericism, so that papers dealing with relations between Antique or Hellenistic esotericism and Islamic or Jewish esotericism will be welcome, but papers dealing with relations between Antique or Hellenistic esotericism and Christian esotericism will not be accepted.

Abstracts and texts

Paper proposals of 300 to 500 words, accompanied by a CV, should be submitted in English by 5th March to: ensie2018@cini.it

We welcome submissions from doctoral students, early career researchers and established academics.

Economics

The Cini Foundation will provide accommodation on San Giorgio Island, coffee breaks and lunches for all participants. Participants will arrange and pay for their own transportation, and will be requested to donate to the Cini Foundation Library Civiltà e Spiritualità Compare one book related to religious studies they authored or in which they have participated. Extra funding may be available to cover the travel expenses of a limited number of junior scholars who cannot obtain funding from their own institutions. If extra funding is needed, please indicate this in the email with which you submit your abstract.

For further information, please contact: ensie2018@cini.it