

Program of the Inaugural Conference of the
European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism

COMMON AND COMPARATIVE ESOTERICISMS:
WESTERN, ISLAMIC, AND JEWISH



ENSIE
European Network for the
Study of Islam and Esotericism



Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, 12-14 June 2018
Centro di Studi di Civiltà e Spiritualità Comparete

Tuesday, 12 June 2018

09:00 - 09:30 Welcome

Francesco Piraino, Director of the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities and researcher at KU Leuven

Mark Sedgwick, Aarhus University, coordinator of ENSIE (European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism) and conference co-organiser

Dilek Sarmis, CETOBaC and conference co-organiser

09:30 – 11:00

Sandra Valabregue Hebrew University of Jerusalem—Israel: “The Role of Images in the Theory of Emanation in Medieval Neoplatonism and Kabbalah: A Comparative Study”

Gianfranco Bria CETOBaC—France: “Alchemy, Cosmology and Gnosticism: The Origin of the Islamic *Meganthropus*”

Saer El-Jaichi University of Copenhagen—Denmark: “The Neoplatonism of Ibn M. Al-Hallaj, and its Implications for his Negative Theology”

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee break

11:30 – 13:00

Andrea Gondos Ben Gurion University of the Negev—Israel: “Seekers of Love: Ecstatic Rapture as Mystical Ideal in Jewish, Christian, and Sufi Mysticism”

Micha J. Perry University of Haifa—Israel: “Medieval Jewish Female Prophetesses between Christianity and Islam”

Ildikò Glaser-Hille Concordia University, Montreal—Canada: “Compelling the Other: Appropriation, Exorcism and Supersession Theology in Premodern Christian Ritual Magic”

13:00 – 14:30 Lunch

14:30 – 16:00

Augusto Cosentino University of Messina—Italy: “The Figure of Solomon in the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*: from Jewish Legend to Islamic Tales”

Gal Sofer Ben Gurion University—Israel: “‘And you Should also Adjure in Arabic’: Islamic, Christian and Jewish Formulas in the Solomonic Corpus”

Luca Patrizi University of Turin—Italy: “Like Hidden Pearls: The Symbolism of Gemstones and its Relationship with Language in the Context of Abrahamic Religions”

Wednesday, 13 June 2018

09:30 – 11:00

Sasson Chahanovich Harvard University—USA: “‘Hidden’ Connections: Shared Esotericism(s) between Ottoman Apocalypticism and Sabbatean Messianism in the Early Modern Eastern Mediterranean”

Mark Wagner Louisiana State University—USA: “Kabbalah and Sufism Synthesized or Juxtaposed? The Poetry of Salem Shabazi and his School”

Yuri Stoyanov University of London—UK: “Christian Elements in Alevi/Bektāšī Esotericism: Old Controversies and New Approaches”

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee break

11:30 – 13:00

Mario Wintersteiger University of Innsbruck—Austria: “Enlightenment from the Orient: The Philosophical Esotericism of the *Falāsifa* and its Impact on Western Thought”

Rasoul Namazi University of Chicago—USA: “Alfarabi as Leo Strauss’ Teacher of Platonic Esoteric Writing: Leo Strauss’ Rediscovery of Esotericism and its Islamic Origin”

Vadim Putzu Missouri State University—USA: “Ozarkian Kabbalah: Preliminary Notes on the Place of Jewish Esotericism in Thomas Moore Johnson’s Platonism”

13:00 – 14:30 Lunch

14:30 - 16:00

Iheb Guermazi MIT, Cambridge—USA: “Western Esotericism and the Hermeneutics of Islamic Art”

Alexandre Toumarkine INALCO Paris—France: “Tlemcen (Algeria): Would-be *Fin de Siècle* and Colonial Esoteric Setting”

Arthur Shiwa Zárate University of Wisconsin—USA: “Worlds Unseen: Islamic Reform and Euro-American Spiritualism and Psychical Research in Mid-Twentieth-Century Egypt”

Thursday, 14 June 2018

09:30 – 11:00

Marco Pasi University of Amsterdam—Netherlands: “Aleister Crowley and Islam”

Dilek Sarmis, CETOBaC—France: “Associating and Sharing Esotericisms: The Academic Ways and Issues of Generalizing *Tasavvuf* to other Spiritualities in Early Republican Turkey”

Johanna Kühn University of Goettingen—Germany: “Christian Angel Tarots, Reiki Healing Sessions and Vortex meditation: Local Interpretations of Globalized Esoteric Practices in Beirut, Lebanon”

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee break

11:30 – 13:00

Marwa Elshakry Columbia University—USA: “The Metaphysics of Modernity: Rescripting Rationalism and Mysticism in Islam and Christianity in the Early Twentieth Century”

Liana Saif Oxford University—UK: “What is Islamic Esotericism?”

Boaz Huss Ben Gurion University—Israel: “Kabbala and Sufism: Connection, Comparison and Mystification”

13:00 - 14:30 Lunch

14:30 – 16:00 Plenary Session

Abstracts

Sandra Valabregue (Hebrew University of Jerusalem—Israel): “The Role of Images in the Theory of Emanation in Medieval Neoplatonism and Kabbalah: A Comparative Study”

The role that Christian and Islamic philosophy played in the rise of the new Jewish esoteric traditions of the Middle Ages has been a pivotal question in the scholarship of Jewish mysticism. All agree that Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophy had a crucial role in the formation of medieval Kabbalah. The definitions and extent of this role, nevertheless, are still under dispute. On the one hand, the influence of philosophy on theosophical Kabbalah is evident, but on the other Kabbalah has an ambivalent position toward philosophy. These two affirmations, put together, give a good sense of the complex dynamism and tendencies at play in theosophical Kabbalah.

In order to explore this complex knot of interactions this study wishes to study a unique trait of thought shared to medieval Neoplatonism and Kabbalah: their use of visual imagery to express theological ideas.

The study will concentrate on the historical period of the appearance of medieval Kabbalah, in 13th century Provence and Gerona (The Midi and Catalonia). It will compare the esoteric Jewish writings of this period with the corpus of Neo-platonic treatises on the concept of Emanation. Among the source that will be examined are *The book of the cause*; *The [pseudo] theology of Aristotle*; *The wisdom of Abraham* (which was apparently known to the famous kabbalist Nachmanides of Girona); and *The book of the five causes* attributed to the pseudo Empedocles which influenced Shlomo Ibn Gabirol. A special place will be given to the philosophy of John Scotus Eriugena, and its similarities with the Kabbalah of Gerona.

