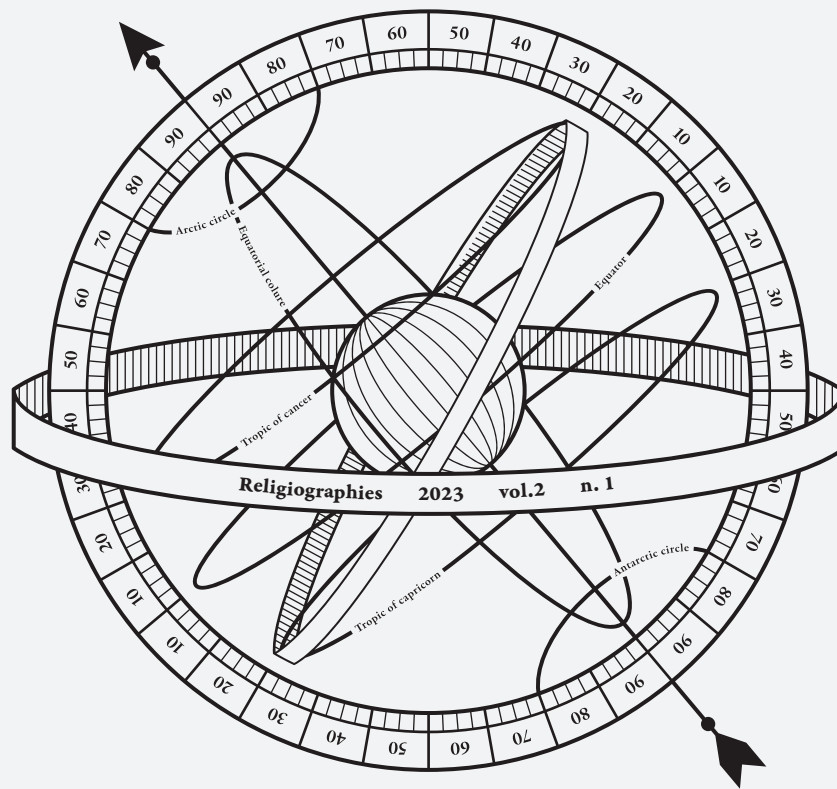


Religiographies



Special Issue
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edited by
Marco Pasi

Heterography 1:

*Hans Thomas Hakl: Personal
Reminiscences*

Joscelyn Godwin



CENTRO STUDI
DI CIVILTÀ E SPIRITUALITÀ
COMPARATE

fondazione
GIORGIO CINI ONLUS

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My first encounter with Thomas Hakl was through the book trade, and since this figures so largely in his life, I must mention the relevant episode in my own. From 1988 until 1992 I ran a small mail-order business for second-hand books on esoteric topics. The object was to overhaul my own library—always a working, rather than a bibliophile's collection—and to exhaust my passion for antiquarian bookshops. Some friends gave me their mailing lists; a local printer made up my typed catalogues. Inspired by those titans of the trade, Todd Pratum and Robert A. Gilbert, I wrote descriptions and comments on each book, while promoting my own works on the back covers.

Thomas ordered 28 books from my second catalogue, of which unfortunately all but six were already sold. Undeterred, he became one of my best customers, while our correspondence widened into topics on which I was writing, such as Schwaller de Lubicz, Julius Evola, and the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor. He had insights to offer on all of these, and our commerce soon became an exchange of ideas. I was eager to meet such a knowledgeable and agreeable person, but my opportunities for crossing the Atlantic were limited. However, 1992 found me on sabbatical leave in England, and invited to participate in a conference on 6–8 April in Lyon. I suggested to Thomas that he attend, and although academic conferences were not his usual habitat, he agreed. This one was called *Le Défi magique*, organized by Massimo Introvigne, the founder of CESNUR (Center for the Study of New Religions).¹ We found much of common interest and amusement, in a conference room decorated with posters from the Belle Époque, all featuring devils. It also proved an epochal event for the academic study of Western Esotericism, for it brought together the Sorbonne contingent of Professor Antoine Faivre, the *chargé de conférences* Jean-Pierre Laurant, and Faivre's eventual successor Jean-Pierre Brach, with the young Wouter Hanegraaff, future Professor of the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam.

