Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe

Brill's Studies in Intellectual History

VOLUME 186

Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe

Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities

By

Kocku von Stuckrad

BRILL

CONTENTS

PART THREE

INTERFERENCES

PREFACE

Begriffe ohne Anschauung sind leer; Anschauungen
ohne Begriffe sind blind.

Immanuel Kant

This is a book about junctures. I have always been fascinated by the
way people make differentiations and distinctions. Of course, this is a
necessary procedure if we want to find our place in the world; at the
same time, it is a highly complex maneuver, with arbitrary elements
and structures, the full power of which is usually outside our aware-
ness. If we look at these processes on a larger scale, on the level of
groups, communities, and even societies, we see the same maneuvers
and strategies at work, and it is the task of the scholar to critically
engage these processes of identity-building—even if he or she is part
of the structures and thus never really independent of them.

European identities are a complex phenomenon. While Westerners
like to portray themselves as rational, enlightened, and scientifically
enhanced inhabitants of the modern world, recently such a narrative
of modernity has been called into question, making room for a more
nuanced analysis. The customary narrative does not explain the con-
tinued presence and power of religious identities in western Europe,
a fact that reveals a transformation of religion rather than a process
of secularization during the past three hundred years. What is more,
if we put these processes into historical perspective, we see that the
terms and concepts that are applied in order to distinguish the 'mod-
ern mind' from pre-modern or non-Western conditions are in fact of
very recent origin and charged with a high degree of polemic. They
are the result of a post-Enlightenment *process of disjunction*: in an
ideology of modernity, European thinkers differentiated magic and
religion from science, Hermeticism from rationality, astrology from
astronomy, alchemy from chemistry, and so on. It would be wrong
to assume a conscious decision here; rather, what we see at work is
the power of a newly emerging episteme, that is—according to Michel
Foucault—a general and undeniable agreement about what can be
reasonably thought about the world. This episteme and the discourse
related to it have had an impact on all areas of society, including the

historical narratives that were set up to justify the superiority of the modern world. At the same time, it provoked counter-reactions that idealized the non-Western and premodern worlds as powerful alternatives to the modern West. It is this dialectic that has shaped modern Europe, even if the key terms of European "spirit," identified by Karl Jaspers in 1947 as "freedom, history, and science," are still functioning as normative identity markers.

This book is not a tract against rationality, science, or historical understanding. It is about processes and complexities. One of the most unfortunate problems of public—and academic—debate is the misunderstanding that relativism means arbitrariness. Against this biased presentation of 'postmodern' cultural analysis and philosophy, I want to stress that relativism takes seriously the *relation* of an identifiable object with its surrounding structure. Relativism, thus, is the very opposite of 'anything goes,' because it addresses the influences that define the positions of actors, opinions, and currents in a field of networks. In contrast to realist interpretations, however, such an approach will no longer claim any knowledge that lies *beyond* those structural relations.

Informed by the thinking of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, as well as by philosophies that critique the realist position, particularly that of Richard Rorty, the chapters in this book engage the *structures* that have formed European identities. Looking at the genealogies of knowledge about 'ourselves' reveals the complexities and disjunctive processes of European history of culture. Since I am particularly interested in junctures, this book focuses on 'locations of knowledge' that have fallen prey to those strategies of 'exorcism' (Charles Zika), but which are dialectically still influential even in contemporary discourse. Between 1200 and 1800, astrology, alchemy, magic, kabbalah, experiential philosophy, and Hermeticism were integral parts of European cultures of knowledge; they were involved in a plural field of knowledge claims, in which various actors claimed superiority and competed for recognition and social capital. Although this pluralism was highly polemical, the underlying polemics were not the same as those that are operative today.

The cultures of knowledge that I am engaging in this book form the material of a field of academic research that has become known as Western esotericism. After having wrestled with the concept of "Western esotericism" for years, I now prefer to talk of "esoteric discourse in Western culture." The noun "esotericism" tends to suggest that there

is an objectively identifiable 'tradition' or coherent 'system of thought and doctrine' that can be studied as a separate topic. Talking of "esoteric discourse" avoids this suggestion and puts the emphasis on the discursive operations that are at work in Western culture, including its academic study. What I am trying to show is that—in contrast to what many scholars in the field argue—the esoteric components of Western cultural history actually have not been marginalized; even in modernity they have been transformed into dialectic processes, despite—or rather, just because of—the disjunctive strategies of post-Enlightenment Europe. Viewed from a structuralist perspective, 'esoteric discourse' provides an analytical framework that helps to reveal genealogies of identities in a pluralistic competition of knowledge.

My argument unfolds on three levels. The basic level is formed by historical sources. No sound argument about genealogies and histories can be made without falling back on historical evidence; the material presented here is offered as a case study in the classic sense, which means that the selected cases should represent more than just a historical incident. They also respond to the Kantian dictum that "thoughts without content are empty." But in addition Kant argued that "intuitions without concepts are blind," which calls for a second level of analysis. Examples should serve theoretical interpretation; and they become meaningful only in combination with an explicit interpretational framework. The theory I am applying to the *exempla* is the notion of a two-fold pluralism that determines European history of religion. On a third level of analysis I turn a critical eye toward the categories that have been developed in modern historical imagination. I interpret these academic tools of interpretation as formations or materializations of discourses that affect how the modern 'West' wants to see itself.

Although some chapters of this book are more theoretical, while others engage historical cases in detail, those three levels of analysis together form the red thread that runs through this study. Its structure is quite simple. Part One sketches the analytical framework of my analysis and attempts to integrate the study of esotericism into the study of European history of religion. It explains the notion of the two-fold pluralism: a pluralism of religious convictions and constructions of tradition on the one hand, and a pluralism of claims of knowledge, located in various cultural and societal systems, on the other. Part Two looks at the critical junctures between religious systems and identifies a number of 'shared passions' that fostered the development

of philosophy, science, and religion in Europe between 1200 and 1800. Some of that period's guiding ideas about the cosmos and the place of the human being in it are still visible in contemporary Western discourses. Part Three addresses the junctures that differentiate and at the same time connect various societal systems. It argues that the esoteric search for perfect knowledge had its impact on many fields of societal activity in medieval and early modern Europe; the 'interferential patterns' of esoteric truth claims are discernible in various locations of culture.

Needless to say, it is not the intention of this book to present a decisive or complete picture of esoteric discourse in Western culture. My goal is much more modest and preliminary: I want to frame the academic discussion about esotericism in a general analysis of European history of religion and make clear that when we talk about esotericism, we are actually talking about processes of identity formation on the one hand, and about the competition of knowledge claims in historical perspective on the other.

In my research for this book, I have benefited enormously from discussions with colleagues and students. The institute for the "History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents" at the University of Amsterdam, where I had the pleasure of working between 2003 and 2009, provided an excellent context for the issues addressed in this book. I want to thank Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Marco Pasi, Rob Pauls, Jacqueline Borsje, Jan Willem van Henten, Osvald Vasicek, Joyce Pijnenburg, Titus Hjelm, Kennet Granholm, and my students for fruitful and inspiring discussions.

In a wider network, discussions with colleagues have helped me to shape the ideas presented in this book. In particular, I want to thank Olav Hammer, Gustavo Benavides, Allison P. Coudert, Mark Sedgwick, Michael Stausberg, Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, Antoine Faivre, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Andreas B. Kilcher, Elliot R. Wolfson, Boaz Huss, Lawrence M. Principe, Bron Taylor, Lee Irwin, Michael Borgolte, Hartley Lachter, David Herbert, Jan N. Bremmer, Michael Bergunder, Helmut Zander, Jörg Rüpke, Steven Engler, Dylan Burns, Joshua Gentzke, and Sara Thejls. I also thank the editors of *Brill's Studies in Intellectual History* for accepting this book for the series, the anonymous reviewer for valuable suggestions, and Matthew D. Rogers for his erudite copy-editing.

Hans G. Kippenberg has been a friend and colleague over the years, and his encouragement and critical feedback remains a source of

inspiration to me. But these acknowledgments would not be complete without mentioning Regine Reincke; since she came into my life, with her intelligence, knowledge, and humor, I have experienced intense happiness. Words cannot express what I owe to her.

For parts of this book, I have made use of articles that were published earlier. Chapter 2 is based on "Whose Tradition? Conflicting Ideologies in Medieval and Early Modern Esotericism," in: Steven Engler & Gregory P. Grieve (eds.), *Historicizing 'Tradition' in the Study of Religion*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2005, 211–226. A preliminary and shorter version of chapter 3 was published as "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," *Religion* 35/2 (2005), 78–97. An earlier version of chapter 5 appeared as "Rewriting the Book of Nature: Kabbalah and the Metaphors of Contemporary Life Sciences," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 2/4 (2008), 419–442. Chapter 6 is a reworked version of "Interreligious Transfers in the Middle Ages: The Case of Astrology," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 1/1, 34–59. A version of chapter 8 appeared earlier as "Visual Gods: From Exorcism to Complexity in Renaissance Studies," *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 6 (2006), 59–85. I thank the publishing houses for granting permission to use the material for the present book.

Groningen, December 2009   Kocku von Stuckrad

PART ONE

ESOTERIC DISCOURSE AND THE EUROPEAN HISTORY
OF RELIGION

INTRODUCTION

Two basic assumptions are recurring motifs in discussions concerning the role of religion in Europe. According to the first assumption, Europe is Christian. Recent debates about the question if Turkey should join the European Union reveal how easy it is in political discourse to allude to a *Christian* community of values, a claim that contrasts with references to a *democratic* community of values which rests on laicist or agnostic identities. Some politicians even regard European democracy as an offspring of Christianity.

The second assumption states that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Europe has witnessed a remarkable secularization. Although there is a certain tension with the first assumption, many people are convinced that the decline of institutionalized Christianity has led to a de-Christianization of European society. Religion has become a matter of private taste in Europe—an ingredient of "patchwork identity" that finds its place in the biography of individuals but no longer in religious communities.

If we are to understand not only the role of religion in modern Europe, but also the course that has led to the present conditions, it is important to critically engage these presumptions. Even in a book that deals with the cultural history of Europe between 1200 and 1750 these questions are relevant, because the instruments of analysis that have been applied to 'early modern'[1] history are themselves the result of these modern discourses. Therefore, our objects of study are not only historical data but also the scholars who interpret them. In a similar vein, Anthony Grafton notes: "Anyone who hopes to grapple with Renaissance humanism or seventeenth-century historical scholarship

---

[1] In this book, I use the term 'early modern'—a term that emerged as late as the 1960s—in a vague sense, referring to the period stretching roughly from 1500 to 1750, thus from the end of 'medieval' culture to the 'Enlightenment.' This is more a matter of convenience than of interpretation. I do not link any analytical value to the term 'early modern.' Keith Thomas recalls that when he used the term "early modern" in 1976, the President of the British Academy, Sir Isaiah Berlin, had never come across it before (Thomas, *Ends of Life*, 4). For a critical assessment of these scholarly periodizations, see Herzog & Koselleck (eds.), *Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewußtsein*; Dürr et al. (eds.), *Eigene und fremde Frühe Neuzeiten*, particularly pp. 1–21. See also the introduction to chapter eight below.

[…] must engage with the lives and thoughts of its later interpreters as well."[2] In other words: we will have to look "the wrong way through the telescope" and contextualize the scholars who turn contingent historical traces into 'facts' and 'data.'[3]

This book argues that the construction of a monolithic Christian occident has been a major obstacle in our understanding of European cultural history and of the place of esotericism within it. After a brief assessment of this master narrative I will introduce a newly emerging concept of European history of religion that builds on a two-fold pluralism: a religious pluralism on the one hand, and a plurality of forms of knowledge and cultural domains on the other (chapter 1). Because the construction of 'tradition' is essential for religious and cultural identities—and, as we shall see, for esoteric discourse—I will engage that category on the basis of Jewish and Christian identity formation in early modern Europe (chapter 2). Subsequently, I will integrate the study of Western esotericism into this analytical framework (chapter 3).

Master narratives, even if they are based on historically dubious material, are capable of creating structures of power and societal realities. In fact, that is what makes a narrative a master narrative! The condensation of thought-patterns into social and historical structures is a key element of discourse theory. Because of their often vague usage, the concepts 'discourse' and 'field'—which I use repeatedly in this book—are in need of some explanation. I apply the term *discourse* in the way Michel Foucault and others have coined it, i.e. as the totality of thought-systems that interact with societal systems in manifold ways.[4] *Discursive formations* conceptualize the impact of and mutual

---

[2] Grafton, *Bring Out Your Dead*, 15.

[3] I borrow this expression from Peter Laslett, "The Wrong Way through the Telescope"; see also Kippenberg, "Response: 'The Wrong Way through the Telescope.'" The problematic status of 'facts,' however, should not lead us to the disbanding of the category 'history'; see von Stuckrad, "Relative, Contingent, Determined," and below chapter 10.

[4] Engler, "Discourse," provides a useful overview of the various usages of the term. On Foucault and the application of his theory in the academic study of religion, see Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*. Still one of the best introductions to Foucault's concept of discourse is his 1970 inaugural address at the *Collège de France, L'ordre du discours* (see particularly pp. 10–12), as well as Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*. Wouter J. Hanegraaff has used this concept, with special regard to the strategy of *excluding* and *forbidding*, as a way to analyze esotericism; see Hanegraaff, "Forbidden Knowledge," 228.

dependency between systems of interpreting the world and processes of institutionalization and materialization. Talking of *discursive events* elucidates the fact that discourses are themselves practices that influence non-discursive elements. Discursive relations are power-relations, which means that the term 'discourse' refers not only to contents of frameworks of meaning, but also to instruments of power.

Another term that figures prominently in my analysis is the concept of *field*. Pierre Bourdieu defines a field as a social arena within which struggles or maneuvers take place over specific resources and the access to them. Hence, a field should be understood as

> a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of a species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relations to other positions (domination, homology, etc).[5]

The field, hence, is a structured system of social positions, occupied either by individuals or institutions, the nature of which defines the situation for their occupants. Put differently: The field is a space of action or struggle;[6] the struggle is over forms of capital in the field. What is important is the fact that any individual or institution—a "player" on the field[7]—occupies a certain position on the various fields of the society, a position that is determined by the agent's access to forms of capital. Each field, by virtue of its defining content, has a different logic and an axiomatic structure of necessity and relevance

---

[5] Bourdieu & Wacquant, *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 97. See also Wacquant, "Towards a Reflexive Sociology," 39; for an overview of Bourdieu's "generative structuralism" that builds on the concepts of field, habitus, and capital, see Rey, *Bourdieu on Religion*, 39–56; Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, 84–99; Urban, "Sacred Capital." I will come back to this theory in chapter 3, when I address Bourdieu's concept of social capital.

[6] Although coming from a different perspective, Burkhard Gladigow arrives at a similar conclusion: "Cooperation and complementarity, polemic and dialogue, exclusion and inclusion of systems and among the carriers of these systems should best be described as a 'field'" (Gladigow, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte," 28; if not noted otherwise, all translations from languages other than English are mine); cf. also Mörth, *Die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit von Religion*, as a field-theory that differs from Bourdieu's and Gladigow's.

[7] It is important to note that scholars today are also players on fields of discourse; see von Stuckrad, "Discursive Study of Religion," and chapter 10 below.

that is both the product and producer of the habitus which is specific
and appropriate to the field. The notion of fields results in a better
recognition of the social relations and of social analysis; what is more,
it integrates the level of (rational) action into the analysis of societal
discourses.

The concepts of discourse and field, but also other notions that
have been developed in post-structuralist thinking—network, transfer,
juncture, interference, etc.—are important analytical tools for coming
to terms with the dynamics of European history of religion and cul-
ture, as well as with the function of esotericism within this framework.
One aim of this book is to critically engage strategies of *singulariza-
tion*[8] and to formulate an alternative model of interpretation that is
based on *pluralism*, acknowledging the fact that the Other is continu-
ously produced by the Own and that it thus is part of a shared field
of discourse.