The importance of this study, beyond illuminating the relations between Christian thought and Jewish Kabbalah, lies in presenting the process of ‘image-writing’ (i.e. iconography) of the divine in medieval theosophical Kabbalah from Provence and Gerona. These schools presented a visual theology which uses images to describe what cannot be described, the inner world of God. This embrace of the visual is shared by some prominent Christian mystics as well: Joachim of Fiore, Bonaventure and Ramon Llull, to mention a few from the same era. For these and other Christian mystics and theologians as for theosophical Kabbalists, the possibility of a visual esoteric language was understood as a tool to convey theological ideas. The power of the visual language lies precisely in its iconographic function in describing the emanative creation.

Gianfranco Bria (CETOBaC—France): “Alchemy, Cosmology and Gnosticism: The Origin of the Islamic *Meganthropus*”

This work aims to analyse the genealogical origin of the esoteric and iconographic representation of the human being as microcosm and macrocosm: the *meganthropus*, i.e. the alchemical transposition of the Perfect Man (*al-Insān al Kāmil*) within Islamic esotericism. According to al-Djurdāni (d. 976), the Perfect Man unites in his totality the divine world and the engendered world, the universal and the particular: the perfect man is therefore the writing which unites the divine and the created writing. In this sense, the human body and its faculties embed the Macrocosm and the First Divine Intellect. Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240) and Al-Jili (d. 1408) speak about the analogy of the human body as a macrocosm and microcosm; in the Ishmaelite tradition, the Original Man is a *meganthropus* which was composed by different cosmic elements as shown in the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*.

These references find an extraordinary correspondence with different figures of others esoteric traditions. In Hellenic Hermetism, the Poimandres is the “pure original source”, such as *al-Insān al Kāmil*. Even in the pre-Islamic Iranian tradition, the figure of the *Gayomard*, the primordial man, refers to the idea of a man as a cosmic mirror. Finally, in the Kabbalah, the *Adam Qadmon* is a reflection and emanation of the light of the ten *Sephirots* with concern different divine cosmic attributes of the Original Man. Such similitudes could even refer the *Puruṣa*

myth of the Vedic traditions: the original man from whom the universe (essence) and the world (matter) take their origins. These similarities, however, are present still in the modern era: Carl Jung (d. 1961) held several works about the cosmic man and its alchemical transposition, touching gnosis, theosophy and psychology; an Albanian sufi, Ferit Vokopola (d. 1969), wrote an essay about the iconographic representation of man as a macrocosm, subdivided in planets and stars.

Can we therefore conclude that there is a real common matrix between these similarities? According to L. Massignon (d. 1962), this is just a coincidence, without a real connection. According to other authors, pre-Christian gnosis has represented the base of the cosmic and alchemical conception of the human being in all Mediterranean esoteric traditions. The idea of this work is to analyse and compare the features and the origins of the Perfect Original Man of the various esoteric traditions mentioned above, to understand if there is a unity of the initiatory origin of all the religions of ancient Asia.

Saer El-Jaichi (University of Copenhagen—Denmark): “The Neoplatonism of Ibn M. Al-Hallaj, and its Implications for his Negative Theology”

This paper examines Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj’s “negative theology” in both its philosophical and its metaphysical dimensions. More specifically, it will be concerned with situating al-Hallaj’s *via negativa* in the Arabic tradition of Neoplatonic theology, and in particular the textual tradition of the Graeco-Arabic Plotinus, which already flourished abundantly during what has commonly been called “the Graeco-Arabic renaissance.” The paper’s core argument is designed to show that al-Hallaj exposes the philosophical and metaphysical elements that underlie all Neoplatonic theology. I argue that al-Hallaj effectively synthesized Neoplatonic ideas and concepts into philosophical reflections, and in doing so, broke new ground, particularly with respect to the theological issue of “God’s being and attributes.” More importantly, the paper capitalizes on the methodological implications that contributed to al-Hallaj’s unique path of theological thought by challenging Louis Massignon’s characterization of Hallaj’s negative theology as a feature of a particular dogma, or doctrine (*‘aqida*), which does not rely on philosophical underpinnings.

This paper, in contrast, argues that an understanding of these philosophical underpinnings is essential for the understanding of (a) Hallaj’s conceptualization of the unity of God; (b) his notion of God as a “non-being;” and (c) al-Hallaj’s perspective on the relation between God’s essence and attributes, which has significant repercussions on his discourse about God’s immanence.

Put in a nutshell, the purpose of the present paper is to make a case for the *via negativa* in its philosophical Neoplatonic sense as the central topic of al-Hallaj’s mystical thought. From this perspective also, Hallaj’s negative theology can be seen as one expression of the varied forms in which the revival of Hellenistic mysticism, and particularly Neoplatonic mysticism, manifested itself in the Arabic-Islamic philosophical tradition.

Andrea Gondos (Ben Gurion University of the Negev—Israel): “Seekers of Love: Ecstatic Rapture as Mystical Ideal in Jewish, Christian, and Sufi Mysticism”

Love constitutes a paradigmatic emotion deployed by mystical writers across the three monotheistic traditions as a counterpoint to ratiocinative discourse transporting the reader into a direct and intimate knowledge of the divinity in contrast to indirect knowledge that logic and scholastic argumentation engender. In my paper, the concept of love will form the main emotional pivot of analysis and will engage related phenomena of jealousy, desire, rapture, physical expressions of attachment (kiss), and poetics or language through which affection becomes articulated. In Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), I will be focusing on Elijah de Vidas’s main work, *Reshit Hokhmah* (*The Beginning of Wisdom*) written in Safed in the last decades of the sixteenth century. De Vidas’s work belongs to the genre of ethical literature (*mussar*) within the Jewish esoteric corpus with a clear focus on affecting and refining human character traits in order to cultivate greater love in a person for God as well as for other human beings. The base text that *Reshit Hokhmah* recurrently cites and comments on is the medieval kabbalistic classic, the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (*Book of Splendor*) and as such my analysis will draw on the *Zohar*’s rich symbolic and poetic layers to uncover how emotive states and feelings function in the creation of meaning in Jewish mysticism.

Love comprises a fundamental aspect of Christian mystical discourse and the writings of important female mystics, such as the medieval Beguine Hadewijch of Brabant, provide an especially fertile ground for fostering spirituality through embodied emotions. Speaking of the Divine through poetry is depicted by Hadewijch as not only a powerful means of awakening love in the inner person of the speaker but also diffusing this love in the hearts of members of her own community: “You must gladly speak of God. This is a criterion of Minne (Love), that the name of the Beloved is found sweet. Saint Bernard speaks of this: ‘Jesus is honey in the mouth.’ To speak of the Beloved is exceedingly sweet; for it awakens Love immeasurably.” In another poem the intersecting repetition of love and the ambiguous movement between the beloved and the lover creates a sense of union with the Divine through love:

O love, were I love, and with love, love
you, love, O love, for love, give that love
which love may know wholly as love.