The next year, 1993, saw the creation of the Octagon Library as an annex to Thomas and Franziska's fine patrician house in the outskirts of Graz. Comparisons naturally came to mind with the few other esoteric libraries accessible to qualified researchers, such as Joseph Ritman's Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica in Amsterdam, which I had known of since 1984, and Oskar R. Schlag's at the Zentralbibliothek of Zürich. I was impatient to see Thomas's collection and its unique setting, but my travels took me elsewhere. Our next meeting was in August 1994, when the Amsterdam Summer University held a series of lectures on "Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times."² We were able to reconnect with Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraaff, meet Joost Ritman, and see the serious study of esotericism making inroads in the academic world, and even beyond. In the same year, Thomas published "A Short Introduction to Julius Evola" in *Theosophical History*, a journal with which I had long been associated.³ For over a decade he had been translating Evola's writings, collecting relevant materials, co-founding a publishing house (*Ansata*), and becoming the best-informed authority outside Italy on this controversial philosopher, with whom (as with the Theosophists) he shares a sympathy with the spiritual worlds of the East.

From 8–14 September 1995 Thomas attended another type of international event: the first of many "Esoteric Quests" organized by Ralph White for the New York Open Center, a holistic and broadly "New Age" institution in Manhattan. The location was the then little-known town of Český Krumlov in southern Bohemia, home of the Rosenberg family and rich in associations with late Renaissance alchemy and magic. The title of the

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Proceedings published in two volumes: Jean-Baptiste Martin and François Laplantine, eds., *Le défi magique: ésotérisme, occultisme, spiritisme*, and Jean-Baptiste Martin and Massimo Introvigne, eds., *Le défi magique: satanisme, sorcellerie* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1994).

2

Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, eds., *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

3

H. T. Hansen [pseudonym], "A Short Introduction to Julius Evola," trans. E. E. Rehmus, *Theosophical History*, V/1 (1994): 11–22.

conference, “The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited,” and the subsequent volume of papers⁴ honored the pioneering research of Frances A. Yates, of London’s Warburg Institute.⁵ Thomas was now able to meet some of my British friends, already known to him through their publications: Adam McLean, founder of the *Hermetic Journal* and publisher of the Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks (a collection of alchemical texts), Christopher McIntosh, authority on the Rosicrucian movements, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, authority on esoteric movements in the Germanic world, and John Michell, contrarian philosopher, antiquarian, and geometrician. The auditors were mostly Americans, paying for an experience that combined lectures and workshops with immersion in the *genius loci*. In this convivial atmosphere Thomas’s circle of contacts became ever wider, and our correspondence afterwards ever more fascinating, at least to me. I wanted to capitalize on the growing excitement over these studies and on the international network of which we were a part.

In his book on Eranos, Thomas records the next event, a “winter house party” from 3–10 January 1997, and names the ten participants who gathered there from six different countries. Thanks to an English charity, the Landmark Trust, I was able to hire the Villa Saraceno, a Palladian villa near Vicenza that is under their care.⁶ It was another magical setting, especially in winter with the log fire blazing in the frescoed salone. The purpose was to share our current interests and enjoy the informal conversations and good cheer of which public conferences never offer quite enough. A chef provided our lunches, and for the other meals we depended on our own skills, in some cases admirable. Another object was to mix established scholars with younger ones, and academics with independent scholars. I have already mentioned Antoine Faivre, Jean-Pierre Brach, Wouter Hanegraaff, and Christopher McIntosh. The others were Deborah Forman (then working with the State University of New York Press, unique in having a series in Western Esoteric Traditions), David Fideler (founder of the Phanes Press and of the journal *Alexandria*), Mark Stavish (future author of many books on

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Some presentations published as: Ralph White, ed., *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited* (Hudson: Lindisfarne Press, 1999).

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Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972).

6

See the website https://www.landmarktrust.org.uk/landmark-italia/italia_villa_saraceno/.



The “Palladian Academy” at Villa Saraceno, January 9, 1997. From left to right: David Fideler, Christopher McIntosh, Mark Stavish, Thomas Hakl, Deborah Forman, Jean-Pierre Brach, Wouter Hanegraaff, Joscelyn Godwin. Photograph © Antoine Faivre. Collection of Joscelyn Godwin.

Proceedings published as: Gianfranco de Turrís, ed., *Studi Evoliani 1998* (Rome: Fondazione Julius Evola and Europa Libreria Editrice, 1999). Includes Alessandro Grossato, “H. T. Hansen studioso di Evola,” 139–43, and H. T. Hansen, “J. Evola e la Rivoluzione Conservatrice tedesca,” 144–80.