---

[8] On the concept of 'singularization' see Gladigow, "Meaning/Signification"; Smith,
"Religion, Religions, Religious."

EUROPE AND THE CHRISTENDOM NARRATIVE:
FROM SINGULARIZATION TO PLURALISM

> Wer Europa historisch begreifen will, muß aner-
> kennen, daß seine Vielfalt keinen Pluralismus der
> Gleichgültigkeit hervorgebracht hat, sondern daß
> sich seine kulturellen Formationen in ständigem
> Bezug aufeinander anpaßten, wandelten oder auch
> abstießen.
>
> Michael Borgolte

The Secularization Theory Revisited

Well into the twentieth century, it has been the expectation of the majority of scholars that religions will sooner or later disappear from the modern world.[1] Scholars based their expectation on the assumption that in the wake of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment the rational and scientific worldview would ultimately lead to a decline of religious truth-claims. We have been told that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the rise of modern science, the separation of church and state, industrialization, and individualization have led to an inescapable secularization and a disenchantment of the world. In these scenarios, Europe was regarded as the 'normal case,' representing a development that sooner or later would seize the rest of the world.

Much to the surprise of sociologists and scholars of religion, the past thirty years have witnessed a remarkable revival of religious identity claims. Religions entered the public spheres and became strong identity markers both for individuals and for communities. In the name of religious traditions people raised political claims and interpreted history with reference to an ongoing global apocalyptic scenario, to a struggle between 'good' and 'evil,' or to the conviction that the project

---

[1] See, e.g., Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind*; Wilson, *God's Funeral.*

of modernity has utterly failed. Often, these claims went hand in hand with violent action or even terrorism.

Scholars of religion have responded to this development by adjusting their older models of interpretation.[2] A number of them now tend to limit the process of secularization to Europe. For Peter L. Berger, the world today is massively religious, with two exceptions—Europe and the intellectuals and academics that are educated in the West.[3] This notion inverts the older assumption that North America is the exception, while Europe is the rule; in contrast to Europe, in the United States religion has remained a powerful element of society, lending vitality and ethos to democracy. Berger is not the only one who regards Europe as an exceptional case. Hartmut Lehmann has recently approached secularization as "*Europäischen Sonderweg.*"[4] He considers Europeans' relation to religion to be broken in many ways, which becomes evident if we compare Europe to non-European cultures; European languages are replete with terms that reveal a critical distancing from religion; pre-Christian ancient cultures have become part of education and identity; and political ideologies that criticize religion have gained the upper hand.

Another voice in this debate is Grace Davie. She puts Europe in a global context and states that with regard to modern parameters of faith Europe is an "exceptional case"—"a statement that many Europeans find hard to accept in that it flies in the face not only of their own experience, but of deeply embedded assumptions. Europeans are prone to believe that what they do today everyone else will do tomorrow."[5] What we see in Europe is an increasing tension between "belief" and "practice"—a dramatic decline of participation in church activities on the one hand, and a high degree of individual religious beliefs on the other. Her slogan for this development is "believing without belonging." As an explanation Davie suggests that religion has become a public actor in civil society that people support without combining this support with an active participation in institutionalized churches. In this context she speaks of "vicarious religion": "Could it be that Euro-

---

[2] One of the best available discussions of secularization theory and its successors is David Herbert's "Rethinking Secularization," pp. 29–61 of his *Religion and Civil Society*.

[3] Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World*, 9.

[4] Lehmann, *Säkularisierung*.

[5] Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case*, ix.

peans are not so much less religious than populations in other parts of the world, but—quite simply—differently so?"[6] It may be noted, however, that a comparison with non-European religions will need more parameters and concepts than 'belief,' 'faith,' and 'belonging' (and parameters derived from these). In the Middle East, for instance, religious communities have increasingly gained influence and have become the source of a new communalism.[7] Even for Europe it may be asked whether the (Protestant) category of 'faith' is sufficient to grasp the role of religion in modern and pre-modern society. For one, the twentieth century has seen the formation of communities beyond the precincts of institutionalized churches; in addition, a main argument of the present book is that communities have repeatedly been built on intellectual networks and even imaginal traditions during the past eight hundred years of European history. Viewed from this perspective, the neat distinction between "believing" and "belonging" turns out to be part of a singularizing discourse that regards the active commitment within an institutionalized 'Church' as the key parameter for measuring religiosity. I do not deny that religion and its role in public life has changed in Europe over the last two hundred years, perhaps even in a dramatic way; but the new role of religion should not be described as mere "memory" or as "vicarious religion" because this unwillingly essentializes a 'pure' form of 'real' religion.[8]

An interesting position is adopted in a volume edited by Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf.[9] After having differentiated Christianity

---

[6] Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case*, 19. See also *eadem, Religion in Britain since 1945*, and *eadem, Religion in Modern Europe*, 24–97, where she elaborates the concept of "vicarious memory." This argument works particularly in contexts where churches are active in civil society, such as in Scandinavia; it has less power of explanation in other areas, such as the former Soviet states.

[7] Cf. the example of Lebanon, analyzed by Samir Khalaf, "The Radicalization of Communal Loyalties."

[8] Davie bases her argument that Europe is an exceptional case on the results of the European Values Study, carried out by the University of Tilburg. The statistics she uses (see *Europe: The Exceptional Case*, 6–7) seem to underscore her interpretation. But if one considers the whole spectrum of statistics that this project yields, the only conclusion can be that it is impossible to come to a general assessment of the situation in Europe. France has the highest amount of atheists (but even here only 15 percent); three quarters of the population of Northern Ireland believe in hell, the same number of Croatians in angels; one third of the Turks believe in reincarnation. In addition, positions regarding issues such as homosexuality, abortion, women's emancipation, xenophobia, etc. diverge to such a degree that a common ethical denominator is hardly to be seen. See Halman et al. (eds.), *Atlas of European Values*.

[9] McLeod & Ustorf (eds.), *Decline of Christendom in Western Europe*.

from the institutionalized church ("Christendom") they note that the separation of Christianity and state in modern constitutions has not been achieved in all European countries at the same time; while several states introduced that separation in the eighteenth century, this cannot be generalized. In Sweden, for instance, the 'Wall of Separation' was confirmed only in 2000, and in Greece this still has to be done. The enormous diversity of state-church relations in contemporary Europe should be a warning against too simple an explanation. In the introduction to a new analysis of these relations, Lucian N. Leustean remarks:

> Despite processes of secularisation and modernisation which have characterised post-war Europe, religious communities are now becoming more actively involved in the European political arena. Their influence extends from local engagement in social activities, such as education and health systems, to the reshaping of national identities and more broadly, to the emergence of a European identity. Church-state relations form the basis of contact between religious and political actors at both national and supranational level. They are at the very core of overcoming social differences and influencing the architectural evolution of the European Union.[10]

When it comes to the reasons for secularization, the explanations that have been proposed are as contested as the theory of secularization itself. Many scholars—particularly in France—have argued that secularization is the result of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Historically this assumption is doubtful, because it disregards the strong revival of Catholicism in nineteenth-century France. Another problematic assumption—this time popular in Germany—claims that secularization is the result of industrialization. New historical studies reveal, however, that the age of industrialization can even be termed a new confessional age.[11]

---

[10] Leustean, "Challenges to Church-State Relations in Contemporary Europe," 248. See the complete special issue of the *Journal of Religion in Europe*. De Vries & Sullivan (eds.), *Political Theologies*, provides a cornucopia of examples for the reappearance of religion in the public sphere and the political influence that religions have today. It may be that much of this argument could be combined with a reformulated memory thesis, like Davie's.

[11] Cf., for instance, Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society*, who notes that in the British communes of Oldham and Saddleworth no changes had taken place with regard to membership in religious communities between 1740 and 1865—in a time of massive industrialization.

On closer examination the concept of secularization falls apart into independent phenomena—decreasing participation in activities of the church; transference of church institutions into the domain of the state; de-Christianization of modern culture; religious indifference.[12] Depending on what aspect of this process one focuses on, the results diverge enormously among various European countries. Therefore it seems wise to approach the term 'secularization' with ideological criticism, as Hermann Lübbe did as early as in 1965.[13] Furthermore, recent research has moved away from attempts to prove the fact of (general) secularization and focuses instead on the roots and influence of that very narrative. Callum G. Brown, for instance, has argued that in England the Christian sphere of life collapsed as late as the 'long' sixties of the twentieth century.[14] He claims that during the same period historians and social scientists massively had begun to cling to the narrative of secularization.[15]

In sum, we will have to give up presumptions about a single process of secularization in Europe.[16] Instead, we will have to look at the various aspects of these processes from the different perspectives and historiographies of church, Christianity, religion, and culture. Rather than limiting the theory of secularization to Europe—actually, to western Europe—or introducing a differentiation between faith ("believing") and religion ("belonging"), subsequently calling the decline of the latter "secularization," in my view it is more convincing to interpret the different developments in various European and non-European

---

[12] Likewise, Hartmut Lehmann notes that "the concept of secularization is a most difficult one. These difficulties are dramatically increased if one considers the competing definitions of what secularization means, or should mean […]. The concept of secularization appears, therefore, at best, as a controversial category, and at worst, as an ambiguous one, plagued by explicit simplifications and by implicit misunderstandings" ("Secularization, Transformation of Religion, or the Return of Religion," 329).

[13] Lübbe, *Säkularisierung: Geschichte eines ideenpolitischen Begriffs*. For the history of the concept, see also Bremmer, "Secularization."

[14] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*. Cf. the critique by Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case*, 20–21.

[15] Brown, "The Secularisation Decade."

[16] Or, more pathetically: "Let us therefore, once and for all, declare an end to social scientific faith in the theory of secularization, recognizing it as a product of wishful thinking" (Stark & Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 78). On p. 79, they add: "After nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophesies and misrepresentations of both present and past, it seems time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories, and there to whisper, 'Requiescat in pace.'"

countries as various responses to 'modernity.'[17] For this variety of processes Shmuel N. Eisenstadt has coined the useful term "multiple modernities."[18]

This interpretive move is in line with David Herbert's observation that the idea of secularization, although being the most influential and comprehensive theory of the relationship between religion and modernization, has been challenged by the actual development in the twentieth century, as well as by detailed historical research. The religion-modernity relation therefore should be framed in another way. To be sure, modernization "tends to weaken the power of traditional religious institutions because of the diversification of channels and forms of communication in modernity."[19] But the mediatization of modern communication does not necessarily lead to secularization.

> Rather, religion as discourse can become the central medium of public communication. And even in cases where religion does not become the dominant language of protest […] religious discourses and practices can still thrive alongside advanced technology, mass literacy and urbanization. Thus, in both cases, and to borrow Foucault's […] metaphor derived from the French Revolution, cutting off the head of the king does not destroy power but disperses it more widely through the system. Indeed, it may even intensify its disciplinary effects. So with religion, whose modern discursive power may even exceed its traditional institutionalized power.[20]

Talking of *transformations of religious discourses* between 1700 and 2000, rather than addressing these transformations as an unstoppable process of secularization, opens up new vistas for the analysis of religious dynamics in Europe. Such an approach may also shed some

---

[17] For instance, is it appropriate to call the mourning over the death of Lady Diana, Princess of Wales, a "memory of religion" or "vicarious religion," as Grace Davie does (*Religion in Modern Europe*, 61–62)? When Davie argues that "the crucial point [is] to realize […] the incompleteness of this process without the formal liturgies of mourning" (p. 79), and when she uses quotation marks when she mentions the 'shrines' that people set up as an expression of mourning, she unintentionally applies an idea of 'real religion' based on Christian theology. Why not simply call these phenomena (new) forms of religion in public spheres? The claim of authenticity is an important feature of contemporary religious discourse; as scholars we have to be careful with the terms and definitions we apply.

[18] Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities*; Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities*. See also Sachsenmaier & Riedel (eds.), *Reflections on Multiple Modernities*.

[19] Herbert, *Religion and Civil Society*, 58.

[20] Herbert, *Religion and Civil Society*, 58–59.

interesting light on the second narrative that is closely related to the theorem of secularization—the rhetoric of the "Christian occident."

Christian Occident?

In their controversial sociological account of the theory of secularization and the role of religion in Europe, Rodney Stark and Roger Finke criticize the idea that Europe is Christian from two different perspectives—"The Myth of Past Piety" and "The Failure to Christianize."[21] The historical arguments that underlie these catchy phrases are by no means new. 'Christianizing' a country usually meant baptizing its respective rulers or kings; large parts of the European population had no clue what the Christian doctrine really meant, let alone were able to translate this doctrine into their everyday life; they could not follow the Latin services and adhered to a variety of non-Christian beliefs at home.[22]

While these problems of Christianization are not controversial, more interesting is the impression that even leading clerics had difficulties with understanding the Christian message. By way of example, Stark and Finke refer to William Tyndale who complained in 1530 that no priest in England knew the Lord's Prayer or could translate it into English,[23] which was confirmed by the bishop of Gloucester after having tested his diocesan clergy in 1551. One year later, bishop Hooper admitted that the English parish clergy could not tell who was the author of the Lord's Prayer or in which text it was recorded.[24] It seems that in 1800 only twelve percent of the British population belonged to a specific religious congregation; this percentage increased to 17 percent in 1850 where it remained until 1990.[25] For Italy, Alexander Murray stated in a similar vein that the idea of a medieval 'age of belief' is absurd: "The Friars [of that era] were not typical figures in a freakish age, but, morally, freakish figures in a typical age. Their mendicant life was a lasting wonder to contemporaries. They were a

---

[21] Stark & Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 63–71 (with further literature).
[22] Many examples of religious ignorance can be found in Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (see "religion: ignorance of" in the index).
[23] We may note, however, that Tyndale's Protestant critique is clearly colored by a polemic against Catholicism and the Anglican Church.
[24] See the references in Stark & Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 65.
[25] *Ibid.*, 67.

small minority: 'Virgins are few, martyrs are few, preachers are few,' said Fra Giordano."[26]

The examples could easily be multiplied, even though—as Sharon Hanson reminds us—we should use all of them with caution and define terms such as "Church" precisely.

> Correct attention to definitional terms enables arguments to be properly categorized and evaluated. The present situation is unsatisfactory in so far as sociologists and historians leave too much for granted by way of the precise boundaries and limits of their definitional terms. Consequently, their arguments are not merely weak, they are misleading.[27]

We have to be very nuanced if we want to determine the degree of Christianization and the establishment of Christian belief-systems within and beyond the institutionalized church.

Even if there is not historical proof for catchwords such as 'Christian occident,' the question is, whether this should lead us to Stark and Finke's conclusion: "Given such clerical ignorance, it is no wonder that the masses knew next to nothing in terms of basic Christian culture."[28] The problem with such a conclusion is that it mixes Christian *doctrine* with Christian *culture* and thus subscribes—unintentionally—to concepts of religion and Christianity that are based on *textual* or theological knowledge.[29] If we consider interpretations that include *visual* and *material culture*, however, there can be no doubt that since medieval times European public spheres have been dominated by Christian symbols and rituals. Even if people could not follow Latin masses they perceived the rituals, smelled the odors of churches, witnessed the power of images and relics in processions, and thus created their own forms of Christian belief-system and ritual practice.

The conclusion, therefore, has to be qualified: It is not that Christian Europe never existed; instead, Christianity in Europe has always been diverse and comprised many forms of beliefs and practices that populated the minds of believers (and non-believers). Despite attempts at professionalization and normatization of belief, the real life of

---

[26] Murray, "Piety and Impiety in Thirteenth-Century Italy," 83 and 106, quoted from Stark & Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 67.

[27] Hanson, "Secularisation Thesis," 168. For a strong and well-argued critique of the presumed historical evidence see *ibid.*, pp. 161–168.

[28] Stark & Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 65.

[29] Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars* provides a lot of interesting evidence for the pervasive state of Christian culture in late medieval Britain.

normal people and of clerics looked quite different. Depicting these theoretically conflicting beliefs as a 'syncretism' of Christian and non-Christian elements means to partake in a singularizing discourse that presupposes a closed, pure Christian identity which is based on a few doctrinal assumptions.