The Sufi poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi will provide the third pivot for engaging the concept of love and emotions in Islamic mysticism. Rumi uses the image of a hunter and the deer to depict the attraction between the human soul and the divine beloved. The path to the deer begins with the hunter following the footprints of the animal but as he approaches closer the scent of the deer’s musk gland guides him finally to the prey. Reciprocity and mutual attraction is underlined by Rumi as a key principle in his doctrine of mystical love: “[A]s the beggar is in love with bounty and in love with the bountiful giver, so the bounty of the bountiful giver is in love with the beggar.”

Through the close examination of mystical sources in Judaism, Christianity and Sufism, my paper will chart new fruitful avenues for investigating the expression, theory, transmission, and practice of emotional states in the pursuit of higher religious ideals espoused by the authors of these texts.

Micha J. Perry (University of Haifa—Israel): “Medieval Jewish Female Prophetesses between Christianity and Islam”

One of the fascinating phenomena of medieval Western Esotericism is the prominent place of female figures in it, especially prophetesses\mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen or Catharina of Sienna – to name only two of the most known examples. To a lesser degree the phenomena is also known in the bosom of medieval Islam, especially with the figure of Rābi‘a of Basra. Nevertheless, the consensus among scholars is that there was no medieval “feminine mysticism” in Judaism, even though medieval Jewish culture had several biblical models to follow. This paper wishes to present three little-known cases of Jewish female prophetesses from the Middle Ages and to compare them to each other as well as to similar Christian and Muslim instances. These cases lend themselves easily to such a comparison, since the first case is a young Jewish prophetess living under Muslim majority culture (12th-century Bagdad); the second, under Christian culture (Sicily, date disputed, 13th or 15th century); and the third case presents a JudeoChristian culture (two young conversas from 15th-century Spain). The aim of this comparison is to examine possible influences between these three Esoteric traditions, as well as to illuminate the uniqueness of the phenomena within the Jewish tradition. Concentrating on women will further stress the ways esoteric traditions passed from one culture to the other through lay, maybe uneducated, oral channels of transmission. The question we will end with is whether we can write a “Cross-Cultural History of Feminine Mysticism in the Middle Ages,” or the particular religious traditions trump such commonalities. From a methodological point of view, we wish to enrich the study of esoteric traditions with the tools of transnational history, social history and gender studies.

Ildikò Glaser-Hille (Concordia University, Montreal—Canada): “Compelling the Other: Appropriation, Exorcism and Supersession Theology in Premodern Christian Ritual Magic”

This presentation will present an approach to premodern Christian ritual magic texts by focussing on the connection between exorcism and supersession theology within Premodern ritual magic. I will argue that the rituals contained within Christian ritual magic texts were not only a way of controlling the conjured beings, but more importantly, a way of compelling the Jewish influences and exorcising them from Christian ritual magic. I will show that while the construction of Christian ritual magic was dependent on older Jewish magic, it also attempted to magically purge and Christianise the influences, thus becoming a magical supersession theology, shaping Christian ritual magic narrative that mirrored the larger social discourse of the time. That much late mediaeval and Renaissance Christian ritual magic, especially that which involved the invocation of angels and demons, was influenced by Jewish magical practices is undeniable. Practitioners, such as the author of *Sworn Book of Honorius* or Trithemius, indicated a familiarity with older Jewish magical literature, evidence that there was a space for intercultural communication and a sharing of ideas between the religious communities in premodern Europe. Within most Christian ritual magic, the element of exorcism was integrally important; a practitioner must not only be a pious Christian, but also familiar with liturgical rites, especially those surrounding the compelling of beings that could pose a danger to the operator, society and to the Christian order. Also found in most Christian ritual magic texts are stern warnings against sharing the knowledge contained within with what the authors considered to be unworthy of practicing the rituals: namely Jewish operators. By looking at the inclusion of exorcist rituals as not only as a distancing but rather a systemic purging of Jewish magic, we can understand exorcism as a practical application of supersession theology in Premodern Christian magical rituals.

Augusto Cosentino (University of Messina—Italy): “The Figure of Solomon in the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*: from Jewish Legend to Islamic Tales”

King Solomon is, as is well known, an important protagonist of Jewish literature, both canonical and extra-canonical. We witness a slow literary evolution of the character, who, starting from old-testament references, slowly takes on the status of magician and exorcist. In the first centuries AD this transformation is consolidated, as we can see from the *Testament of Solomon*, from a passage in Flavius Josephus, and from the long series of magical amulets in which Solomon is represented on horseback while piercing a female demon. These amulets originate in relation to the seal of Solomon, the magical ring quoted in the *Testament*, through which Solomon takes control of the demons. He uses these demons, properly chained, to assist in the construction of the Temple of Jerusalem. The demons are locked up and sealed inside amphorae. This tradition will give rise to the Islamic legend of the genius in the lamp, at the service of its master.

In the West this tradition will give rise to a vast magic literature placed under the aegis of Solomon. These are often real grimoires, that, in imitation of the *Testament of Solomon*, list angels, demons and magic words to chain them. Tradition that flows into the history of *Faust*.

In the Islamic world, while on one hand the character of Solomon appears in the Qur'an, his tradition is well present in all pre and post-Qura'nic literature. In the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, an esoterical society that arose within Ismailism, probably around the 10th century) there is a large section dedicated to Solomon, in which the Judeo-Christian tradition of the master of the demons is resumed, but a metaliterary critique of this tradition is also made. The last example of Solomon in this oriental tradition will be the story of Kipling “The Butterfly that Stamped”.

Gal Sofer (Ben Gurion University—Israel): “And you Should also Adjure in Arabic?: Islamic, Christian and Jewish Formulas in the Solomonic Corpus”

The English and French late 18th-19th centuries stage of the Solomonic Corpus, which its most famous text is the *Clavicula Salomonis*, contain mainly Judeo-Christian formulas and practices. As we move to the Hebrew versions of the same period, we can also find Arabic and Aramaic formulas, which reveal an earlier developmental stage of the Solomonic Corpus and attest much more complicated routes of knowledge transmission than those that are already have been established. One of the most important texts in the Solomonic Corpus is the 15th century *Liber Bileth*. When trying to summon Bileth, the Master of Art uses Arabic demonological structures, alongside Hebrew and Aramaic formulas. While the process of incorporating “foreign” knowledge into magical texts is considered, occasionally, as an accident or a misunderstanding of the authors, in the Solomonic Corpus, especially in *Liber Bileth*, the authors are well aware of this kind of knowledge, and they even used it to bridge some gaps in their own textual traditions. But how often did Jewish writers use Arabic traditions in order to bring a mysterious or incomplete text into perfection? We will dive into an unknown manuscript of a renaissance Kabbalist who wrote a visionary-like commentary on Solomonic practices, while using Arabic and Christian traditions to systematize some of the most famous Solomonic practices. I believe that this examination might shed light on the traditions of the famous *Clavicula Salomonis*. Also, it will allow us to reconsider some of the theories concerning the Solomonic Corpus. The contributions of medieval Islamic and Jewish ideas and texts to the development of early modern and contemporary Solomonic-Magic texts explain their dynamics and popularity among different audiences – in the past, but also in our days.