Julius Evola, Gruppe von UR, *Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*, ed./trans. Hans Thomas Hakl - aka H. T. Hansen, Band 1, *Praktische Grundlegung der Initiation* (Interlaken: Ansata-Verlag, 1985); Julius Evola, Gruppe von UR, *Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*, ed./trans. Hans Thomas Hakl - aka H. T. Hansen, Band 2, *Schritte zur Initiation: Theorie und Praxis des höheren Bewusstseins* (Bern: Ansata-Verlag, 1997); Julius Evola and the UR Group, *Introduction to Magic*, trans. Guido Stucco, ed. Michael Moynihan, vol. 1, *Rituals and Practical Techniques for the Magus* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2001); Julius Evola, Gruppe von UR, *Introduction to Magic*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin, foreword by Hans Thomas Hakl, vol. 2, *The Path of Initiatic Wisdom* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2019); Julius Evola, Gruppe von UR, *Introduction to Magic*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin, vol. 3, *Realizations of the Absolute Individual* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions 2021); vol. 3 in German forthcoming.

Richard Caron, Joscelyn Godwin, Wouter J. Hane-graaff and Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, eds., *Ésotérisme, gnosés & imaginaire symbolique: mélanges offerts à Antoine Faivre* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001). Includes Hans Thomas Hakl, “Die Magie bei Julius Evola und ihre philosophischen Voraussetzungen,” 415–36.

Hans Thomas Hakl, *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos. Unbekannte Begegnungen von Wissenschaft und Esoterik. Eine alternative Geistesgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Bretten: scientia nova Verlag Neue Wissenschaft, 2001); Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, trans. Christopher McIntosh with the collaboration of Hereward Tilton (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013); Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: Nabel der Welt, Glied der goldenen Kette. Die alternative Geistesgeschichte. Zweite und wesentlich erweiterte Auflage* (Gaggenau: H. Frietsch Verlag—scientia nova Verlag Neue Wissenschaft, 2015).

experiential esotericism), and Marco Pasi, then starting a career in esoteric studies which would lead to directing the program at the University of Amsterdam. Thomas gave an encyclopedic talk about the history of secret and occult movements in Italy, from Raimondo di Sangro to Piero Fenili, and his connections brought us a visit from Vittorio Fincati, another expert in that field. Mark Stavish directed a closing ritual, Ficino style, with the Orphic Hymn to Jupiter, who we felt had been the presiding deity over an extraordinary week.

Mentioning so many names has been inevitable to give even a slight impression of Thomas’s own network; and who knows how that extends through his business contacts from Switzerland to China, and through the magical schools of Italy? I was to get a glimpse of the latter during the centenary commemorations of Julius Evola’s birth. These included a conference sponsored by the Cultural Department of the Region of Lombardy, held in Milan on 27–28 November 1998, at which we both gave papers.⁷ Here I saw Thomas at ease in yet another environment, and benefited from his introductions to Italian scholars and potential publishers. Soon afterwards I would become involved with the translation of the papers of the Gruppo di Ur, a project completed over two decades later with the English edition of the third and final volume, simultaneously with Thomas’s translation of the same into German.⁸

In all this time I had never been on Thomas’s home ground. It was only in July 1999, during a European tour with my son, that I was able at last to meet his wife Franziska, see the Octagon, and walk with Thomas and Ari (the hound) on their beloved mountains. I was almost overwhelmed by the wealth of sources in the library, which greatly aided my current project: an essay for the Festschrift to be presented to Antoine Faivre in September 2001 on his retirement from the Sorbonne chair.⁹

David Fideler had humorously christened the Villa Saraceno gathering the “Palladian Academy,” but it was not clear whether it had any future until Thomas took the initiative. He reconvened it from 13–17 June 2000 at a quiet retreat in the wine country of Styria, near the Austrian-Slovenian border. Jean-Pierre Laurant and Claire Fanger joined this party, as did Nicholas and Clare Goodrick-Clarke. A third European chair in esoteric studies (after Paris and Amsterdam) would later be founded for Nicholas at the University of Exeter. One highlight was a bus-trip to the Octagon Library, which surpassed all expectations from those who had only heard about it. Another was a surprise feast served after a steep walk in a remote alpine meadow.

The Palladian Academy took on fresh energy when Rosalie Basten appeared, like a good fairy waving her wand. She offered it the hospitality of her Templar castle, the Domaine de Taurenne, near Aups in the south of France. This brought a higher level of luxury to the sessions, with sumptuous meals and a private concert by a string quartet in the castle yard. A newcomer at the session of 23–29 June 2002 was Arthur Versluis of Michigan State University, who had just founded the Association for the Study of Esotericism (ASE) and was planning to hold regular academic conferences. His example sparked intense discussions among the European members, who in this and subsequent meetings laid the foundations for what would become the ESSWE (European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism).