Singularization also means that it is *a priori* impossible to follow more than one religion. As discursive formation the process of singularization can hardly be overestimated in European history of culture; it has led to influential concepts of the individual[30] and to juridical structures that make it impossible to be a member of different religious institutions at the same time.[31] The equation "one person—one religion" is so powerful that any blending of different belief-systems and practices is deemed undesirable or even dangerous and pathologic.

If we consider sociological research into modern religious identities, however, we should no longer talk of a closed religious identity in the twentieth century that follows the rule "one person—one religion." My thesis is that this crossover is not limited to the modern age, even if the differentiation of religious options and the possibilities to choose among them are enhanced in modern culture. In earlier times, identities were also constructed along the lines of fields of discourse, biographical narratives, and a tension between inner and outer perception. As it does not seem to create problems for Christians today to practice Zen meditation or to believe in Buddhist concepts of reincarnation and karma, in early modern times many Christians easily could pick up pantheistic thoughts or practices that officially were regarded as heretical. The minister Johann Rist (1607–1667), for instance, established in his parish in Wedel (Germany) a complex alchemical laboratory in order to search for the foundation of life. In 1664 he confessed that "[t]he pleasure [*Lust*], however, that I derive from this I can hardly put into words." When a friend criticized his alchemical practice, saying, "as a consequence the [alchemist] and his sort will become demigods," the minister tersely replied: "Why should that not be possible?"[32]

---

[30] On this topic see Sonntag, "*Das Verborgene des Herzens.*"

[31] On the 'juridicization' of religion in Europe see Kippenberg, "Europe," 136–143; Kippenberg & Schuppert (eds.), *Die verrechtlichte Religion*.

[32] See Trepp, "Im 'Buch der Natur' lesen," 103–104. Many further examples will be provided in the subsequent chapters of this book.

Religious identities are shaped through communicative processes. They are not found but negotiated.[33] In this process religious alternatives play a crucial role, because in considering other options, whether positively or negatively, persons come to form their own positions. And this process applies to individuals as well as to religious communities. Both need a deviant, 'significant' Other to define themselves. In this process slight differences are exaggerated as radical contrasts, a phenomenon that is particularly obvious in the 'high tide' of esotericism and the confessional differentiation of Christianity between 1450 and 1750. Jonathan Z. Smith persuasively argued that the confessional age also determined later processes of theological (and scholarly) Othering that declared a comparison between Christianity and ancient mystery cults utterly impossible.

> [T]he centre has been protected, the periphery seen as threatening, and relative difference perceived as absolute "other." The centre, the fabled Pauline seizure by the "Christ-event" or some other construction of an originary moment, has been declared, *a priori*, to be unique, to be *sui generis*, and hence, by definition, incomparable. The periphery, whether understood temporally to precede or follow the Pauline moment, or, in spatial terms, to surround it, is to be subjected to procedures of therapeutic comparison. This is exorcism or purgation, not scholarship.[34]

The modulations of this criticism have been intensively discussed in the humanities during the last decades,[35] but its implications have only rarely been put into practice. In other words: although that criticism is widely accepted theoretically, many scholars shrink from the consequences that lead to a new position regarding the possibility of telling a monolinear history. But one has to take them seriously. Generic definitions of 'Christianity,' 'Judaism,' or 'Islam' have to be avoided as far as possible. They are the result of a mechanism of legitimization and singularization. Single positions have to be examined for their own sake and, simultaneously, embedded in the discussions of the time.

As a next step, we have to move on from a problematization of closed Christian identities to the question how this purifying strat-

---

[33] See Kippenberg & von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, 136–146.

[34] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 143.

[35] Among the most illuminating contributions to this debate are Berger & Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*; White, *Metahistory; idem, Tropics of Discourse*; Koselleck, *Futures Past*; Müller & Rüsen (eds.), *Historische Sinnbildung*. I will come back to this discussion in chapter 10.

egy was motivated, how the master narrative of a Christian occident fostered European identities, and how it happened that this episteme formed societal realities.[36] In her thorough analysis of *Christendom and European Identity* Mary Anne Perkins relates the power of this master narrative in the twentieth century to three terms that Karl Jaspers identified in his lecture *Vom Europäischen Geist* (1947) as the basic constituents of European culture: "Freedom, history, and science."[37] On the one hand, this formula detached European identity from too close a link to Christianity (a separation that was necessary in order to find acceptance beyond institutionalized Christendom); on the other hand, Perkins is right in noting that these concepts were subsequently made into a heritage of Christian culture by leading politicians and intellectuals.

> No doubt the grand narrative [...] has been, historically, quite as seductive and potentially dangerous. It is in just such extraction from material and historical context that ideas of "nation", "Europe", and "Christendom" become susceptible to exploitation and distortion for the purposes of propaganda, or to lend credibility to ignoble projects. However, despite the degrees of inherent ambiguity and mutability associated with the term, the narrative of Christendom has achieved coherence through the endurance of certain principles, values and traditions which constitute and characterize it and to which both its main proponents and its opponents bear witness.[38]

From the perspective of discourse theory, one might say that this is a process of materialization of discursive practices in areas that are

---

[36] I use the term 'episteme' in a Foucauldian sense. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault used the concept of episteme to denote the historical *a priori* that grounds knowledge and its discourses and thus represents the condition of their possibility within a particular epoch. In later writings and interviews, he made it clear that several epistemes may co-exist and interact at the same time, being parts of various power-knowledge systems. And he links the term 'episteme' to the term 'apparatus' that he used in later writings: "I would define the *episteme* retrospectively as the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won't say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The *episteme* is the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 197).

[37] Jaspers, *Vom Europäischen Geist*. See Perkins, *Christendom and European Identity*, 331–332, with references and discussion.

[38] Perkins, *Christendom and European Identity*, 331. Later she adds: "Neither the distortions and corruptions of the Christendom narrative nor its progressive secularization have succeeded in diminishing its power to shape European consciousness, culture and socio-political relations" (p. 339).

only indirectly linked to the origin of that discourse. When the Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende addresses the topic *waarden en normen* ("values and norms"), he habitually constructs a link between democracy and Christianity.[39] This became a hot issue in summer 2004 when the European Parliament discussed the question whether the "Christian roots" should be mentioned explicitly in the preamble of a future European Constitution.[40] Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, leading advocate of such a preamble, called the "Christian roots of Europe" a "historical truth" and attested Russia's share in this heritage, which makes Russia a reasonable candidate for membership in the European Union[41]—unlike, of course, Turkey.[42]

As a result of these considerations, we will have to conclude that the notion of a "Christian occident" can only be the *object* of our analysis. It can never be an analytical *tool* for the academic study of religion. Put differently: cultural studies have to focus on the functions of these master narratives and the tropes attached to them. At the same time, however, we should be able to answer the question as to which interpretational model would be more suitable for explaining the role of Christianity and religion in European cultural history. The next passage intends to provide such a model.

The Two-Fold Pluralism

If we are to write the history of religions in Europe, there are basically two options. The first possibility is what I call an *additive* histo-

---

[39] See Balkenende et al. (eds.), *De kunst van het leven*. One may also recall the *geistig-moralische Wende* ("intellectual and moral turn") that Helmut Kohl propagated after being elected German chancellor (1982 and 1983). Naturally, in Kohl's vision of a Europe as "united in diversity," it is Christianity that plays the uniting role; see Perkins, *Christendom and European Identity*, 110.

[40] The draft Constitution referred only to the "cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe." In May 2004, representatives of the Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, and Slovakia wrote in a letter to the chair of the European Union that they wanted the "Christian roots of Europe" mentioned in the preamble. "This issue remains a priority for our governments as well as for millions of European citizens" (*The Guardian*, 25 May 2004; quoted from Perkins, *Christendom and European Identity*, 341).

[41] *European Voice*, 24–30 October 2002, 7.

[42] What this rhetoric means for European Muslims is analyzed by Talal Asad, "Muslims and European Identity." On the dialectics involved in the European construction of Islam see Nirenberg, "Islam and the West."

riography, in which the main religious traditions—Christianity and its denominations—are described side by side with the historical developments of the 'other' religions in Europe, mainly Judaism and Islam.[43] This is the traditional form of approaching the history of religions in Europe; it ultimately leads to a church history with some sort of appendix that considers the minor traditions, which have existed more or less in the shadow of mainstream Christian religion.

In recent debates, a different approach has been suggested, which can be called *integrative* and which engages the history of religions in Europe from the perspective of religious pluralism. Arguing against the assumption that European history of religion is the history of Christianity and its confessional schisms, scholars of religion began to focus on the specific dynamics of interreligious dependency as a common denominator of European culture. Religious pluralism has been a characteristic of European history since ancient times, and not only in modernity.[44] It is the presence of alternatives that has shaped Western culture. What has also been distinctive is the presence of one particular religious institution—the Roman Church—that intended to take control over all aspects of the lives of people, legitimizing its authority with reference to a transcendental order.[45] Hence, it is the tension between actual alternatives and attempts at normatization and control that created dynamics of religious development in Europe.

These alternatives include all three scriptural religions. Even during those times in which Islam was not institutionalized in western Europe, it existed as an ideological alternative to Christianity or Judaism, as did Judaism to Christianity. It was part of a shared field of discourse. This marks the difference between 'plurality' and 'pluralism': Whereas plurality stands for a simple coexistence of different religious traditions, pluralism denotes the *organization of difference*. Religious options alternative to one's own are known, are a matter of negotiation, and constitute an element of one's own identity. In constructing the Other, both parties form a discursive unit. The organization of difference then crystallizes in ecclesiastical councils, confessional

---

[43] Historiographies of this kind are Clemen, *Religionsgeschichte Europas*; Lanczkowski, *Religionsgeschichte Europas*; Elsas, *Religionsgeschichte Europas*.

[44] See Kippenberg & von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, 126–135; Kippenberg & von Stuckrad, "Religionswissenschaftliche Überlegungen"; most recently Kippenberg, "Europe," as well as Kippenberg, Rüpke & von Stuckrad (eds.), *Europäische Religionsgeschichte*.

[45] See Benavides, "Western Religion and the Self-Canceling of Modernity."

literature, constitutions, social group-formation,[46] and in political and juridical systems. In his masterful history of medieval Europe, Michael Borgolte notes: "If we want to understand Europe historically, we will have to acknowledge that its multiplicity has not led to a pluralism of indifference, but that its cultural formations were adjusted, changed, and rejected in continuous mutual reference."[47]

But not only the scriptural religions are players on these fields: memories and new forms of the pagan, polytheistic past, or pieces of religious traditions that are related to the names of Hermes Trismegistus or Zoroaster, likewise influenced the dynamic processes of European intellectual and religious history.[48] Esotericism illustrates how Christians, Jews, and Muslims became interested in alternative descriptions of the cosmos and of history that were incorporated in their own identities, either within or beyond scriptural religions. Only if we acknowledge the pluralistic reflection as characteristic of European history of religions we are able to understand these processes.

From a perspective of cultural studies this interlacing does not apply to the religious system alone. There is a second form of pluralism involved in European intellectual history. In two programmatic articles, Burkhard Gladigow argued that it is the mutual dependency of religious, philosophical, scientific, and political reflections that characterize "European history of religion" (*Europäische Religionsgeschichte*, in contrast to "history of religions in Europe"). Gladigow argues that

> [i]n the course of many centuries, philosophy and philologies presented—or revived—traditions that no longer or never had 'carriers' ['*Träger*'] (in the Weberian sense), traditions that were transmitted only in the medium of science. Renaissance, Humanism and Romanticism took their alternatives to occidental Christian culture mainly from

---

[46] As we will see repeatedly in the subsequent chapters, these groups easily transgress religious boundaries. For instance, the 'Platonic Academy' and the humanist 'Republic of Letters' are ideal constructions of an intellectual community that (partly due to the symbolic capital that it is offering) attract scholars with different religious persuasions.

[47] Borgolte, *Christen, Juden, Muselmanen*, 10. For the German original see the epigraph to this chapter.

[48] Take Zoroastrianism as an example: In his seminal *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of the figure of Zoroaster in Europe, Michael Stausberg addresses Zoroastrianism—which was present in Europe as 'mere imagination'—in such a way that "in addition to the analysis of the European view on Zoroaster from outside ("*Fremdgeschichte*") the question of the religious or historical implications and explications of this process of reception" must always be taken into account (Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, 22).

the sciences. A revived Platonism could subsequently be closely tied to Christianity—or it lived on as theory of magic and irrationalism right into the eighteenth century—; Gnostic schemes and ideas of redemption could interfere with Asian religions that were imported through philologies; a monism could melt into a Christian pantheism or constitute a new religion.[49]

In 2006, Gladigow further elaborated this concept. He now gives special attention to the process of "professionalization of religion" that tests historical and philological methods on non-Christian sources. This leads, secondly, to a pluralization of the religious field. This process culminates in the Renaissance with a new "density of intellectual communication in Europe," and in all of Europe.

> A Renaissance prince who buys the Corpus Hermeticum and pays for its translation—later to become a canonical text of religious currents of the most varied disciplines—may be seen as a characteristic of the new phase of religious options in Europe. Not only the "positive," institutionalized religions receive the attention they deserve, but also the "undercurrents," repressed patterns, "heresies," "alternatives," which could explicitly or implicitly compete with Christianity.[50]

This is an apt—though a bit generalizing[51]—description of the complex dynamics that have shaped Western identities since late medieval times, as well as a prolegomenon for the study of Western esotericism. My own understanding of these dynamics owes a lot to Gladigow's position. At two points, however, I would like to qualify his interpretation. First of all, Gladigow overrates the Renaissance as the 'birthplace of modernity.' As with all labels for historical eras, the Renaissance is a matter of construction, which characterizes, usually in hindsight, specific periods as something unique, as an event *sui generis*, highlighted in a longer time-span due to its particular qualities. The Renaissance as the 'rebirth of the ancient world' is an invention of special significance for the history of esotericism, as many scholars tend to speak of a kind of watershed between the 'early periods' of esotericism and

---

[49] Gladigow, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte," 29.

[50] Gladigow, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte seit der Renaissance," par. 1.

[51] The perception of Hermeticism as an 'undercurrent,' 'heresy,' or 'alternative' vis-à-vis Christianity is a later, and particularly Protestant, phenomenon. Theological doctrine in the fifteenth century, however, thought that in principle the Hermetic philosophy could easily be linked to and combined with Christian theology. But still, the consequences of such a combination could change both Hermeticism and Christian theology.

its 'actual' formulation in the Renaissance. This notion of the Renaissance as a distinct period, like that applied to the Enlightenment, has come under fire in recent years, as it stems from a nineteenth-century construction.[52] Although it is true that for the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century the introduction of Hermetic philosophy was a decisive new step, we should not forget that Hermeticism had clearly been an element of Islamic philosophy and science throughout the Middle Ages, which influenced western European debates, as well.[53]

A second qualification of Gladigow's characterization of European history of religion should be made with reference to Neoplatonism. Again, Gladigow is right when he says that the revival of Neoplatonic philosophy in Europe—first in Plethon and Ficino, later by the Cambridge Platonists[54]—led to an opposition against established religious positions and provoked alternatives to Christian understandings. But the discrepancy between Platonism and Aristotelianism has in fact never been that strong. The "Plato-Aristotle Debate" is a singular event of the Renaissance, and we should not adopt this binary position uncritically.[55] As I will explain in chapter 9, what we find in the sources is a dynamic mixture of Platonism and Aristotelianism, transformed contingently in various religious and political contexts.

This criticism notwithstanding, and summarizing the recent debate on religion in Europe, let me formulate three assumptions that are essential for the approach I am suggesting in this book: First, religious pluralism and the existence of alternatives are the normal case, rather than the exception, in Western history of culture; second, Western culture has always been characterized by a critical reflection on religious truth claims and the interaction between different systems of knowledge and of societal organization (such as religion, science, art, literature, politics, law, economics, etc.); third, recognition of compet-

---

[52] See the introduction to chapter 8 below.