Luca Patrizi (University of Turin—Italy): “Like Hidden Pearls: The Symbolism of Gemstones and its Relationship with Language in the Context of Abrahamic Religions”

The use of the symbolism of gemstones, which is attested in different religious contexts, allows us to observe strong analogies between the three Abrahamic religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam. While in the Jewish and Christian context, this symbolism has been the subject of a certain number of studies, this same topic in the Islamic context did not gain the attention of the scholarly world. The Old Testament mentions a breastplate belonging to the High Priest of the Temple of Jerusalem, decorated with twelve gemstones, on each of which the name of one of the twelve tribes was engraved. From this passage, a significant esoteric exegesis emerged both in rabbinic literature and in ancient Christian literature. As for the New Testament, the passage of the Apocalypse in which the twelve gemstones embedded in the walls of the Celestial Jerusalem are mentioned, has always been read in the light of the passage of the Exodus cited above, and has, as well, been the source of a considerable exegesis in the Christian literature. In addition to this, one has to mention several passages from the Old and New Testaments in which the symbolism of gemstones appears in an allegorical form, generating various esoteric commentaries. It is from this literature precisely that the genre of Lapidary texts, which had a wide diffusion in the Christian Middle Ages, took its origin.

In Western Esotericism, the symbolism of gemstones plays a fundamental role, particularly in the writings of Dante Alighieri and Petrarch, in the Hermetic texts, and for obvious reasons, in the alchemical ones. Among the most important themes appearing in this literature, we can mention the Emerald Table and the Philosopher’s Stone, both derived from the Islamic esoteric literature, in particular from the work of Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, who in turn introduced Pythagorean, Neoplatonic and Gnostic influences in the Islamic Esoteric environment. In the Islamic literature, the symbolism of gemstones is found primarily in its two main sources, the Qur’an and the sayings of the prophet Muḥammad. The symbolism of the pearl, as in the Abrahamic traditions, plays a fundamental role in these sources in connection with language. As we shall see, several Islamic religious texts, Sunni as well as Shi’i, include the name of gemstones in their titles, while some of these texts have been even structured according the gemstone names. In particular, the title of one of the most important work of the Islamic Esotericism, *al-Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* of Ibn al-‘Arabī, refers to the symbolism of the gemstones, since the word *faṣṣ* (pl. *fuṣūṣ*), indicates originally either the necklace which bears gemstones, or the gemstone itself. In this talk, I will try to demonstrate in what extant the symbolism of gemstones in Islamic Esotericism is aligned with Western and Jewish Esotericisms, from doctrinal issues to the shared practice of wearing rings with engraved gemstones mounted on it. I will also attempt to show how the symbolism of gemstones in Islamic Esotericism is closely related to the idea of language, in particular the esoteric one. Finally, the study of this topic aims to contribute to shed light on the existence of a specific area of study called Islamic Esotericism, which presents characteristics that transcend the boundaries of Sufism.

Sasson Chahanovich (Harvard University—USA): “‘Hidden’ Connection shared Esotericism(s) between Ottoman Mystic Apocalypticism, Lurianic Kabbalah, and Shabbatean Messianism in the Early Modern Eastern Mediterranean”

In a letter to his brother Werner Sholem dated September 7, 1917, Gershom Sholem, the progenitor of modern Kabbalah studies, rhetorically asks the following: “Perhaps you have already heard of the mystical sect among us Jews, the Hasidim of Galicia, who preach (or preached!) socialism *sans phrase*. They stood for unity and myth, and myth is life.” Though intended as an oblique rebuke of Werner’s Socialist sympathies, the great Israeli scholar’s fraternal remarks belie a key insight in his own work on Jewish esotericism. Specifically, Sholem thought that mystic-esoteric teachings (Kabbalah) were the very mythical soil in which the seeds of radical revolutions, be they religious or secular, grow and, ultimately, emerge. According to this logic, Sholem argued that the esoteric elements of Lurianic Kabbalah gave birth to Sabbatean messianism, a radical revolution of Ottoman Jews. Yet in Sholem’s history of Jewish messianic enthusiasm, he missed a critical anterior factor that enhances our understanding of the phenomenon: Islamic mystic (Sufi) esotericism and official Ottoman

imperial apocalypticism. Addressing the conference's theme, I argue that Islamic apocalyptic enthusiasm of the 15th-16th centuries in the Ottoman realm was not only truly Islamic *per se*, but fundamentally set the intellectual and cultural stage for the emergence of Shabbtai Zvi's own messianic movement. In the paper, I will first discuss the history of the rise of an organic Sufi esoteric messianism in the pre-modern period. Sufis introduced new End-Times-oriented concepts and themes, such as the "renewer of the age" (*mujaddid aḡ-ḡaman*) and "seal of the saints" (*khātim al-anliyā*). Equally interesting is the degree to which one finds interest in letterism (*ḥurūf*) and astrology (*ilm al-falak*) in Sufi apocalyptic works as key sciences for predicting the advent of various messianic-characters and, importantly, the End of Time. Second, I will discuss how, in the 15th-16th centuries, Ottoman Sultans, worried by the claims to universal Islamic authority by their Shi'ite and Turcoman neighbors, turned to this esoteric Sufi vocabulary to bolster their own claims to universal Islamic dominion, especially in messianic terms. Third, I will review the regnant work on Sabbatean messianism in Jewish studies and argue that this Ottoman Islamic "background" history helps us not only better understand Jewish apocalyptic enthusiasm in the early modern age, but also prove the extent to which Islamic esotericism is, in fact, very Islamic.

Mark Wargner (Louisiana State University—USA): "Kabbalah and Sufism Synthesized or Juxtaposed? The Poetry of Salem Shabazi and his School"

In Yemen (South Arabia) in the eighteenth century a strange literary phenomenon began to occur. Jews began to write paraliturgical poetry using the Arabic language or alternating stanzas of Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew (and rarely Aramaic). This form of poetry is identified with one semi-legendary rabbi, Salim Shabazi (1619-*circa* 1679) and is labeled "Shabazian style" after him.

There were two schools of thought in Jewish literary history as to the reasons for the emergence and efflorescence of "Shabazian style" in Yemen. The dominant school of thought held that Lurianic Kabbalah, which emerged at roughly the same time, was responsible for the innovation, which emerged solely from within Hebrew literature. Following in the footsteps of Wilhelm Bacher in 1910, in my 2009 book, *Like Joseph in Beauty: Yemeni Vernacular Poetry and Arab-Jewish Symbiosis*, I argued that the Sufi (Islamic mystical) poetry of the Jews' Muslim neighbors constituted a much more likely vector of influence for Shabazian poetry.