Thomas, always self-effacing in these gatherings, had meanwhile published *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos*.¹⁰ This was a major scholarly work

about a more famous “academy,” the Eranos conferences and their participants, which Christopher McIntosh translated into English. In October 1996 Thomas had also launched the thrice-yearly periodical *Gnostika*¹¹ which continues to this day, unique in the German-speaking world. After the demise in 1999 of *Gnosis Magazine*, there was no rival in any language for *Gnostika*’s coverage of the whole esoteric landscape, historical and contemporary. Thomas’s regular survey of current events and recent publications in several languages is always the first place to turn, while every issue reveals some unknown document or arcane work from his library.

My later opportunities to meet Thomas were at the Taurenne symposium from 28 June–2 July 2004, the first ESSWE conference in Tübingen (19–22 July 2007),¹² and a conference at the Cini Foundation in Venice, organized by Alessandro Grossato (“Forme e correnti dell’esoterismo occidentale,” 29–30 October 2007).¹³ At the latter two, which were academic events with large audiences, Thomas gave papers on aspects of modern Italian esotericism, again based on his own ever-growing archives, and he returned to speak at the third ESSWE conference in Szeged (6–10 July 2011).¹⁴ With the launch of ESSWE in Europe and ASE in the United States, and the publication by E. J. Brill of the *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, edited by Wouter Hanegraaff with the collaboration of Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek, and Jean-Pierre Brach (and contributions by Thomas and myself),¹⁵ our field took its rightful place as an interdisciplinary area of investigation, largely but not exclusively within the Humanities. I last saw Thomas at the ESSWE conferences in Erfurt (1–3 June 2017) and Amsterdam (2–4 July 2019), by which time the discipline had fulfilled our dreams of thirty years earlier, and the torch had been taken up by a younger generation.

Many of these younger scholars and friends contributed to an astounding production of Thomas’s recent years: the four-volume set *Octagon*, one volume in each of German,¹⁶ English,¹⁷ Italian,¹⁸ and French.¹⁹ Partially inspired by the trilingual Festschrift for Antoine Faivre, this is a tribute to the influence of Thomas’s library by 94 contributors who have benefited from or admired it; and perhaps even more, a tribute to his own personality and generosity of spirit. For while Thomas has done so much to further research and impartial scholarship, he is part of the esoteric tradition itself. As such, he joins an august company of bibliophilic scholar-initiates, stretching from the fifteenth-century Neoplatonist Nicholas of Cusa, whose books are still at the Sankt-Nikolaus Hospital in Kues, Germany, to the Shaivite musicologist Alain Daniélou, whose collection is already at the Cini Foundation in Venice; to be joined—hopefully many years hence—by Thomas’s own.

11

Dr. Wolfram Frietsch unter Mitarbeit von Dr. H. T. Hakl, eds., *Gnostika: Zeitschrift für Symbolsysteme* (AAGW Archiv für Altes Gedankengut und Wissen, 1996-present).

12

Included Hans Thomas Hakl, “Die Römische Tradition,” contribution to panel on Neopaganism.

13

Proceedings published as: Alessandro Grossato, ed., *Forme e correnti dell’esoterismo occidentale* (Milan: Edizioni Medusa, 2008). Includes Hans Thomas Hakl, “Adonismo – l’adorazione di Adone e Didone. La storia intrigante di un culto magico-pagano del XX secolo in Austria, Germania e Cecoslovacchia,” 191–204.

14

Hans Thomas Hakl, “The Hermetic Symbolism of Julius Evola.”

15

Hans Thomas Hakl contributed articles on Dürckheim; Evola; Fraternitas Saturni; Heindel.

16

Octagon, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, Band 1, *Die Suche nach Vollkommenheit, im Spiegel einer religionswissenschaftlichen, philosophischen und im besonderen Maße esoterischen Bibliothek* (Gaggenau: scientia nova Verlag Neue Wissenschaft, 2015).

17

Octagon, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, vol. 2, *The Quest for Wholeness, mirrored in a library dedicated to religious studies philosophy and esotericism in particular* (Gaggenau: scientia nova Verlag Neue Wissenschaft, 2016).

18

Octagon, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, vol. 3, *La ricerca della totalità, riflessa in una biblioteca dedicata alla Storia delle religioni, alla filosofia et, soprattutto, all’esoterismo* (Gaggenau: scientia nova Verlag Neue Wissenschaft, 2017).

19

Octagon, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, vol. 4, *La recherche de perfection, dans une collection d’ouvrages dédiée, en particulier, aux travaux sur la religion, la philosophie et surtout l’esotérisme* (Gaggenau: scientia nova Verlag Neue Wissenschaft, 2018).