[53] A prominent example is the Illuminism of Suhrawardī, which I will introduce in chapter four. For a concise overview of the vast Hermetic literature prior to the Renaissance cf. also the entries "Hermetic Literature I: Antiquity," "Hermetic Literature II: Latin Middle Ages," and "Hermetic Literature III: Arab," in Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, vol. 1, 487–533.

[54] Gladigow, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte seit der Renaissance," paragraphs 4 (Ficino) and 12 (Cambridge Platonists).

[55] Cf. Monfasani, "Marsilio Ficino and the Plato-Aristotle Controversy"; von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, 49–52.

ing ways of attaining knowledge of the world is a key to understanding the role of esotericism in Western discourse.

The third assumption will be explored in more detail in chapter 3. Before doing so, I want to discuss the discursive function of a key term both in historiography and esotericism—the notion of 'tradition.'

THE POLEMICAL CONSTRUCTION OF TRADITION

> The "otherness" of the common housefly can be taken for granted, but it is also impenetrable. For this reason, its "otherness" is of no theoretical interest. While the "other" may be perceived as being either LIKE-US or NOT-LIKE-US, he is, in fact, most problematic when he is TOO-MUCH-LIKE-US, or when he claims to BE-US. It is here that the real urgency of a "theory of the other" emerges. This urgency is called forth not by the requirement to place the "other," but rather to situate ourselves. It is here, to invoke the language of a theory of ritual, that we are not so much concerned with the drama of "expulsion," but with the more mundane and persistent processes of "micro-adjustment." This is not a matter of the "far" but, preeminently, of the "near." The problem is not alterity, but similarity—at times, even identity. A "theory of the other" is but another way of phrasing a "theory of the self."
>
> Jonathan Z. Smith

The concept of 'tradition' plays a significant role in discourses of European identity. We have seen that talking of a 'Christian tradition' or—as is popular in the United States because it alludes to American civil religion—of a 'Judeo-Christian tradition' means to simplify the historical processes of differentiation. It is part of a singularizing rhetoric. Despite the power of this Christendom narrative, European history has witnessed an alternative interpretation of religious heritage that leaves the confines of biblical revelation. The idea of a coherent line of philosophical and religious tradition that comprised doctrines stemming from the scriptural religions had been present in European culture from late antiquity onwards. Having played an important role particularly in Islamic circles in medieval times, the concept of *prisca theologia* ("first theology") or *philosophia perennis* ("eternal philosophy") influenced European discourses in the fourteenth

century.[1] Beginning with the provocative paganism of Georgios Gem-
istos (1355/1360–1454), who called himself "Plethon" after the Fer-
rara council of 1439, the notion of *prisca theologia* and the narrative
of a superior tradition shaped identities that formulated genealogies
of knowledge which transgress the revelation of Jewish or Christian
tradition. Usually connected to authorities that are potentially older
than Moses or that stood outside the biblical revelation—Hermes Tris-
megistus, Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Orpheus, Plato, etc.—this 'invented
tradition' played a crucial role in the inter-religious and intra-religious
debates of subsequent centuries.

This chapter interprets the emergence of *prisca theologia* in early
modern Europe as a discursive strategy to formulate alternative gene-
alogies of knowledge and identities that go beyond the usual revela-
tion of scriptural traditions. In addition, it compares the concept of
prisca theologia to kabbalistic constructions of tradition that emerged
at the same time. This comparison is interesting not only because the
word *qabbalah* is the Hebrew equivalent of "tradition/reception" and
because Jewish authors presented their tradition as a singular line of
Jewish authorities—thus partaking in an inter-religious debate about
the superiority of tradition—but also because Jewish circles developed
an idea of authority through authorship, which focused on the *way of
transmission* as indication of truth rather than on the *commensurable
content* of tradition.

As to the methodological consequences, I will argue that the notion
of 'tradition' should not be taken as an analytical category for histori-
ography. By contrast, scholars should apply it only with reference to
its meaning and function in a given contextual structure.

The Construction of Prisca Theologia

The formation of alternative religious and philosophical identities
that referred to a superior and often hidden tradition was a decisive
element of religious discourses between the tenth and the fifteenth

---

[1] Among the many important studies devoted to this issue—albeit mainly focusing
on the Christian context—are Walker, *Ancient Theology*; Schmitt, "Perennial Philoso-
phy from Agostino Steuco to Leibniz"; Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*; Hankins,
Plato in the Italian Renaissance; Klutstein, *Marsilio Ficino et la théologie ancienne*;
Tambrun, "Marsile Ficin et le *Commentaire* de Pléthon sur les *Oracles chaldaïques*."

century.[2] Being part of a reception of Hermetic literature and the revival of a Neoplatonic philosophy, this claim of tradition influenced Muslim, Jewish, and Christian debates during that time—both internally and in inter-religious rhetoric. Far from being isolated social groups, the scriptural religions interacted on several levels in a pluralistic religious world.[3] Interestingly, the twelfth century not only saw the emergence of Neoplatonic mystical doctrines in Islam but also the growing interest of Jewish theologians in interpretations that came to be known as kabbalah. Christians, for their part, were openly receptive to these doctrines—albeit often in a negative way—and certain mystical trends in Christianity influenced the formation of kabbalistic thinking. Hence, it is worthwhile to compare the different constructions of identities in this highly pluralistic situation and to follow the development of claims to 'tradition' into the seventeenth century.

Let us start with *Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī* (1154–1191) who regarded Hermes as the "father of philosophers." The Islamic world was from the outset characterized by a plurality of theological and philosophical currents. Besides the dominant Aristotelianism of Avicenna (Ibn Sina, c. 980–1037) there always existed Neoplatonic schools that were more open to esoteric and Hermetic doctrines, especially in the milieu of Shiite and Sufi communities.[4] One of the most interesting representatives of this thinking is the Iranian philosopher Suhrawardī. The theosophical school of this charismatic figure, sentenced to death in Aleppo in 1191, had an impact on Eastern Islam similar to that of Avicenna on the West. While many scholars used to interpret Suhrawardī's doctrines in the light of some Old Iranian 'national' tradition, new studies indicate that in fact we are dealing here with the reception of Platonic philosophy in a Persian context.[5] Suhrawardī's

---

[2] On the esoteric notion of 'tradition' see also the overview in Hanegraaff, "Tradition."

[3] See Meyerson & English (eds.), *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*; Brann, *Power in the Portrayal*. See also the introduction to Part Two of the present book.

[4] This does not mean that such doctrines were limited to the Shiite milieus. Particularly the theme of initiation into perfect knowledge was transmitted from late ancient contexts to the Ismaili and Sunni Islam and to Judaism. On the notion of *bāṭin* (inner dimension; the observance of secrets) and *'ahd* (oath of allegiance) as esoteric elements of Muslim and Jewish currents in medieval times see Hughes, *Texture of the Divine*, 25–30.

[5] See Walbridge, *Leaven of the Ancients*, 3–11; Walbridge, *Wisdom of the Mystic East*.

philosophy integrates Zoroastrian, Hermetic, Pythagorean, Platonic, and other ancient teachings. Suhrawardī calls his doctrines "intuitive philosophy," i.e. a philosophy of mystical experience that supplements the speculative philosophy of the Aristotelians. The subsequent *ishrāqī* school is therefore known as "School of Illuminism."[6] In his main work, *The Philosophy of Illumination* (*Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*), Suhrawardī explains that his doctrine and its spiritual praxis will lead to a perfect understanding of the world. The illumined masters of a philosophical chain of tradition serve as examples of the mystical vision of higher knowledge:

> In all that I have said about the science of lights and that which is and is not based upon it, I have been assisted by those who have traveled the path of God. This science is the very intuition of the inspired and illumined Plato, the guide and master of philosophy, and of those who came before him from the time of Hermes, "the father of philosophers," up to Plato's time, including such mighty pillars of philosophy as Empedocles, Pythagoras, and others. The words of the Ancients are symbolic and not open to refutation. The criticisms made of the literal sense of their words fail to address their real intentions, for a symbol cannot be refuted. This is also the basis of the Eastern doctrine of light and darkness, which was the teaching of Persian philosophers such as Jamasp, Frashostar, Bozorgmehr, and others before them. It is not the doctrine of the infidel Magi, nor the heresy of Mani, nor that which leads to associating other gods with God—be He exalted above any such anthropomorphism!
>   Do not imagine that philosophy has existed only in these recent times. The world has never been without philosophy or without a person possessing proofs and clear evidences to champion it. He is God's vicegerent on earth. Thus shall it be so long as the heavens and the earth endure. The ancient and modern philosophers differ only in their use of language and their divergent habits of openness and allusiveness. All speak of three worlds, agreeing on the unity of God. […] Among them are the messengers (*ahl al-sifāra*) and lawgivers (*al-shāri'ūn*) such as Agathadaemon, Hermes, Asclepius, and others.[7]

For Suhrawardī, hence, history of philosophy begins with Hermes, the "father of philosophers." The genealogy of wisdom that Suhrawardī adheres to is handed down to Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (after Aristotle no Greek philosophers are mentioned). Interestingly enough, he does not refer to Zoroaster, nor to Muhammad or Jesus,

---

[6] I will deal with Illuminism in more detail in chapter 4.
[7] Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination*, "Introduction," par. 4, trans. Walbridge & Ziai, pp. 2–3. See also Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 174; 36–37.

which marks a significant difference to those lines of tradition that usually are constructed in Sunnite and other Shiite contexts. In addition, the notion of pure tradition serves as an identity marker against conflicting (older) claims of 'Magi' or 'Manichaeans.'

Suhrawardī established an influential current of theosophical Shia in the East that almost matched the importance of Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) in Spain. The thesis of concordance between Greek and Iranian philosophy was in the thirteenth century picked up by Quṭb al-Dīn al Shīrāzī (d. 1311). In addition, Jews embraced major parts of his doctrine, particularly in those circles that Steven M. Wasserstrom describes as "interconfessional circles," of Muslim and Jewish thinkers that were "interconfessional despite themselves."[8] Among the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Safawides it was the famous School of Isfahan that further developed Suhrawardī's doctrines. Although the links between the School of Isfahan and the Platonic Academy of Florence are worthy of investigation, the influence of Muslim ideology on Christian Platonism has as yet not found the scholarly attention it deserves.[9]

With the revival of Neoplatonism in fourteenth-century Christian contexts the construction of a chain of 'enlightened philosophers' gained further momentum. It was Georgios Gemistos Plethon who had a decisive influence on this debate.[10] Plethon was extremely interested in the late antique Chaldaean Oracles and was the first to claim Zoroaster's authorship of the *Oracles*, thus setting the stage for an enthusiastic European reception of Zoroaster as belonging to the *prisci theologi*.[11] By describing the Platonic doctrines as being common to the Zoroastrians, the Pythagoreans, and many others, Plethon

---

[8] See Wasserstrom, "Jewish-Muslim Relations in the Context of Andalusian Emigration." Such a characterization of exchange or discursive transfers is not limited to Jews and Muslims but can be found in relation to Christian milieus, as well. For fascinating examples of concrete confrontation see the contributions in Fine (ed.), *Judaism in Practice*: From an "Egyptian woman who seeks to rescue her husband from a Sufi monastery" and "visionary experiences among Spanish Crypto-Jewish women" to "Jewish devotional rites in a Sufi mode." See also Wasserstrom's contribution "Jewish Sectarianism in the Near East."

[9] The attitude toward the 'Islamic world' as something totally different than and detached from the 'Christian world' is beginning to make room for a more complex understanding of the mutual dependency of both. Examples of this changing attitude are Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*; Flasch, *Meister Eckhart*; Belting, *Florenz und Bagdad*.

[10] On Plethon's life and work see Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*.

[11] Michael Stausberg notes: "Plethon has given the history of European reception of Zoroaster the crucial impulse" (Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, 43). And on p. 61

founded another line of alternative tradition that was claimed to be
older than—and utterly superior to—Christian revelation. The result
was a full-blown polytheistic model of religion that Plethon wanted to
introduce. Presumably due to his admiration of the Chaldaean Ora-
cles, Plethon did not refer to Hermes Trismegistus and the Graeco-
Egyptian writings attributed to him, nor to the Jewish kabbalah that
had already taken shape.[12]

   The combination of Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and *prisca theolo-
gia* that became so influential in Renaissance esotericism was a result of
the reintroduction of the Corpus Hermeticum into western European
culture.[13] Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) interrupted his translation of
the Platonic writings when Cosimo de' Medici asked him to translate
the manuscripts of the Corpus Hermeticum that were rediscovered in
1463 and brought to Cosimo. This was only logical insofar as some
scholars argued that Hermes Trismegistus was older than Plato and
perhaps even older than Moses, thus making accessible the ancient
ultimate knowledge of mankind.[14] Ficino's translation was printed in
1471 under the title *Book of the Power and Wisdom of God* (*Liber de
potestate et sapientia Dei*) and became known as *Pimander*, referring to
the corpus' first tractate. Thanks to the printing press this translation
was published 25 times until 1641. Renaissance Europe thus discov-
ered the *philosophia perennis*, the "eternal philosophy," as a common
denominator of Egyptian, Greek, Jewish, and Christian religion.

Genealogies of Wisdom

Due to the fact that scholars and philosophers in the fifteenth cen-
tury gained access to texts that stemmed from outside the biblical
revelation and might perhaps even be older than those of Jewish and
Christian tradition, the question arose how these alternative pieces of
knowledge were related to the revelations of the scriptural religions.[15]

---

he concludes that "the reception of Zoroaster thus becomes an act of auto-identifica-
tion," a self-identification that was followed by many Christian authors.
   [12] See Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*, 59–61.
   [13] See von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, 53–56.
   [14] On the humanist debate about the age of the Hermetic writings see Mulsow (ed.),
Ende des Hermetismus.
   [15] This process was further enhanced due to the advent of printing; see Eisenstein,
Printing Press as an Agent of Change.

The answers to this question, diverse as they were, lead us right into the inter-religious tensions of the time, because it makes a big difference whether one's own tradition can claim a greater age and hence a closer relation to the 'original truth,' or not.

Particularly interesting is the comparison between Christian and Jewish claims of tradition, as will be demonstrated later. At this point, reference must be made to the different solutions Christian authors found for the theological problem of the existence of conflicting ways of revelation, or, in the useful—though admittedly simplifying and idealtypical—definition of Moshe Idel, for the *unilinear* and *multilinear* theories of *prisca theologia*. While the unilinear model rejects the assumption that ultimate knowledge can flow from different sources (i.e. from 'pagan' authorities), the multilinear model reckons with the possibility of several sources of revelation that have to be incorporated in a Christian framework. Principally, early modern Christians applied two different solutions to integrate non-Christian sources:

> [T]he first contends that they agree with Christian theology because they were influenced by a primeval tradition which included or at least adumbrated the tenets of Christianity; the alternative argues that the affinity between these two bodies of thought has no historical explanation but is the result of a revelation or a series of revelations imparted separately to both pagan and monotheistic spiritual leaders.[16]

The unilinear model was dominant in Christian circles before the fifteenth century and remained so in Jewish circles until the seventeenth century, when it was more and more challenged. Some followed the line of Suhrawardī, Plethon, and others, and argued that there was an independent line of tradition that was even superior to scriptural revelation. But most Christian scholars were reluctant to present the *prisca theologia* in such a radical way. Marsilio Ficino in particular struggled with the implications of multilinear historiographical models and tried to combine these with the Christian tradition. The *one* truth could, after all, be revealed in quite different ways. Inspired by Plethon, Ficino nevertheless presented a line of authorities in which Mosaic sources do not occur: Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophamus, Pythagoras, Plato. In his *Philebus Commentary* Ficino explained:

---

[16] Idel, "Prisca Theologia in Marsilio Ficino and in Some Jewish Treatments," 138–139.