I am currently compiling a database consisting of the works of Yemeni Sufi poets and Arabic material from two early Shabazi manuscripts in order to gain a more comprehensive view of the similarities between the Muslim and Jewish corpora. I intend to present at the ENSIE conference on the larger question of how the poetry of Shabazi and his successors made use of Sufi concepts, themes, and motifs in order to popularize kabbalistic-sephirotic concepts. Focusing especially upon anthropomorphic language, I will draw upon my digital corpus to illustrate my argument. I shall argue that Shabazi's poetry does not synthesize particular Sufi and kabbalistic ideas in a seamless manner but rather that its juxtaposition of, and alternation between, sharply contradictory modes of anthropomorphism provide the momentum for a medium that sought to spread kabbalistic concepts among Arabophone Jews.

Yuri Stoyanov (University of London—UK): "Christian Elements in Alevi/Bektāšī Esotericism: Old Controversies and New Approaches"

The paper intends to offer a reappraisal of the earlier and recent theories of the purported existence of Christian "Gnostic" and esoteric layers in Ottoman-era Alevism (*Alevilik*)/Kızılbaşism (*Kızılbaşlık*) and Bektāšism. It will reassess the early theological and ideological models advanced to conjecture and reconstruct the presence and provenance of such strata in Alevism and Bektāšism, traced in most of these models to Alevi and Bektāšī interactions with the indigenous Christian dualist Balkan and Anatolian sectarian communities, the Paulicians and Bogomils, with their specific traditions of visionary mysticism as well as doctrinal and cultic secrecy. The paper will also focus on the newly refashioned theories and arguments for such formative Christian heterodox

impact on Alevi and Bektāšī mysticism and esotericism, presenting some cases when such claims and reconstructions have been advanced on the basis of spurious parallels, questionable evidence or even fabricated documents. After discussing the ideological and religionist agendas of such theories and reconstructions, the paper will re-examine the posited parallels and affinities between the characteristic esoteric traditions in medieval Christian dualism and their postulated counterparts in Alevism and Bektāšīsm. Finally, attention will be drawn to newly reassessed or discovered primary source material and novel research on the confluence of Jewish, Christian and Islamic esoteric traditions in dissenting and non-conformist religious milieux in the early Ottoman era and their likely role as the syncretistic matrix for the formation of the distinctive currents of esotericism in Alevism and Bektāšīsm.

Mario Wintersteiger (University of Innsbruck—Austria): “Enlightenment from the Orient: The Philosophical Esotericism of the *Falasifa* and its Impact on Western Thought”

Contrary to popular prejudices, some roots of the European Enlightenment lie in medieval soil; the observation that a specific form of esotericism from the Arab world contributed to the emergence of modern Western thought will be even more astonishing for some. The “distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric teaching” (Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*) is of crucial importance for understanding this intercultural history of ideas. The presence of a certain form of “philosophical esotericism” (Arthur L. Melzer, *Philosophy Between the Lines*,) in medieval Europe can be demonstrated by some evidence; religious authorities back then seem to have been deeply moved by the fear that scholars might teach a “double truth” theory that could threaten the monopoly of monotheist orthodoxy. The school of thought which was suspected of doing so could therefore be seen as some sort of “Enlightenment in the middle ages” (Kurt Flasch, *Aufklärung im Mittelalter?*) and it went on to influence early modern political thinkers in the West. If one looks closely, this form of Enlightenment seems to be a product of the European reception of esoteric ideas from the Arabic *falsafa* tradition, a school that aimed at creating a political “alliance between philosophers and enlightened princes” (Leo Strauss, *Farabi’s Plato*).

In principle, the *falasifa* can be interpreted as medieval proponents of the Enlightenment; but the main feature distinguishing them from the mainstream of their modern European counterparts is the basically esoteric character of their teaching and their political rhetoric. The hermeneutics following Leo Strauss argue that there had been two main reasons for this distinction between the esoteric core and the exoteric shell: self protection out of fear of persecution, but also protection of the uninitiated from ideas that were considered to be politically dangerous.

This contribution will focus on the esotericism of the *falsafa* tradition and its impact on Western philosophical esotericism. The esoteric method of the *falasifa* will be highlighted by presenting exemplary features from the works of Alfarabi and Ibn Rusd: the “parable of the drunken mystic” (Charles E. Butterworth and Thomas L. Pangle, *Foreword*, in Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*,) from the former’s *Plato’s Laws* (2011) and the core argument of the later’s *Faṣl al-maqāl*. The patterns thus reconstructed will then be discussed in the light of their impact on Western thought.

Rasoul Namazi (University of Chicago—USA): “Alfarabi as Leo Strauss’ Teacher of Platonic Esoteric Writing: Leo Strauss’ Rediscovery of Esotericism and its Islamic Origin”

Leo Strauss’ claims about the art of esoteric writing and his esoteric interpretations of Western philosophical works have been the most controversial aspects of his thought and writings. Strauss bases his thesis on esotericism on what he considered to be a well-known characteristic of many societies, namely: persecution of thought. He argues that closed societies do not recognize the right to evaluate and criticize the authoritative beliefs of those societies. In such societies, Strauss claims, heterodox thinkers are faced with grave dangers and must protect themselves and their ideas. If these thinkers decide to transmit their thoughts to other heterodox or potential heterodox readers, they have to practice an art of “esoteric writing,” or, writing in a way that conceals one’s heterodox ideas from all but those who are knowledgeable about the practice of reading “between the lines.” Esotericism allows the majority of readers to receive a conventional message while allowing a select group of readers to take away the heterodox message. Among scholars working on Strauss’ thought, insufficient attention has been paid to the fact that Strauss learned the art of esoteric writing and reading not from Western sources but rather from Alfarabi’s writings on the philosophy of Plato. In this paper I will discuss the Islamic origins of Strauss’ idea of esotericism by presenting an interpretation of Strauss’ famous essay entitled “Farabi’s Plato.” “Farabi’s Plato” is a penetrating discussion of Alfarabi’s *The Philosophy of Plato*, the treatise which Strauss believed to be of central importance for understanding Alfarabi’s peculiar art of writing. In his essay, Strauss claimed that in *The Philosophy of Plato* Alfarabi reveals himself as an esoteric writer who teaches his deepest philosophic insights by pretending to be merely an interpreter of Platonic writings. Strauss argues that by omitting some essential Platonic themes in his summary of Plato’s writings, Alfarabi intimates the merely exoteric character of these Platonic teachings. According to Strauss’ interpretation of Alfarabi, these exoteric ideas are different from Plato’s true esoteric teachings. In my presentation, I will discuss how Strauss understood the relationship between Greek and Islamic traditions of esotericism and learned from the first to interpret the second.

Vadim Putzu (Missouri State University—USA): “Ozarkian Kabbalah: Preliminary Notes on the Place of Jewish Esotericism in Thomas Moore Johnson’s Platonism”

The purpose of this paper is to discuss and evaluate the role of Jewish esotericism in Thomas Moore Johnson’s thought, as it is reflected in his own writings, in his work as editor of the journal *The Platonist*, and in his activities as head of the American branch of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor.

Known as “The Sage from the Osage,” Johnson (1851-1919) was a lawyer by trade and a Platonist at heart. In his house in Osceola, a small Missouri town southeast of Kansas City, Johnson amassed a library of over 8,000 volumes, which comprises hundreds of sixteenth and seventeenth-century publications. While much of Johnson’s collection reflects his interest in Greek philosophy, he also acquired several rare books that include Latin translations (Johnson could not read Hebrew), Christian interpretations, and creative appropriations of Jewish Kabbalah, such as the 1557 edition of Pico della Mirandola’s *Opera Omnia* (which includes Reuchlin’s *De Arte Cabalistica*), Johannes Pistorius’s 1587 compendium *Artis Cabalisticæ*, a 1612 edition of Pietro Galatino’s *De Arcanis Catholicae Veritatis*, and a 1679 edition of Henry More’s philosophical writings, which include his *Conjectura Cabalistica*.

In addition to translating from the Greek Platonic and Neoplatonic works, and to authoring studies on them, Johnson also entertained an extensive correspondence with early Jewish scholars and translators of medieval kabbalistic works such as Isaac Myer, as well as with prominent members of the Theosophical Society who were deeply interested in Kabbalah, such as Henry Olcott, William Judge, Seth Pancoast, and Alexander Wilder.

Out of the conviction that “the Esoteric doctrine of all religions and philosophies is identical,” Johnson’s journal *The Platonist*, which he edited and published irregularly from 1881 to 1888, also featured numerous contributions about Kabbalah, including excerpts of classic Jewish sources translated by Eliphas Levi, Myer, and Arthur Waite.

Additionally, as part of his project to advance the spiritual development of humanity by means of occult doctrines and practices, Johnson, who had been affiliated with the Theosophical Society since 1875, in 1885 started promoting the activities of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor in the US by infusing kabbalistic ideas filtered through Eliphas Levi with conceptions elaborated by Jewish theosophist Max Theon.

Insofar as Johnson self-identified with Platonism, which he understood as a perennial philosophy, “immortal because its principles are immortal in the Human Intellect and Heart,” yet incorporated into his speculation ideas drawn from classical works of Jewish mysticism, such as the *Sefer Yeẓirah* and the *Zohar*, my paper explores the relations between a distinctively Jewish form of Kabbalah and (Johnson’s personal iteration of) Western Esotericism. In addition, since Johnson and his fellow authors (such as T.H. Burgoyne, Rabbi Emanuel Schreiber, and Alexander Wilder) include in their discussion of Kabbalah a number of supposedly Jewish secret traditions, such as the “occult wisdom” of the Pharisees, Judah Leon Abravanel’s philosophy of love, and Spinoza’s doctrines, my research on their writings for *The Platonist* further explores the contours and the definition(s) of Jewish esotericism as it was understood by late nineteenth century American theosophists.

Iheb Guermazi (MIT, Cambridge—USA): “Western Esotericism and the Hermeneutics of Islamic Art”

During the first half of the twentieth century, a number of European artists, art historians, and thinkers attached to Western esoteric traditions converted to Islam, adopted Arabic names, and moved to North Africa. They later produced a substantial amount of books, biographies, poems, chronicles, but also paintings, sculptures and printings. In their work, whether visual or textual, they all postulated the existence of a hidden “Truth” that is universal, ideal, atemporal, and metaphysical in nature. This truth, according to them, existed in all pre-modern “authentic” religious traditions, was lost in the West and needed to be unveiled, and recovered again. Islamic art, they argued, is one of the many sensible manifestations of this hidden rationale. But not any observer is capable of reading the cryptic metaphysical concepts behind a Muqarnas, a calligraphy or the dome of a mosque. An “authentic” understanding of Islamic art should be preceded with a metaphysical initiation into a ‘pure’ spiritual tradition, which partly explains their interest in Sufism. The main protagonists of this esoteric approach to the study of Islamic art are the artists Ivan Agueli (1869-1917), Etienne Dinet (1861-1929), and Gustave Jossot (1866-1951). Other central figures to this study are Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) who developed a concept of a “universal sacred art” that was later applied to Islam by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933) and Titus Burckhardt (1908-1984). Other central figures are the Sufi Sheikh Ahmad Al-Alawi (1869-1934), and the French metaphysician Rene Guenon (1886-1951). It is the story of this rejected and rather eccentric current of art theory that this paper will reconstruct. This presentation will trace the history of this chain of Western artists and writers who, through a line of Sufi *tariqas*, developed a particular reading of Islamic art.

The rare studies dedicated to this movement considered it only through the scope of Western esotericism, this paper will try to reposition the role of an Islamic Sufi esotericism in the development of this school of thought and offer the possibility to compare the Western and Islamic esoteric inputs. This work addresses crucial questions related to the two fields of art theory and esotericism: What is, if it exists, an Islamic esoteric reading of art? What are the central concepts developed by this school and what is its proper mechanic of argumentation? To which extent this school of art interpretation was Islamic or Western? Finally, how can this particular movement illuminate our understanding of the role ‘esotericism’ could play in the construction of historical claims about art?

Alexandre Toumarkine (INALCO Paris—France): “Tlemcen (Algeria): Would-be *Fin de Siècle* and Colonial Esoteric Setting”

Tlemcen is a Maghreb town, best known for its flourishing intellectual life that once made it a cultural capital. Besides, the city has been reknowned as the main regional Sufi center. Tlemcen was conquered by the French colonial Army between 1836-1842. The difficulties French troops experienced were partly due to the role played by Emir Abdelkader, a respected and charismatic Sufi figure - who later on, in a spectacular and daring move, joined Free Masonry - and a military leader who epitomized the local resistance to the French.

Yet, around 1900, the city, located on the western fringe of French Algeria, then a quiet and peaceful provincial town, had no connection with its warlike fame in the late 1830s. From the beginning, the colonial administration and academy distrusted the *marabouts* and magic as well as the locally-rooted Muslim brotherhoods (especially the Tijâniyya). However, the colonial authorities afterwards shifted to a reverse attitude and became eager to construct and promote the idea of a genuine and popular religiosity based on authentic and popular religion.