> [T]he ancient theologians [*prisci theologi*] […], since they brought themselves as near as possible to God's ray by releasing their souls, and since they examined by the light of that ray all things by uniting and dividing through the one and the many, they too were made to participate in the truth [*veritatis compotes effecti sunt*].[17]

This explanation refers to the Neoplatonic theurgic traditions of late antiquity that were formulated in the Chaldaean Oracles. The wise men of antiquity—and in their succession the wise men of Ficino's time—could get in touch with the divine sphere through the ascent of their souls. In addition, those who want "to reach the truth […] must prepare themselves especially by purity of soul for the flowing in of the divine splendour [*ad divini splendoris influxum*]."[18] Both the Neoplatonic sefirot symbolism[19] and the Gnostic self-empowerment of the understanding individual are a characteristic of this line of interpretation. In his *Theologia Platonica* Ficino clearly attests to this 'pagan' chain of revelation. In other writings, however, Ficino offered a different explanation: In his apologia for Christian religion, *De Christiana religione*, he acknowledged the influence of certain biblical figures on the *prisca theologia*. Because *Theologia Platonica* and *De Christiana religione* were written in the same period of Ficino's career, the discrepancy between those two interpretations seem to convey his opinion that the pagan theology is not necessarily superior to Christian theology but independent of it.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) shared this opinion.[20] In his oration usually referred to as "On the Dignity of Man" (*Oratio de hominis dignitate*)[21] he names Orpheus as the first source of philosophical-theological wisdom, which was carried on to Pythagoras and

---

[17] Ficino, *The* Philebus *Commentary*, 246.
[18] *Ibid*., 246 and 248.
[19] Note that *splendor* is the Latin name of *Zohar*.
[20] See Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 759–760; Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 61–62.
[21] The lecture's title "On the Dignity of Man" is by no means the originally intended one. "Pico's original title, if he had one, was something on the order of *Oratio ad laudes philosophiae* (Oration in Praise of Philosophy). The traditional title *Oratio de hominis dignitate* first appeared ten years after Pico's death in a corrupt German reprint of his collected works" (Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 2 note 4). In fact, the title "On the Dignity of Man" is part of a myth-making that the figure of Pico has undergone to end up as a 'precursor of modernity'; see Craven, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Symbol of His Age*; von Stuckrad, "Christian Kabbalah and Anti-Jewish Polemics."

the later *prisci theologi*.[22] Although kabbalistic doctrines are generally in agreement with these teachings, Pico notes that it was Orpheus who first independently formulated them. In an account by Piero Crinito we read:

> That divine philosophy of Pythagoras, which they called Magic, belonged to a great extent to the Mosaic tradition; since Pythagoras had managed to reach the Jews and their doctrines in Egypt, and knowledge of many of their sacred mysteries. For even the learning of Plato (as is established) comes quite near to Hebrew truth; hence many called him a genuine Moses, but speaking Greek. Zoroaster, the son of Oromasius, in practicing magic, took that to be the cult of God and study of divinity; while engaged in this in Persia he most successfully investigated every virtue and power of nature, in order to know those sacred and sublime secrets of the divine intellect; which subject many people called Theurgy, others Cabala or magic [*ut sacra illa et sublimia divini intellectus arcana cognosceret: quam partum vel theurgiam multi, vel cabbalam alii, vel magicem etiam dixerunt*].[23]

Here, Pythagoras and even Plato are pictured as dependent from the Mosaic theology, while Zoroaster's doctrines agree with kabbalah but were developed independently.

These differences in detail do not change the general impression that the multilinear conception of religious tradition was a major challenge for Christian authors of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. That people began to construct genealogies beyond the Christian revelation unmistakably influenced the scientific discourse of later generations. By referring to an imagined tradition of *prisca theologia*, scientific research was emancipated from Christian truth-claims.

Jewish Perspectives

The multilinear conception of religious historiography was an element of differentiation in Islamic discourses of which Suhrawardī is a good example; and it marked an important new development in Christian circles as well. *Claiming tradition* was always, even if implicitly, directed *against* conflicting claims by other religious communities or by other

---

[22] Pico della Mirandola, "*De hominis dignitate*," in: *Opera omnia*, 330–331; cf. also p. 315.
[23] Crinito, *De Honesta Disciplina Libri XXV*, 81 (quoted from Walker, *Ancient Theology*, 50).

groups within one's own religious heritage. If we apply to this plural-istic situation the analytical instrument of the rational choice theory of religion, it will come with no surprise that pluralistic discourses foster religious commitments. It is the existence of alternatives that promotes the formation of strong identities.[24] In the period between the eleventh and the sixteenth centuries, there was no scarcity of alter-natives indeed! Therefore, let us now turn to the Jewish construction of 'tradition' and contextualize it in this highly pluralistic situation.

In order to understand the emergence of a new Jewish current that was soon to be known as kabbalah, we have to look at the specific social and religious situation of twelfth-century Spain and southern France.[25] Although esoteric interpretations were present in late ancient and medieval Judaism, both within and outside of rabbinic milieus, these took on new characteristics as Jews were confronted with inter-nal and external readings of their own religious heritage. The earliest documentary evidence of systematic kabbalah is found in the *Sefer ha-Bahir* on the one hand—circulated around 1180—and in the writ-ings of Rabbi Isaac the Blind (d. ca. 1235) and his circle, on the other. Scholars agree that the doctrines expressed in these writings were not entirely new; instead, the authors seemed to feel the need of spreading these ideas to a wider public. It is a general characteristic of these and subsequent kabbalistic authors—in particular of the circle that was responsible for the formation of the *Zohar* around 1300—that they belonged to an extremely conservative current in Jewish theological speculation. They saw themselves as guardians of the true Jewish heri-tage. As noted earlier, the Hebrew term *qabbalah* means "reception," "heritage," or "tradition," i.e. a tradition which was handed down from the beginning of history as a secret knowledge of the Jewish people.[26]

---

[24] On this thesis, with reference to rational choice theory, see Stark & Finke, *Acts of Faith*; cf. the discussion and further literature in Kippenberg & von Stuckrad, *Ein-führung in die Religionswissenschaft*, 129–131, and the notion of "plural fields" on p. 132. For methodological reasons, the rational choice theory should be combined with a more nuanced theory of action. A good example of this is Hartmut Esser's concept of *Situationslogik*; see Esser, *Soziologie: Spezielle Grundlagen 1*, particularly pp. 161–169; 295–358.

[25] For reasons of convenience, I leave out here the Rhineland Hasidism of the twelfth century. But the picture of a pluralistic situation applies just as well to Ashke-naz, where Judaism was heavily threatened. Furthermore, there definitely were links between the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* and the early kabbalah of the Provence and Spain.

[26] There are several other names that were used by kabbalists to describe their teachings. Calling kabbalah the *torat ha-sod* ("secret teaching") or *ḥokhmat ha-nistar*

Making use of the rabbinic doctrine of oral Torah,[27] kabbalists claimed to belong to a superior line of hidden wisdom. The main figure behind the *Zohar*, Moses de Leon (d. 1305), clearly exemplifies this:

> This is what is called "kabbalah" [reception], owing to the fact that it is a reception [traceable back] to Moses from Mount Sinai. Moses transmitted it to Joshua, and Joshua transmitted it to the elders, and the elders transmitted it to the prophets, and the prophets transmitted it to the men of the Great Assembly, according to the same process as the reception of the Torah. They transmitted this wisdom one to the next. In fact, this path of wisdom was given to the first man at the moment of his entrance into the garden of Eden. The secret of this wisdom was given to him, and it was with him until he sinned, and was expelled from the garden of Eden. After that, when the first man died, his son Seth inherited this wisdom. After that, this wisdom made its way to Noah the righteous, and he transmitted it to his son Shem, [and this continued] until Abraham our father inherited it, and with this wisdom he worshipped his Creator. He transmitted it to Isaac, and Isaac to Jacob, and Jacob to his sons, [and this continued all the way] to the moment when the later generations stood at Mount Sinai and it was transmitted to Moses our master. From there it was transmitted and received orally, person to person ('*qibblu 'ish mi-pi 'ish*'), through all the subsequent generations. But in the exile this wisdom was forgotten, except for among the very few, and they reawakened this wisdom in each and every generation. For this reason, this wisdom is called "kabbalah" (reception), transmitted orally from person to person. The entire Torah, the written Torah and the oral Torah, is grounded in this wisdom.[28]

Moses de Leon's is a strong example of a monolinear construction of tradition. Furthermore, it is not so much the *content* of this heritage that serves as identity marker in kabbalistic discourse but the *reliability of reception*.

> For this kabbalist—who may indeed be viewed as paradigmatic—the very definition of Kabbalah is tied to a historical and cultural process. The matters that he sets out to discuss are "Kabbalah" precisely because

---

("concealed wisdom") indicates the esoteric character of kabbalah. Rather than applying the Christian theological category of 'mysticism' to these currents, we should talk of 'esotericism,' as Elliot R. Wolfson noted ("Occultation of the Feminine" and his introduction to *Rending the Veil*); see also Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, 9–38; Fishbane, "Authority, Tradition, and the Creation of Meaning in Medieval Kabbalah," 62–63; von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, 35–43.

[27] The *locus classicus* for the rabbinic chain of tradition is *Mishnah Avot* 1:1. On the complex meaning of *Torah* see my discussion below in chapter 5.

[28] De Leon, *Sefer Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, 17–18.

of the line of *unbroken* historical transmission that he, as a reliable master, is able to posit and assert. His legitimacy and authority to transmit esoteric ideas and practices are entirely dependent on his ability to establish such a firm foundation for reception.[29]

By focusing on the oral transmission of esoteric doctrine, kabbalists such as Nahmanides or Isaac of Acre (fourteenth century) not only claimed that they followed the ultimate *derekh ha-'emet* ("Way of the Truth")[30] but also opened the door to pluralistic understandings of the *content* of tradition. Finding tradition becomes a creative process that allows for the inclusion of quite different interpretations.[31]

   Now it may be asked why this rhetoric of tradition was so attractive for kabbalists during that time. Given a framework of tense pluralism in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Provence and Andalusia, Jews formulated their interpretation of tradition as an answer to both internal and external challenges. To begin with the internal conflicts, the philosophical controversies that related to Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) and his (alleged) Aristotelian rationalistic interpretation of Jewish law were of crucial importance. For many Jews, his *Guide of the Perplexed* was the most authoritative work of the time; for others, however, Maimonides seemed to give up any superior, esoteric reading of the Bible, abandoned speculation about the qualities of the godhead as mere anthropomorphism, and made too much use of non-Jewish philosophers, thus watering down the uniqueness of Jewish tradition.[32] These kabbalistic critics—among them Nahmanides, Rabbi Jonah Gerondi, Rabbi Ezra ben Solomon, and Rabbi Azriel—tried to

---

[29] Fishbane, "Authority, Tradition, and the Creation of Meaning in Medieval Kabbalah," 67. He concludes that "reliable reception […] makes for legitimate transmission."

[30] See Wolfson, "By Way of Truth."

[31] Fishbane, "Authority, Tradition, and the Creation of Meaning in Medieval Kabbalah," 72, speaks of a *pluralistic hermeneutic*; see also pp. 73 and 77 with his discussion of Isaac of Acre's *Me'irat 'Einayim* and the conclusion that "we encounter a construction of pluralistic meaning that is even more extreme than the model of harmonization. Here Isaac's implication goes a step further: truth does not adhere to a single predetermined meaning, insofar as two interpretations may both be true and nevertheless be completely contradictory and incompatible." In a comparable way, Moshe Idel describes this change—although related to Abulafia and his circle—as a "shift from conceptual to technical transmission [that] caused an important change in the very nature of the kabbalist's relation to Scripture." Technical transmission "was much freer in its handling of the text" (Idel, "Transmission in Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," 154; see also Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 390–409).

[32] See Green, "Introduction," XL–XLII.

combat the implications of Maimonidean rationalism by embracing Neoplatonic concepts that were particularly suitable for sefirotic kabbalah. It was a discourse of identity that encouraged early kabbalists to publish their teachings.

But there were external factors, as well. In the Castile, in Andalusia, and elsewhere, Jews were confronted with Muslim and Christian conflicts that had significant impact on their self-definition, as well as on the way the Jews were imagined from outside. The pluralistic situation created a number of clichés[33] that we can only explain when all parts of this discourse, i.e. the dynamics of Othering among the scriptural religions, are taken into account.[34] "In this context, the *Zohar* may be viewed as a grand defense of Judaism, a poetic demonstration of the truth and superiority of Jewish faith."[35] The kabbalistic authors were well acquainted with Muslim and Christian theology and philosophy. With their claim of tradition, they not only tried to establish a self-conscious attitude in a conflicting situation but also incorporated Muslim and Christian doctrines into their own system. Besides a Neoplatonic framework that was central to esoteric discourse in general, concrete teachings that were attractive to the kabbalists included, among others, the trinity (i.e. a unity in diversity) or Mary as a quasi-divine female figure.[36] "Much that is to be found in the *Zohar* was intended to serve as a counterweight to the potential attractiveness of Christianity to Jews, perhaps even to the kabbalists themselves."[37]

As a result of this Jewish ideology, multilinear constructions of religious historiography, so crucial for the challenging Christian notion of *prisca theologia*, were generally refused by Jewish authors. Even if kabbalists allowed for a pluralistic reading of Scripture—either through a focus on personal experience or the focus on reliable (oral) transmission rather than on content—this plurality took place in a monolinear framework. The notion of an oral tradition of revelation, taken over from rabbinic narratives into kabbalistic concepts, led to the assumption that non-Jewish authorities had learned their wisdom from Jewish

---

[33] Strickland (*Saracens, Demons, and Jews*) demonstrates that this pejorative imagery and Othering is itself also a visual phenomenon.

[34] An example of such an approach is Anidjar, *"Our Place in al-Andalus."*

[35] Green, "Introduction," LIX.

[36] On the relation between Marian theology and the Bahiric concept of the Shekhinah see Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 169–172. For the interchange between Safed and Florence, see Idel, "Italy in Safed, Safed in Italy."

[37] Green, "Introduction," LX.

spiritual teachers. This rhetoric was already widely applied in antiquity, as the works of Artapanus, Alexander Polyhistor, Flavius Josephus, and others reveal.[38] It is interesting to see that this narrative of 'tradition' was still defended after the Hermetic writings had entered the stage. Now, Hermes could be seen as identical with the biblical Enoch. Yohanan Alemanno, who was a contemporary of Ficino and a companion of Pico in Florence, even used Platonic philosophy to show the superiority of Jewish tradition.[39] In his commentary on the *Song of Songs* he differentiated two philosophical schools. The first is

> the sect of the ancient ones, from venerable antiquity up to the generation when prophecy disappeared. They and their sons and disciples thirstily drank their [the prophets'] words up to Plato who was in their [the prophets'] days and in their times. The second sect commenced when prophecy ceased and the days of evil came, from the time of Aristotle and later, up to our days.[40]

Idel remarks that here "Platonic lore is described as being the result of the influence of the Hebrew prophets. In fact, valid philosophy is considered to be contemporary with ancient Israelite prophecy and as having ceased together with it."[41]

The polemical character of claiming tradition is also well attested in the works of Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel (1437–1508). Financier and courtier to the kings of Portugal, Spain, and Italy, Abarbanel was also a leading Jewish scholar at the turn of the sixteenth century. He was the foremost representative at court at the time of the 1492 expulsion

---

[38] On the motif 'Abraham teaches the gentiles astrology' see von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie*, 239, 306–307, 351, 360–361, 451–452, 457 (Moses as astrological teacher), 809.

[39] On the relationship between Yohanan Alemanno and Pico see Idel, "The Anthropology of Yohanan Alemanno"; *idem, Absorbing Perfections*, 487–492; Novak, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Jochanan Alemanno"; Lelli, *Yohanan Alemanno; idem*, "Yohanan Alemanno, Pico della Mirandola e la cultura ebraica italiana del XV secolo"; von Stuckrad, "Christian Kabbalah and Anti-Jewish Polemics."