So far, Tlemcen was not only a vivid Muslim intellectual and mystical centre, but had long been a centre of Jewish Kabbala. This tradition underwent changes but did not vanish until the end of the nineteenth century or even later. Besides, and among the colonial settlers, Spiritism and Freemasonry - a lodge, the “Union de Tlemcen” opened in 1860 - popped up. Last but not least, a tiny esoteric community, but well connected to Western Europe, the self-proclaimed “Cosmic Movement”, established itself locally after the arrival in 1887 of the occultist Max Theon and his wife, in Zarif, a neighborhood close to Tlemcen.

A few years ago, a collective book was issued, devoted to the “European Capitals of Esotericism” (Brach, Choné and Maillard, 2014). As pointed out by the title, none of the cities scrutinized here was situated in the East, with the partial exception of Cairo; the Egyptian capital could easily claim a leading role in the Middle East, but there might be places, like Tlemcen, that require a careful investigation.

A brief glimpse at the local esoteric landscape in Tlemcen leads one to the conclusion that partition and interaction coexist, that duality is the first issue one will focus on. The other questions this presentation will tackle are the following: how does colonial rule affect these circulations? How is rural environment taken into consideration here? And eventually to what extent can one talk about the emergence of an “esoteric milieu or setting” in Tlemcen? By setting, one means a space defined by a shared esoteric culture around specific activities, institutions and loci.

Arthur Shiwa Zárate (University of Wisconsin—USA): “Worlds Unseen: Islamic Reform and Euro-American Spiritualism and Psychical Research in Mid-Twentieth-Century Egypt”

Since the publication of Timothy Mitchell’s seminal *Colonizing Egypt* (1988), scholars have devoted great attention to charting the spread of rationalizing state practices and ideologies to Egypt. Indeed, far less scholarly attention has been afforded to trends in modern Egyptian history that do not fit comfortably within the rationalizing logics of the state and the modern secular social sciences. As a window into such trends, this paper explores a vibrant world of the “Unseen” (*al-ghayb*) in colonial and postcolonial Islamic Reform in Egypt—a term used in the Qur’ân to describe God’s hidden world of mysteries, which includes the human spirit, *jinn*, angels, heaven, hell, and the Last Day, whose ultimate nature is reportedly inaccessible to human reason. To do this, it examines the writings of a number of early to mid-twentieth century Egyptian Muslim reformers who engaged and debated Euro-American spiritualism and psychical research in Arabic. It focuses specifically, however, on the writings of Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1996), a onetime leading intellectual of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Like their Euro-American interlocutors, the Egyptian Muslim reformers whose writings I explore in this paper discussed at length séances, spirit mediums, and channeled spirits, as well as seemingly supernatural occurrences (*khanāriq al-‘adā*), including

cases of healing effected by prayer, clairvoyance, telepathy, and reported human encounters with the spirits of the dead and *jinn*—God created spirit like entities born of fire who at times guide humans and, at others, lead them astray. Together these writings give shape to an Unseen world in Egyptian Islamic Reform—one informed by logics that overlap with, but often transcend, the limits of rationalist ideologies and practices.

This paper charts a history of the Unseen in Islamic Reform by considering the theological stakes of spiritualism and psychical research for these Muslim reformers, as well as the ontological assumptions at play in their attribution of agency in human history to *jinn*, spirits, and other unseen beings. Along the way, it shows how the unique qualities of spiritualist “science” allowed Egyptian Muslim reformers to harness it to their project of demonstrating that knowledge yielded through experimental methods and knowledge yielded through revelation were not mutually exclusive. It also shows how Muslim reformers not only borrowed from the epistemological authority of this science, but also drew upon Islamic theological discourses to contribute to and “correct” the work of their Euro-American interlocutors. Indeed, Muslim reformers claimed a range of Islamic precedents for the phenomena reported by spiritualists and psychical researchers, and often deemed revelation’s epistemological authority to be superior than spirit science when it came to understanding the functioning of the Unseen. I thus argue that the spread of spiritualism and psychical studies to the Middle East testifies not to the erosion of revelation’s epistemological value for Muslim reformers, but rather to the ability of Islamic discourses to assimilate and redirect modes of scientific inquiry for theological purposes.

Marco Pasi (University of Amsterdam—Netherlands): “Aleister Crowley and Islam”

Not much has been written on the relationship between one of the most prominent personalities of modern Western esotericism, Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), and Islam. Yet, this relationship was important to Crowley and is now significant for understanding his views on religions, as well as some particular aspects of the religious tradition he himself initiated, Thelema. Crowley had close contacts with various forms of Islam during the extensive travels he made in his life, particularly in India, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia. In his works, he often expresses admiration and fascination for Islamic culture, which he compares favourably to other religious traditions, particularly Christianity, but also Hinduism. Some of his opinions mirror ideas that were relatively widespread in Victorian Britain. The paper will start with a comparison between Thelema and Islam, focusing on analogies and similarities, but also differences. This will show the extent of the influence that Crowley’s contact – both direct and indirect – with Islam had on the shaping of his own religious movement. In the second part, the paper will focus on the broader cultural meaning of Crowley’s views on Islam, with respect to aspects such as politics, gender, and sexuality. Particular attention will be given to the influence that the British explorer and orientalist Richard Burton (1821-1890) had on Crowley with respect to Islam. Many of the opinions Crowley expressed were clearly modelled on Burton, who had been one of his “heroes” since his childhood years and a constant inspiring figure throughout his life. In this second part I will also focus more closely on the interest Crowley had for Sufism, and compare it with the similar interest Burton had, as it shows for instance in his poem *Kasidah*.

Dilek Sarmis (CETOBaC—France): “Associating and Sharing Esotericisms: The Academic Ways and Issues of Generalizing Tasavvuf to other Spiritualities in Early Republican Turkey”

This paper will focus on an intellectual construction of *tasavvuf* as an academic object in Turkey: this is made through a particular historicization of the Islamic mystical tradition in connection and association with other mystical traditions. I will focus on the book *Tasavvuf tarihi*, a work which forms at the time of its publication the basis of a teaching of the republican faculty of theology opened in 1924. The scholar Mehmet Ali Ayni (1868-1945) built its object of study according to an epistemic delimitation of relocating the “mystic” (*tasavvuf*) historically and

conceptually, comparing and associating, like the scholarly Western orientalism that he exploits, mystics of various traditions. His enterprise responds to several dynamics: the construction of university chairs and academic knowledge, the historicization and objectification of religion, and the nationalization of religious references. Thus the teaching of history of mysticism occurs within the framework of historicizing traditional Islamic knowledge, and collaborates on the academic heritage of Sufism during a period that sees the closure and ban of tekkes and confraternities, which intervene very soon after the first publication of this book. This teaching also matches a modification of the scientific approaches of the new Faculty of Theology, whose prerogatives and missions were different from those of classical *medrese* before the reform of 1914. It is characterized epistemologically by a mystical-philosophical indiscernability which is incarnated in writings on the *tasawwuf* within the Faculty of Theology. Inducing an interesting referentiality of Islamic esotericism, it constitutes spiritualism as a juncture between republican academic issues and classical heritage.