[40] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Or. 1535, fol. 162, quoted from Idel, "Prisca Theologia in Marsilio Ficino and in Some Jewish Treatments," 140. See also the other examples he presents (especially R. Joseph Shelomo Delmedigo and R. Elijah Hayyim ben Benjamin of Genazzano). On the relation between Alemanno and Lodovico Lazzarelli, Hanegraaff notes that the parallels between Alemanno and Lazzarelli are remarkable and that it is possible "that the two may have known each other personally. Oral transmission of knowledge from Jews to Christians was a prominent and new phenomenon characteristic of the Italian Renaissance" (Hanegraaff & Bouthoorn, *Lodovico Lazzarelli*, 59).

[41] Idel, "Prisca Theologia in Marsilio Ficino and in Some Jewish Treatments," 140.

of Jews from Spain, and during his time in Italy he had contact with leading thinkers, both Jewish and Christian. His influence on the intellectual debate of philosophy, astrology, messianism, and kabbalah was decisive.[42] Part of his oeuvre can be read as a response to proselytizing attempts on the side of the Christians in Spain and Italy. After his arrival in Italy (1492), he quickly got acquainted with the newly translated Hermetic writings and the emerging Christian readings of Jewish kabbalah that usually had a proselytizing subtext. He strongly refuted these attempts at 'rewriting tradition,' and some of his works were written to convince Spanish *conversos* to return to their elderly faith.[43] In his *Yeshuʿot meshiho*, Abarbanel engaged the Christological interpretations of rabbinic sayings commonly known from the *adversus Judaeos* literature.[44] Against what he regarded as Christian misinterpretations, he set his own influential messianic interpretation, which was informed by Islamic-Jewish astrological speculation of the so-called 'great conjunctions' of Jupiter and Saturn.[45]

Abarbanel's link to the Florentine intellectual circles was indirect. Having begun his Italian sojourn in Aragonese Naples, where he was involved at court and had access to the Neapolitan royal library, he soon got into contact with Yohanan Alemanno and the Averroist Aristotelian Elija del Medigo.[46] Alemanno was the scholar-in-residence of the da Pisa family during the 1480s and early 1490s, which held

---

[42] On Abarbanel, see Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*; Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance toward Tradition*; Borodowski, *Isaac Abravanel on Miracles, Creation, Prophecy, and Evil* (interestingly enough, Borodowski completely neglects astrology); Feldman, *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis*.

[43] See Ben-Shalom, "The Converso as Subversive"; Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance toward Tradition*, 131.

[44] On this genre see Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte*.

[45] See the discussion in chapter 6 below.

[46] As Alemanno, del Medigo (1463–1498), too, had personal contact with Pico della Mirandola. He was introduced to Abarbanel by Saul Hakohen as a "wise and discerning man, perfect in philosophic investigation"; see Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance toward Tradition*, 45. It is believed that del Medigo lectured in philosophy at Padua, thus being "the first Jew to have been an instructor in philosophy at a European university" (Feldman, *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis*, 164). Del Medigo—addressed by Seymour Feldman (*ibid.*) as Pico's "tutor"—met Pico in 1485 and discussed with him matters of Averroist and Aristotelian philosophy. In the introduction to his commentary on Averroës' *De substantia orbis* he praised Pico as "*homo valde intelligens, philosophus honorabilis, diligens viritatem, cui similem vere non vidi in hac aetate*" (*Expositio averrois de substantia orbis*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Ms Codex Vat. Lat. 4553, f. 1v, quoted from Hames, "Elijah Delmedigo," 50; see *ibid.*, 39). Cf. also Kieszkowski, "Les rapports entre Elie del Medigo et Pic de la Mirandole"; Bland, "Elijah del Medigo's Averroist Response."

close contact with the Abarbanel family. Another link, of course, was Abarbanel's eldest son Judah, who was to become famous as Leone Ebreo. His *Dialoghi d'amore* (written around 1502) rank among the most important Platonic treatises of the Renaissance; they also witness Hermetic and kabbalistic readings of esoteric tradition in a Jewish key.[47]

Like Pico della Mirandola, Alemanno and Abarbanel sought to overcome the rivalry between philosophy and kabbalah, albeit not—as Pico did—by claiming the universal Christian truth to be found in kabbalah, but by insisting on the superiority of Jewish tradition. Even this kind of modest synthesis, however, raised suspicion among fellow kabbalists. Isaac da Pisa, Isaac Mar Hayyim, Judah Hayyat, Elijah Hayyim of Genazzano, and others criticized this approach and "sought to demonstrate rational philosophy's limitations and its ultimate inability to penetrate the superior insights of theurgic Kabbalah."[48]

Taken together, these conflicts clearly reveal the problematic implications of conflicting narratives of 'tradition' for religious identities in a pluralistic situation. With their rejection of multilinear models of *prisca theologia*, Jewish kabbalists were protesting against what they felt to be a deliberate misreading of their tradition by (proselytizing) Christian authors. In so doing, they followed the example of the rabbinic critique of Christian 'misreading.'[49] It was not until the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that Jewish authors attributed at least some authority to non-Jewish *prisci theologi* and adopted elements of a multilinear historiography. Examples are Gedalyah ibn Yehiya, Abraham Yagel, Asaria de' Rossi, or Menasseh ben Israel.[50] This slight shift might be attributed to an increasing influence of Pico's

---

[47] Although we should not forget that—as in the messianic writings of his father—Leone Ebreo was reluctant to substantiate his argumentation explicitly with kabbalistic doctrines (see Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 138–140), a close reading of the *Dialoghi d'amore* reveals formulations and ideas that are best explicable against a kabbalistic background. In one passage, Leone Ebreo even associates Platonism with the kabbalah (*Philosophy of Love*, 296). A balanced interpretation is provided by Feldman, *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis*, 166–175.

[48] Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance toward Tradition*, 46.

[49] See Idel, "Jewish Thinkers versus Christian Kabbalah," 49.

[50] See the examples presented in Idel, "Prisca Theologia in Marsilio Ficino and in Some Jewish Treatments," 155–156.

and Ficino's writings on Jewish circles during that time, to be followed by Christian kabbalah in the wake of Reuchlin's works.[51]

Beyond Tradition

The debates between Muslims, Christians, and Jews about the competing lines of 'tradition' are an example of discursive transfers between different circles that belong to different religious systems. Claims of tradition are made in mutual dependency from one another, in constructing *alternatives* in a religiously 'productive' framework of pluralism. That traditions—related to, but quite different from 'history'—are *claimed* in a situation of competition implies that we have to scrutinize these claims with regard to identity formation.[52] Like identities, traditions are negotiated in a complex process of cultural exchange. When Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger argue that "[i]nventing traditions [...] is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition,"[53] the category 'identity' provides the particular reasons why people tend to construct conflicting lines of tradition. The categories 'pluralism' and 'competition' help to identify contexts that foster these claims to tradition.

---

[51] In Idel's words: "It seems reasonable to assume that the Jewish Kabbalist became more open to the idea of an exoteric Kabbalah, a Jewish version of the *prisca theologia*, as the result of their contacts with the Christian contemporaries but at the same time they printed their original texts *inter alia* also in order to counteract the Christological interpretations of the Jewish lore" (Idel, "Jewish Thinkers versus Christian Kabbalah," 58).

[52] The 'invention of tradition' and its relation to identity and pluralism have been the issue of many studies, mostly related to the modern age. See, for instance, Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process*; Gephart & Waldenfels (eds.), *Religion und Identität*. That identity and tradition are bound to discursive processes of power is argued in Bond & Gilliam, *Social Constructions of the Past*. That identity is tied to territoriality is demonstrated in Lavie & Swedenburg, *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*; see also Kippenberg & von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, 114–126. On the construction of tradition in modern esotericism see Faivre, "Histoire de la notion moderne de Tradition"; Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 85–200 ("The Appeal to Tradition"); Hanegraaff, "Tradition." There is no reason to assume that—from a methodological point of view—these strategies differ widely from processes in earlier periods that are characterized by a pluralistic competition.

[53] "Introduction: Inventing Traditions" to Hobsbawm & Ranger (eds.), *Invention of Tradition*, 4.

> [W]e should expect it [the invention of tradition] to occur more fre-
> quently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the
> social patterns for which "old" traditions had been designed, producing
> new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old tradi-
> tions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove
> sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated: in short,
> when there are sufficiently large and rapid changes on the demand or
> the supply side.[54]

To be sure, the past two centuries of European history provide an
excellent example of these processes, as Hobsbawm and Ranger argue.
But the debates presented in this chapter show that the triad of tradi-
tion, identity formation, and pluralism was a crucial discursive ele-
ment of earlier periods, as well.

From a methodological point of view, it is not sufficient—or to put
it more strongly, not possible—to describe traditions neutrally. Homi
K. Bhabha notes: "The recognition that tradition bestows is a partial
form of identification. In restaging the past it introduces other, incom-
mensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition. This
process estranges any immediate access to an originary identity or a
'received' tradition."[55] The formulation of conflicting traditions within
and beyond the scriptural religions' framework in medieval and early
modern esoteric discourse reveals that 'tradition' is a polemical term
in the historical sources, which should be applied scholarly in a dis-
cursive way only, describing its varying uses, functions, and contexts.
It is not a candidate for an analytical term in the study of religion.
Although there are identifiable continuities in the history of religions,
these continuities do not necessarily constitute tradition. Instead, tra-
dition is the evocation and application, if not the invention, of a set of
continuities for certain identifiable purposes.

---

[54] *Ibid.*, 4–5.
[55] Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 3. This resonates with Michel Foucault's claim that
"there is a negative work to be carried out first: we must rid ourselves of a whole
mass of notions, each of which, in its own way, diversifies the theme of continuity.
They may not have a very rigorous conceptual structure, but they have a very precise
function. Take the notion of tradition: it is intended to give a special temporal status
to a group of phenomena that are both successive and identical (or at least similar); it
makes it possible to rethink the dispersion of history in the form of the same; it allows
a reduction of the difference proper to every beginning, in order to pursue without
discontinuity the endless search for the origin; tradition enables us to isolate the new
against a background of permanence, and to transfer its merit to originality, to genius,
to the decisions proper to individuals" (Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 23).

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUALIZING THE STUDY OF ESOTERIC DISCOURSE

> Alle kulturwissenschaftliche Arbeit in einer Zeit der
> Spezialisierung wird, nachdem sie durch bestimmte
> Problemstellungen einmal auf einen bestimmten
> Stoff hin ausgerichtet ist und sich ihre methodi-
> schen Prinzipien geschaffen hat, die Bearbeitung
> dieses Stoffes als Selbstzweck betrachten, ohne
> den Erkenntniswert der einzelnen Tatsachen stets
> bewußt an den letzten Wertideen zu kontrollieren,
> ja ohne sich ihrer Verankerung an diesen Wert-
> ideen überhaupt bewußt zu bleiben. Und es ist gut
> so. Aber irgendwann wechselt die Farbe: die Bedeu-
> tung der unreflektiert verwerteten Gesichtspunkte
> wird unsicher, der Weg verliert sich in die Däm-
> merung. Das Licht der großen Kulturprobleme ist
> weiter gezogen. Dann rüstet sich auch die Wissen-
> schaft, ihren Standort und ihren Begriffsapparat zu
> wechseln und aus der Höhe des Gedankens auf den
> Strom des Geschehens zu blicken.
>
> Max Weber

Against the background of the two-fold pluralism of European his-
tory of religion and the rhetorical or even polemical functions of reli-
gious narratives of tradition, I will now turn to the place of esoteric
discourse within this conceptual framework. My point is that the
study of 'Western esotericism' is most successful if it is linked to the
general characteristics of European—and, for modernity, to North
American[1]—history of culture.

---

[1] The question of whether American cultural and religious history shares the
characteristics of European culture is much debated. While some scholars—arguably
Burkhard Gladigow and Christoph Auffarth—regard American cultural history as a
'subchapter' of European history of religion, in my view the differences are in fact
enormous. It is only since the second half of the twentieth century that we can talk
of a shared cultural and religious space here, particularly through the reception of
American New Age culture in Europe. For early modernity and also for Romanticism,
the characteristics found in Europe should not be transferred to North America (and
vice versa).

To begin with, 'esotericism' is a controversial term. Despite the fact that during the last ten to fifteen years a cornucopia of contributions has led to the emergence of the research field of 'Western esotericism,' scholars are still far from agreeing on definitions of esotericism. This does not mean that there also is fundamental disagreement about the currents and historical phenomena that scholars think of when they apply the term 'esotericism.' Most scholars share the opinion that esotericism covers such currents as gnosticism, ancient Hermetism, the so-called 'occult sciences' (notably astrology, magic, and alchemy), Christian mysticism, Renaissance Hermeticism, Jewish and Christian kabbalah, Paracelsianism, Rosicrucianism, Christian theosophy, illuminism, nineteenth-century occultism, Traditionalism, and various related currents up to contemporary New Age spiritualities. All these currents are reflected in the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (2005), which indeed is an important contribution to esotericism research. But even if scholars—for whatever reason—agree on historical currents that they want to study under the rubric of esotericism, it will be important to answer questions such as the following: what is the rationale behind the selection of currents? Why do we need a general analytic term to study phenomena that are apparently quite diverse (as, e.g., Hermetism, Paracelsianism, or New Age)? Is it sufficient to justify the selection with reference to the fact that "this entire domain was severely neglected by academic research until far into the 20th century"?[2] What about other currents—such as ancient and medieval theurgy, Islamic and Jewish mysticism, or Romantic *Naturphilosophie*—that likewise "display certain similarities and are historically related"[3] to currents seen as belonging to 'Western esotericism'? These questions indicate the need to constantly reflect on the biases and presuppositions that underlie academic interpretation.

Due to the problems related to a general concept of esotericism, many scholars choose different terms or apply the term 'esotericism' only to a restricted period or context. Bettina Gruber, for instance, makes clear that she is "not interested in any 'transhistorical' definition of the phenomena." Instead, for her such a definition would be "possible, at least with regard to esotericism and occultism, only under certain conditions and at the price of marginalizing functional

---

[2] Hanegraaff, "Introduction," ix.
[3] Hanegraaff, "Esotericism," 337.

aspects."[4] The editors of an important contribution to the study of 'Western esotericism' (as described above) avoid the term 'esotericism' because "it was not used in early modern times" and because "it too easily provokes associations with the contemporary 'New Age' movement."[5] A third example, discussed below, is Monika Neugebauer-Wölk who limits the applicability of the term to the period between 1450 and 1800.

One argument of this chapter is that 'esoteric discourse' is a useful term for addressing structural elements of European culture in historical perspective, structures that include the role of scholarly concepts in the formation of modern Western identities.

Approaches to Esotericism

While the adjective 'esoteric' (from Greek *esôterikos*, meaning "the inner") is first attested in a satire by Lucian of Samosata in the second century CE, its contrasting term 'exoteric' was already present in ancient Greek philosophy.[6] The neologism 'esotericism,' however, has a relatively short history.[7] In its French form *l'ésotérisme* it seems to make its appearance in 1828, in a time when in the wake of the Enlightenment's religious critique alternative religious currents began to break away from mainstream Christianity. Hence, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the idea that esotericism was something different from Christianity gained wide currency. Scholars described the esoteric as some kind of subculture, as a tradition that had formulated alternatives to the Christian mainstream from the Renaissance onwards. Like 'gnosis' and 'mysticism'—in fact often synonyms in earlier scholarship for what today is addressed as esotericism—esoteric currents were regarded as having been suppressed as heretical by orthodox Christianity.[8] Until the 1950s, the study of these phenomena was dominated by specialists in mysticism and in gnosis who regarded

---

[4] Gruber, "Mystik, Esoterik, Okkultismus," 28.

[5] Trepp, "Hermetismus oder zur Pluralisierung von Religiositäts- und Wissensformen in der Frühen Neuzeit," 10.

[6] See Gaiser, "Platons esoterische Lehre"; Riffard, *L'ésotérisme*, 65.

[7] See the overview in Hanegraaff, "Esotericism," 336–337; Riffard, *L'ésotérisme*, 63–137.

[8] See van den Broek & Hanegraaff (eds.), *Gnosis and Hermeticism*; van den Broek & van Heertum (eds.), *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme*.

their fields of research as powerful alternatives to the institutional-
ized scriptural religions of Europe. Many of these scholars—Gershom
Scholem, Henry Corbin, Mircea Eliade, Martin Buber, and Carl Gus-
tav Jung—were themselves part of a counter-movement against the
'disenchantment of the world.'[9]

Let us have a closer look at dominant approaches to Western esoter-
icism today. Following the ancient usages of the term, scholars often
referred to the esoteric as something hidden from the majority, as a
secret accessible only to a small group of initiates. But many of these
teachings had in fact never been concealed, and in the twentieth cen-
tury they even gained wide currency in popular discourses, so that to
characterize esotericism as secretive and elitist seemed to be mislead-
ing.[10] This critique of the notion of secrecy, reasonable as it might seem
at first glance, has had an unfortunate impact on scholarly research,
because it led to a neglect of the discursive function of secrecy. I will
return to this issue in more detail below.

A very influential understanding of esotericism was put forward by
Antoine Faivre. He claimed that the common denominator, or the *air
de famille,* of those currents referred to as esoteric traditions was a spe-
cific *form of thought* (French *forme de pensée*); a certain vagueness of
this concept notwithstanding,[11] Faivre regards the "form of thought"
as a characteristic way of approaching and interpreting the world.
Faivre developed his characteristics from a certain set of early modern
sources that comprise the 'occult sciences' (astrology, alchemy, and
magic), Neoplatonic and Hermetic thinking as it was shaped in the
Renaissance, Christian kabbalah, (mainly Protestant) theosophy, and
the notions of a *prisca theologia* or *philosophia perennis.*

In 1992, Faivre put forward his heuristic thesis that the esoteric
"form of thought" consists of four "intrinsic," or indispensable, char-
acteristics, accompanied by two "relative" characteristics, which are
not essential but which nevertheless occur very often. Faivre insisted
that only those currents are correctly labeled 'esotericism' that show

---

[9] The famous *Eranos* meetings are an important part of this early stage of research
into Western esotericism; see Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*; Hakl, *Der verbor-
gene Geist von Eranos.*

[10] See Faivre, "The Notions of Concealment and Secrecy"; Bochinger, *"New Age"
und moderne Religion*, 374–375.

[11] Cf. the critique in McCalla, "Antoine Faivre and the Study of Esotericism," 443–
444.

all four intrinsic characteristics, even if in different emphases.[12] (1) The *idea of correspondences* is a crucial characteristic because it refers to the famous Hermetic notion of 'what is below is like what is above.' In the wake of the micro-macrocosm idea of ancient philosophy and religion, esotericists view the entire cosmos as a 'theater of mirrors,' an ensemble of hieroglyphs to be deciphered by adepts. Astrology, magic, and spiritual alchemy all partake in this kind of interpretation. (2) The concept of *living nature* views nature as a whole as a living being, permeated by an interior light or hidden fire that circulates through it. Nature can be read like a book but also interacted with through active participation, for instance in magical acts (*magia naturalis* in Renaissance parlance). (3) *Imagination and mediations* are complementary notions, referring on the one hand to imagination as an 'organ of the soul' and the importance of focused concentration in magical work;[13] mediation means the contact with intermediary entities that serve as informants and messengers to the absolute truth. The important role of angels, ('ascended') masters, or divine figures in the process of revelation can also be described as mediation. (4) The *experience of transmutation* expresses the idea that adepts of esoteric tradition undergo a profound process of transformation and rebirth. Faivre alludes to the alchemical doctrine of death-and-rebirth to illuminate the spiritual processes within the adept.[14] The two "relative" characteristics are (5) *the praxis of concordance*, or the search for reference systems that show the common denominator of all spiritual traditions (similar to the idea of *philosophia perennis*), and (6) the notion of *transmission*, or the initiation of an adept by a teacher or a group.

The past fifteen years have shown that this typological approach, developed from concrete historical material, is very helpful in understanding the connections among seemingly diverse traditions, e.g. the philosophy of nature, mysticism, Hermeticism, gnosis, astrology, magic, and alchemy. In addition, Faivre's operational definition

---

[12] See Faivre & Needleman (eds.), *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, xi–xxx; Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 1–19.

[13] The importance of this concept in early modern times is analyzed in Godet, *Imagination*; see also van den Doel & Hanegraaff, "Imagination."

[14] The difficulties with the notion of 'spiritual alchemy' and its use to represent alchemy in general (mainly through the religionist psychology of C.G. Jung) are discussed in Principe & Newman, "Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy."

of esotericism[15] helped to overcome the simplistic dichotomies—of religion versus science, magic versus religion, and esotericism versus Enlightenment—that had so often distorted earlier understandings of the complexities of Western culture.[16] At the same time, it is a characteristic of heuristic, operational definitions that they are subject to critique and change. One problem is the fact that Faivre does not always consistently employ his own typology. On the one hand, he describes currents as esoteric that do not fit all of his characteristics (e.g. Mesmerism, which shows only one characteristic, namely the idea of living nature); on the other hand, he excludes currents that nicely match his typology but fall beyond his scope of interest, such as Suhrawardī's medieval Islamic philosophy. More importantly, Faivre generates his typology from a limited set of sources—originating mainly from Renaissance Hermeticism, *Naturphilosophie*, Christian kabbalah, and Christian theosophy—and thus deliberately excludes aspects of European history of religion that other scholars view as decisive for a contextual understanding of esoteric currents.[17] In doing so, he excludes antiquity, the medieval period, and above all modernity.[18] He marginalizes Jewish, Muslim and 'pagan' traditions as mere influences on 'esotericism proper.' In a review of my work, Faivre writes:

> Actually, Faivre's intention had just been to speak, as a methodological choice, of an 'occident *visited by* Judaism and Islam,' therefore mainly immersed (until the twentieth century) in Christianity. This did not mean, by the same token, underrating the importance of a religious pluralism, the reality of which, after all, nobody would (or could) deny.[19]

---

[15] See McCalla, "Antoine Faivre and the Study of Esotericism," 443.

[16] Cf. also Neugebauer-Wölk & Zaunstöck (eds.), *Aufklärung und Esoterik*; Neugebauer-Wölk & Rudolph (eds.), *Aufklärung und Esoterik*.

[17] On Faivre's arguments against a "comparative study of esotericism" that runs the risk of claiming a universal—essentialist—esotericism see Faivre, "La question d'un ésotérisme comparé des religions du livre," particularly 102–105; but cf. Hanegraaff, "Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism," 121–124.

[18] 'Correspondences,' for instance, have a different meaning in the Renaissance than in twentieth-century magic. Another problematic term is 'magic': Wouter J. Hanegraaff ("How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World") compared the Renaissance *magia naturalis* and the 'disenchanted magic' of the twentieth century (cf. the critical remarks in Asprem, "Magic Naturalized?"). As a conclusion, simple typological approaches to this shifting field of identities and strategies miss the point because they pretend a common denominator that is not found in the sources.

[19] Faivre, "Kocku von Stuckrad et la notion d'ésotérisme," 208 (italics original).

Calling Judaism and Islam "visitors" of Christian Europe is a highly problematic notion, to say the least; it reveals a Christian-normative understanding of European history of religion, which I critically engaged above. This statement also shows that Faivre has completely misread my very concept of pluralism, which is based on the critical function of the Other for sustaining one's own identity. More important, though, is the fact that such a view on the relevance of Judaism and Islam for Western esotericism has been influential. For instance, the already mentioned *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, a flagship publication in the field, also marginalizes Jewish and Islamic esotericism. Even if we take into account the "pragmatic reasons" the editor Wouter J. Hanegraaff gives for these lacunae,[20] it remains strange that the Jewish authors and currents are lumped together in the lemma "Jewish Influences"; Islamic 'influences' are not even covered in a respective entry. It may be argued that this is not only a pragmatic decision but also evidence of a discursive event, even if the editors are not aware of the discourse they are exerting.

If we follow Faivre's typology, we end up in a circular argument: "since esotericism is defined as a form of thought, nothing outside that form of thought can be esotericism."[21] Although he himself would disagree, Faivre's typology in fact best fits what could be called Christian esotericism in the early modern period or, to borrow Neugebauer-Wölk's phrase, "Western esotericism in a Christian context."[22] Antoine Faivre's enormous effort for the establishment of the field notwithstanding, there are almost no scholars today who apply Faivre's typology without significant changes and adjustments. Thus, alternative interpretations of esotericism have been suggested. Among these, Monika Neugebauer-Wölk's and Wouter J. Hanegraaff's deserve special attention.

In a nuanced exploration of methodological issues, Monika Neugebauer-Wölk argues for a distinction between esotericism and Christianity. She contends that esotericism should be defined as an *alternative* to Christianity that cannot be integrated into Christian semantic structures. To address early modern esotericism as an "independent

---

[20] Hanegraaff, "Introduction," xii.
[21] McCalla, "Antoine Faivre and the Study of Esotericism," 444.
[22] Neugebauer-Wölk, "Esoterik und Christentum vor 1800," 160. Faivre's religionist language—particularly in his early writings—is pointed out by McCalla, "Antoine Faivre and the Study of Esotericism," 444–447.

religious system of meaning" (*Sinnsystem*)—that is, independent of Christianity[23]—she identifies five characteristics, or thematic fields (*Themenkreise*), of esotericism that demonstrate its autonomy.[24] (1) The "transgression of holy scriptures" refers to the fact that esoteric authors often claim knowledge that is revealed from non-Christian sources, such as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the Chaldaean Oracles, and some pre-Christian traditions. (2) These claims lead to the idea of a "higher knowledge" within esoteric discourse. Early modern esotericism understands itself as "true Christianity" on the basis of higher knowledge.[25] (3) "Realization and worldly power" addresses the claim to put esoteric knowledge into social and political practice, thus challenging the institutionalized forms of Christianity. According to Neugebauer-Wölk, this claim should not be mixed up with the real historical exertion of power in Christian institutions, because Christianity had to "broaden and adjust" its religious concepts in order to justify power, while the exertion of power is "an integral part of esoteric religiosity." (4) The practical aspect of esotericism has implications for ideas of "revelation and the image of Christ." It is particularly the gnostic notion of self-redemption,[26] the identification of Christ with the alchemical *Opus Magnum*, and the "repeated reincarnations of the Son of God" that are "incompatible with the Christian system of meaning." (5) Finally, the idea of "invisible church and secret society" constitutes a powerful alternative to the public nature of both church and society in institutionalized Christianity.

Neugebauer-Wölk understands her model as an ideal type. It "follows the intention to put forward a religious *conception*, i.e. to paradigmatically distinguish esotericism from Christianity, not esotericists from Christians."[27] And she limits her interpretation to the period between 1450 and 1800, which means that if we want to arrive at a general concept of esotericism, this model is of only restricted applicability. But even with regard to that period methodological questions remain. Is it correct to identify Christianity with the confessional-

---

[23] Neugebauer-Wölk, "Esoterik und Christentum vor 1800," 137.

[24] *Ibid.*, 137–143.

[25] The problem how the claim to represent "true Christianity" should characterize esotericism as being *outside* Christianity, remains unresolved in Neugebauer-Wölk's approach.

[26] One may add that in gnosticism even the divinity is saved, while in mainstream Christianity it is humans who are being saved.

[27] Neugebauer-Wölk, "Esoterik und Christentum vor 1800," 143, italics original.

ized and institutionalized churches?[28] Are we not confronted with an *internal pluralization* of Christianity, a process in which alternative readings of Christian tradition claim authority (the "true church")?[29] Even taken as an ideal-typical point of departure, it may be argued that Neugebauer-Wölk's model is the manifestation of a theological discourse of purity and difference.[30] The crucial problem of this Christian-normative approach is the neglect of non-Christian traditions in Western culture. Even if we accept Neugebauer-Wölk's first two characteristics, we will have to remove the focus on Christianity as decisive for esoteric discourse.[31]

Let us have a look at yet another important contribution to the academic study of Western esotericism. In recent publications, Wouter J. Hanegraaff has developed his idea of a "Grand Polemical Narrative" that according to him underlies the formation of the set of currents that today is regarded as esotericism by most scholars. As he put it in 2005:

> [T]he field of study referred to as 'Western esotericism' is the historical product of a polemical discourse, the dynamics of which can be traced all the way back to the beginnings of monotheism. Moreover, it is in the terms of this very same discourse that mainstream Western culture has been construing its own identity, up to the present day. This process of the construction of identity takes place by means of telling stories—to ourselves and to others—of who, what and how we want to be. The challenge of the modern study of Western esotericism to academic research ultimately consists in the fact that it questions and undermines those stories, and forces us to see who, what and how we really *are*. Instinctive resistance against the breaking down of certainties implicit in such (self)knowledge is at the very root of traditional academic resistance against the study of Western esotericism.[32]

---

[28] This idea is criticized by Hanegraaff, "The Dreams of Theology and the Realities of Christianity," to which Neugebauer-Wölk reacts in her article.

[29] Neugebauer-Wölk sees the problem without giving a solution to it: "The main problem of the approach proposed here, namely to basically differentiate esotericism and Christianity, is the self-understanding of the contemporaries" ("Esoterik und Christentum vor 1800," 159).

[30] Neugebauer-Wölk correctly criticizes the full inclusion of esotericism into Christianity as taking sides with the early modern esotericists who claim to be (true) Christians; but taking sides with "the orthodoxies of that epoch" (*ibid.*, 160) seems to me equally problematic.

[31] See also Lehmann, "Probleme einer Europäischen Religionsgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit," 235–237.

[32] Hanegraaff, "Forbidden Knowledge," 226, italics original.

This focus on the reconstruction of the genealogy of what today is referred to as esotericism comes very close to my own understanding of what the field of esotericism research is all about. I agree with Hanegraaff that polemics and identities are at the core of esoteric discourses, and that when we study 'esotericism' we will have to address these dynamics. However, I differ from Hanegraaff on three points: First of all, I do not think that the dynamics of such a polemical discourse "can be traced all the way back to the beginnings of monotheism"; rather, what we see at work is an old dialectic of fascination and rejection that gave way to a disjunctive mechanism only after the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment. Second, I do not think that historiography will ever be able to tell us "what and how we really *are*";[33] in fact, such an essentialist narrative is not what historians should be willing to provide. Perhaps we are just telling *other* "stories—to ourselves and to others—of who, what and how we want to be."[34] Third, in my view it is discourse analysis that would provide a useful referential framework for Hanegraaff's position.

Let me explain this contention in more detail. Hanegraaff bases his analysis on the concept of "mnemohistory" (*Gedächtnisgeschichte*) that Jan Assmann has developed.[35] The concept of mnemohistory is applied to an analytical distinction, which Hanegraaff calls a "complex pattern of cultural and religious interactions based upon a 'deep structure' of conflict between the dynamics of two mutually exclusive systems: monotheism and cosmotheism, and all that they imply. The logical incompatibility of the two systems has led to an endless series of creative attempts to overcome it."[36] Hanegraaff thus is turning away from typological approaches based on content and ideas and explores the *structures* that underlie European history of culture. I fully agree that this approach opens new vistas for inquiry. The question is, whether the construction of a "Grand Polemical Narrative" is helpful, or coherent.

---

[33] See also his claim that "as a matter of historical fact paganism is and always has been part of what we *are*" (Hanegraaff, "Forbidden Knowledge," 234, italics original).

[34] See chapter 10 for a critique of this normative realist position.

[35] On the differences between Assmann and Hanegraaff see Hanegraaff, "The Trouble with Images," 112.

[36] Hanegraaff, "The Trouble with Images," 120. In that article, Hanegraaff focuses particularly on the concept of idolatry and the discourse of images.