Johanna Kühn (University of Goettingen—Germany): “Christian Angel Tarots, Reiki Healing Sessions and Vortex meditation: Local Interpretations of Globalized Esoteric Practices in Beirut, Lebanon”

Various forms of yoga and meditation as well as different energy-based healing methods have made their way around the globe. Especially in urban centers, yoga places, meditation groups and alternative healers seem to be mushrooming. While the majority of literature focuses on aspects of ‘new age’ practices in Europe and North America, comparatively little has been written about the perception of these esoteric practices among non-Christians in other parts of the world. This paper aims at addressing the aforementioned research gap by focusing on contemporary esoteric practices in Lebanon’s capital Beirut. It asks how globalized meditation and healing practices which are based on Western Christian esotericism or Western interpretation of Buddhist and Hinduist practices are perceived by Lebanese practitioners coming from Muslim or Druze backgrounds. How do the practitioners understand these practices in contrast or relation to the established and institutionalized forms of their religions? In which ways do the meditation and healing groups offer spaces of mutual exchange between Christian and Muslim esoteric belief systems? And how do the interlocutors integrate the esoteric practices (from other religious backgrounds) into their daily religious and spiritual routine?

The paper is based on data acquired through ethnographic fieldwork in Beirut, Lebanon. The data consists of semi-structured narrative interviews and informal conversations with the respective practitioners as well as participant observation of meditation groups and healing sessions. Furthermore, I analyze discursive material such as social media content and websites of practitioners. The research design is inspired by the Grounded Theory, more precisely of Charmaz’s interpretation and combination of Grounded Theory and ethnographic fieldwork.

The research shows that the interlocutors have diverging perceptions of the Western esoteric practices. Some explicitly integrate the practices in their (Muslim or Druze) religious belief systems by emphasizing shared religious ideas, figures and practices between Christianity and Islam. Others draw a clear line between spirituality (which may root in other religions and confessions) and their own religion (*din*) and religious beliefs. Nevertheless, links between Western esoteric practices and “older” Muslim esoteric practices, such as Sufism, are rare. Instead, the interlocutors present the meditation and healing practices as something new and unrelated to other “older” (Muslim) esoteric practices. Thus, I conclude that the globalized Western esoteric practices offer the interlocutors “new” spaces of individual forms of religiosity and spirituality beside the established and institutionalized religious system and their respective agents. The open and inclusive language of these globalized esoteric practices enables the interlocutors to integrate them into their individual belief system, while avoiding conflicts with the established forms of religiosity.

Marwa Elshakry (Columbia University—USA): “The Metaphysics of Modernity: Rescripting Rationalism and Mysticism in Islam and Christianity in the Early Twentieth Century”

This paper will make a preliminary foray into modern discussions of metaphysics within world histories of philosophy, looking at the dichotomy that emerged between ideas of “rationalism” and “mysticism” in the first three or four decades after the turn of the twentieth century through the works of such diverse thinkers as Muhammad Iqbal, A.E. Affifi, Zaki Najib Mahmud, Louis Massignon, Henry Corbin, Alexandre Koyré and Bertrand Russell among others. While this is of course a vast subject, the paper will focus on two aspects in particular. Firstly, it will consider early twentieth century discussions of the rise of rationalism in Western philosophy looking at how the story of the rise of rationalism in the West after Descartes was narrated in a variety of new popular and pedagogic compendium on the history of philosophy and compare that with ideas of the “decline” of Muslim rationalism after Ash’ari and his school around the same time. It will then consider how “mysticism” emerged as a postcedent and critically rescripted philosophical category that implied a specific metaphysical orientation towards time, space and knowledge while looking at the ways in which the biographies of both Christian and Muslim “mystics” were narrated in Europe and beyond (particularly in Egypt and India) around the same time.

Liana Saif (Oxford University —UK): “What is Islamic Esotericism?”

Within the field of Western esotericism, an escalated interest in Islamic Sufi, esoteric and occult traditions is evident in the increased number of papers dedicated to them within Western-oriented anthologies with a global approach and the presence of panels in major conferences such as ESSWE (ENSIE), Renaissance Society of America annual meeting, and the Congress of Medieval Studies. This is hardly surprising, since research on Islamic occult sciences and esoteric traditions has been witnessing a renaissance in the last decade. As a fledgling field, still working through untapped archives and understudied texts, historical narratives in the field risk adopting cognitive and semantic structures that introduce an element of anachronistic mythologizing.

This paper takes advantage of the aforementioned interest and the current trends in de-stabilising the “western” and “esotericism” in Western esotericism, to ask whether we can apply the term “esotericism” to describe Islamic esoteric, occult, mystic discourses? The preliminary answers that will be presented result from (1) challenging the “regional methodologies” dominating the discussion: West vs East and instead looking at entanglements that generate connected pluralities in a comparative approach, now highlighting multi-directional processes; (2) loosening the grip of 19th- and 20th-century imagination of the historical narrative of “Islamic esotericism”, yet still maintaining this conceptualisation as an adaptation of a malleable discourse (practice and doctrine). It also requires adapting our eyes to reading the influential Perennialist and Traditionalist sources more as primary texts and less as secondary on the Islamic side of the story.

This paper is an invitation to consider a fresh theoretical and methodological template for the study of Islamic esotericism.

Boaz Huss (Ben Gurion University—Israel): “Kabbala and Sufism: Connection, Comparison and Mystification”

Since the early 19th century, Western theologians and scholars have discussed the historical connections between Kabbalah and Sufism, compared between them, and regarded them as the mystical trends of Judaism and Islam. While some scholars, such as Gershom Scholem, downplayed the historical connections between Kabbalah and Sufism, some contemporary scholars of Kabbalah emphasize the connections between these Jewish and Muslim traditions. While the extent of the historical connections between Kabbalah and Sufism was debated, the idea that

both traditions are expressions of the spiritual and mystical aspects of the Jewish and Islamic tradition was accepted by almost all scholars. The perception of Kabbalah and Sufism as the spiritual and mystical forms of Islam and Judaism was accepted also in Western esoteric circles, and today, is very prevalent in New Age and contemporary spiritual movements. The paper will review historical and comparative studies on Kabbalah and Sufism and examine the development of the notions of Kabbalah and Sufism as forms of universal spirituality and mysticism. I will discuss the history and the ideological and political significance of the scholarly debates concerning the connections between Kabbalah and Sufism. I will further discuss the history of the identification of Kabbalah and Sufism as forms of mysticism, and analyze the historical and cultural contexts of the “mystification” of Kabbalah and Sufism.