To begin with, falling back on Assmann's conceptualization of monotheistic and "cosmotheistic" mnemohistory comes with a price. The problem here is the vague differentiation, inherent in Assmann's interpretation, between historical data and tools of interpretation. Although mnemohistory is presented as independent of actual historical developments, its initial introduction, according to Assmann, is directly linked to historical instances, from the first monotheistic concepts of Akhenaton to the supposed imposition of exclusive monotheism by biblical Judaism.[37] It is controversial, to say the least, whether this description does correspond to the actual historical development. Peter Schäfer calls Assmann's exclusive monotheism an exaggerated straw man "that historically never existed."[38]

But even if we accept that mnemohistory is independent from actual history—and both Assmann and Hanegraaff argue that the origins of the distinction between monotheism and cosmotheism, and the origins of the mnemohistorical idea of that history, do not coincide—there must be sufficient historical evidence for the existence of such a memory.[39] However, many of the 'currents' within the field of Western esotericism (however defined) have in fact never been simply neglected, marginalized, or banned as dangerous (and thus, 'remembered' negatively); they all have a complex and changing history in many different contexts.[40] If there is an effective polemical Othering in Western history, this process unfolded as late as during the eighteenth through twentieth centuries. Wouter Hanegraaff himself hints at this process:

---

[37] The idea is developed in Assmann, *Die mosaische Unterscheidung*.

[38] "Die Kategorie des Monotheismus, die Assmann postuliert, ist eine Abstraktion bzw. genauer ein Popanz, den es historisch so nie gegeben hat und dessen gedächtnisgeschichtlicher Wert außerordentlich zweifelhaft ist" (Schäfer, "Geschichte und Gedächtnisgeschichte," 22–23). Schäfer also notes the anti-Semitic potential—of course unintended by Assmann—of the distinction between 'monotheism' and 'cosmotheism' ("eine historische Fiktion, die auch gedächtnisgeschichtlich nicht gerettet werden kann"; p. 24; see also pp. 25–39). A critical Egyptological response to Assmann's assumptions is presented by Quack, "Perspektiven zur Theologie im Alten Ägypten." Cf. also Bergunder, "'Östliche' Religionen und Gewalt," as a critique of Assmann.

[39] This problem is noted by Schäfer, "Geschichte und Gedächtnisgeschichte," 21–22.

[40] This is true for Hermeticism, astrology, alchemy, freemasonry, or kabbalah. Even for natural magic a more nuanced picture has to be applied.

> Western esotericism (the very term dates from the nineteenth century) is an etic construct applied retrospectively to earlier periods, and the fact that specific components are nowadays seen as belonging to it does not mean they were necessarily seen as "other" in earlier periods; quite frequently the opposite was true, and the process of marginalization and exclusion occurred only later [...]. Among the various examples that could be given, astrology is an obvious one.[41]

This can easily be combined with my own interpretation: European cultural history is characterized by a dialectic of rejection and fascination vis-à-vis those currents that modern scholars regard as belonging to esotericism. What can be dubbed the 'processes of distancing' is a discursive event that took place during the past 200–300 years. Analyzed with the instruments of discourse theory, what Hanegraaff describes is actually a discursive formation, i.e. the concretization of discourses in institutions, such as the university and its specific research programs.

I will return to this discussion in chapter 10. At this point, I want to introduce my own attempt to conceptualize the study of esoteric discourse in Western culture. I will start with a reassessment of the concept of secrecy.

Secrecy as Social Capital

As noted above, the concept of secrecy is a delicate one in the study of Western esotericism. In an attempt to establish the serious study of Western esotericism in an academic context, representatives of this young field of research have explicitly distinguished esotericism from secrecy. This is because, as Antoine Faivre writes in the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, the

> notion of secrecy is often associated with that of esotericism, even to the point of reducing the sense of this latter term to that of the former. The typological meaning of "esotericism" as referring to secrecy should, however, be clearly distinguished from the historical meaning used in the present reference work and increasingly in general academic parlance.[42]

---

[41] Hanegraaff, "The Trouble with Images," 110 note 12.
[42] Faivre, "Secrecy III," 1056; see also *idem*, "Notions of Concealment and Secrecy"; cf. Laurant, "Du secret ésotérique."

Similarly, Wouter J. Hanegraaff notes that "emphases on secrecy and interiority can certainly be found within quite a few of the historical currents [of esotericism], but they are absent in many others, and therefore cannot be seen as defining characteristics."[43] Although it is useful to distinguish theoretically between esotericism and secrecy—even if not only lay people but many scholars, too, simply neglect such a distinction—the emphasis on this difference has led to a certain disregard of secrecy in the academic study of esotericism. Therefore, let me attempt to determine the place of secrecy within esoteric discourses, without identifying the one with the other.

The concept of secrecy has been quite influential both in sociology and in the academic study of religion. As early as 1906 Georg Simmel devoted an article to "The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies." In this famous text, Simmel argues that secrecy

> secures, so to speak, the possibility of a second world alongside of the obvious world, and the latter is most strenuously affected by the former. Every relationship between two individuals or two groups will be characterized by the ratio of secrecy that is involved in it. Even when one of the parties does not notice the secret factor, yet the attitude of the concealer, and consequently the whole relationship, will be modified by it. The historical development of society is in many respects characterized by the fact that what was formerly public passes under the protection of secrecy, and that, on the contrary, what was formerly secret ceases to require such protection and proclaims itself.[44]

Simmel regards secrecy as "a universal sociological form, which, as such, has nothing to do with the moral valuations of its contents."[45] It is the social structure or form, not the content that defines the *function* of secrecy in communicational processes. Even if secrecy is a social function in all of human communication, it certainly plays an even more important role in secret societies. Simmel explains:

> The structure of the group is often with the direct view to assurance of keeping certain subjects from general knowledge. This is the case with those peculiar types of secret society whose substance is an esoteric doctrine, a theoretical, mystical, religious gnosis. In this case secrecy is the sociological end-unto-itself.[46]

---

43 Hanegraaff, "Esotericism," 338.
44 Simmel, "Sociology of Secrecy," 462–463.
45 *Ibid.*, 463.
46 *Ibid.*, 476–477.

it purports to be, but if the secret is not disclosed as the secret it secretly cannot be, it cannot be the secret it exposes itself not to be.[48]

Theoretically, the revelation of esoteric truths is accessible to anyone who follows the prescribed ways and strategies that lead to perfect knowledge, even if the requirements of following these strategies are so high that an elitist self-understanding emerges from them. But we may add another dimension to secretive discourses. It is not necessarily the case that no one else knows the content of the secret but that people simply do not tell, except at the proper juncture of transmission. From this point of view, the chief effects of secrecy are on the recipients of the secret, not on those from whom it is putatively withheld. The social capital of a secret is attractive for people outside the group only if the fact is known that there is a secret to be told.

We can base this interpretation on Georg Simmel who more than one hundred years ago wrote:

> Secrecy involves a tension which, at the moment of revelation, finds its release. This constitutes the climax in the development of the secret; in it the whole charm of secrecy concentrates and rises to its highest pitch […]. Secrecy also is sustained by the consciousness that it *might be* exploited, and therefore confers power to modify fortunes, to produce surprises, joys, and calamities, even if the latter be only misfortunes to ourselves.[49]

With Simmel's notion of *power*, we have arrived at what in the second half of the twentieth century became known as discourse analysis. Above, I have already engaged the post-structuralist tradition in cultural analysis and argued that the concepts of *discourse* and *field*, developed by Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, are particularly helpful to understand the dynamics of religious polemics and pluralities of knowledge. With regard to the mechanisms of secrecy and concealment that characterize esoteric discourse, we should add Bourdieu's concept of *capital* to our analytical instruments.

---

48 Wolfson, "Kabbalah," 1052. Cf. also Michael Taussig's comment: "The real skill of the practitioner lies not in skilled concealment but in the skilled revelation of skilled concealment. Magic is efficacious not despite the trick but on account of its exposure. The mystery is heightened, not dissipated, by unmasking and in various ways, direct and oblique, ritual serves as a stage for so many unmaskings. Hence power flows not from masking but from unmasking, which masks more than masking" ("Viscerality, Faith, and Skepticism," 273).

49 Simmel, "Sociology of Secrecy," 465–466, italics original.

If power relations form an identifiable structure, various forms of capital come into play and regulate access to resources and social status. Bourdieu differentiates four categories of "goods": (1) economic capital; (2) social capital (i.e. various kinds of valued relations with others);[50] (3) cultural capital (i.e. primarily legitimate knowledge of one kind or another); (4) symbolic capital (i.e. prestige and social honor). Despite the theoretical distinction between various forms of capital, Bourdieu makes it clear that all forms of capital can be turned into economic capital, and that a number of further interrelations between forms of capital are at work. And Bourdieu also notes that *practice* is the sum product of an agent's active engagement with capital in a given field: "[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice."[51]

The nature of positions, their "objective definition," is to be found in their relationship to the relevant form of capital. What is more, a field can be 'self-sustaining,' because the existence of a field *presupposes* and, when it is actively functioning, *creates* a belief among agents in the legitimacy and value of the capital which is at stake in the field. This legitimate *interest* in the field is produced by the same historical processes that have produced the field itself.

Equipped with the methodological tools provided by Pierre Bourdieu we can now return to the relationship between esoteric discourses and secrecy. It is a common feature of many discrete societies that members enjoy access to superior, exclusive, and elitist knowledge, which means an increase of social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Time and again, esoteric fields have been formed as a result of historical processes, leading to an interest of agents (i.e. persons acting in the field) in the disclosure of secret knowledge; in their functioning, these fields at the same time created the belief in the legitimacy and the importance of participating in these forms of capital.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the notion of 'tradition' plays a significant role here. By adhering to a claimed secret line of wisdom, intellectuals from the Middle Ages through today have claimed superior knowledge and thus increased their social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Consequently, the notions of *prisca theologia* and *philosophia perennis* have served as identity markers in an esoteric discourse that is characterized by a dialectic of concealment and disclosure. This

---

[50] Social capital refers to all resources that an agent can mobilize and profit from, because the agent is involved in a network of relationships with others.

[51] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 101.

is the *social function* of esoteric ideas and texts in European history of culture.

Consequently, I argue for the usefulness of the notion of secrecy for the study of esotericism, if—and this is important!—that notion is part of an analytical framework that operates with concepts of fields, communication, structure, and discourse. With their approaches, Urban, Wolfson, and others have provided an excellent means for a better understanding of the function of secrecy and concealment in esoteric fields of discourse. Applying the conceptual frameworks of the structuralist tradition in general, and of Pierre Bourdieu in particular, opens new vistas for historical analysis, because it is not only the texts and ideas that are at stake here but also their concrete societal impact, as well as the communication of agents who actually make use of those texts and propagate those ideas. The disclosure of hidden knowledge becomes a contested object of desire; its possession adds to all forms of capital that the agents both strive for and benefit from. In turn, the existence of such a contested arena creates and nurtures the desirability of participating in the disclosed knowledge. This participation is what keeps esoteric fields of communication functioning and alive, until the dynamic of positions on the field changes and agents lose their conviction that it is worth striving for an increase of symbolic and social capital derived from the field.

Discourses of Perfect Knowledge

As should be clear by now, I argue for a model of esotericism that is capable of describing the dynamic and processuality of identity formation, as well as the discursive transfers between religions and societal systems, including the academy. It is important to note that when we study the esoteric as discourse we refuse to present a new master-narrative of what 'we Europeans' 'really are.'

Such an approach also means that the discourse of esotericism can be strictly historicized. In fact, it is the genealogy of this discourse, leading to the institutionalization of the academic research of esotericism, which is an important topic of its academic study.[52] Historicization also means that the determinants of the modern concept of

---

[52] Therefore, Michael Bergunder's critique that my approach "nominalistically dehistoricizes esotericism" is based on a simplified interpretation; see Bergunder, "Was ist Esoterik?," 485–487.

esotericism can predate the advent of the term in the nineteenth century. On this point I differ from Michael Bergunder's attempt to limit the discursive conceptualization of 'esotericism' to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Bergunder's definition,

> esotericism can be understood as an identificatory general term in the form of an empty signifier, which is articulated and reproduced by a discursive community and in various fields of discourse. In this sense, esotericism is an historical phenomenon and not understood nominalistically or idealistically, but as a contingent juncture or fixation of a contested discourse of power.[53]

If we define esotericism as an "empty signifier," it will be difficult to operationalize our definition when it comes to concrete historical material. Paradoxically, the definition itself has to remain "empty," in order to retain its usefulness.[54]

While Bergunder suggests excluding historical phenomena from esoteric discourse if they do not partake in the modern language-game(s) of "esotericism," I am interested in the genealogy and pre-history of this discourse, even if the term itself did not occur. In my view, we cannot understand the dynamics of a modern discourse of esotericism without taking discursive events into account that predate that discourse; I would even argue that those events are an intrinsic element of the modern discourse and that it is the scholar's task to reveal the underlying discursive structures. This book is an attempt to do so.

In order to determine the structure of esoteric discourses—or the genealogy of the modern discourse of esotericism, if we want to follow Bergunder's idiom—I am especially interested in *claims of higher or*

---

[53] "[…] lässt sich folglich Esoterik als identifikatorischer Allgemeinbegriff in Form eines leeren Signifikanten verstehen, der durch eine Diskursgemeinschaft und in verschiedenen Diskursfeldern artikuliert und reproduziert wird. In diesem Sinne ist Esoterik ein historisches Phänomen und wird weder nominalistisch noch idealistisch verstanden, sondern als kontingenter Knotenpunkt bzw. Fixierung eines strittigen Machtdiskurses" (Bergunder, "Was ist Esoterik?," 500).

[54] Bergunder's attempts at operationalizing his definition clearly reflect this paradoxical situation. While trying to reconstruct the "discursive network" from the "first use of the term esotericism [*Esoterik*]" to its "last use, hence in the present time" ("Was ist Esoterik?," 502), he neglects the different forms of the term in various European languages. In addition, the discursive field of a term would have to include synonyms that were quite popular at certain points, such as mysticism, gnosis/gnosticism, Hermeticism, occultism, and others. Unfortunately, Bergunder does not offer a solution to this problem.

perfect knowledge. Not only the content of these systems, but the very fact that people claim a wisdom that is superior to other interpretations of cosmos and history is important. What is claimed is a vision of truth as a master-key for answering all questions of humankind. Hence, relativism is the natural enemy of esoteric claims of knowledge. The idea of higher knowledge is closely linked to a discourse of secrecy, simply because, as noted above, *the dialectic of concealment and revelation* is a structural element of secretive discourses. Consequently, Moshe Idel, borrowing Jan Assmann's notion of 'arcanization,' can describe the dialectics of secrecy and concealment on the one hand and revelation and understanding (Hebrew *binah* or *derishah*) on the other in Jewish mysticism as an elitist form of religion that would match my understanding of esoteric discourse.[55]

Totalizing claims of knowledge can be found in religious contexts—from the gnostic search for self-redemption, to Suhrawardī's School of Illumination, to Abraham Abulafia's kabbalistic fusion with the divine, to Jacob Böhme's notion of *Zentralschau* ("central vision"), and Emanuel Swedenborg's conversing with the angels—but also in philosophical contexts, as the late antique Middle Platonists or the Renaissance Neoplatonists, discussed in the following chapter, clearly reveal. Philosophers have often partaken in an ongoing discourse of higher knowledge. From this perspective, even Hegel can be described as a player on esoteric fields of discourse because he presents his doctrine as the 'end of philosophy' (*Abschluss der Philosophie*).[56] All these examples illustrate the esoteric structure of the respective philosophies. If we compare them to the view of Augustine and medieval scholastics that the ultimate truth has simply to be believed because it is beyond the reach of the human intellect, the structural difference is apparent. The same is true for Cartesian rationalism or the Kantian critique of pure reason; both philosophers are much more modest concerning the ultimate reach of their doctrines.

At this point, the question arises how we are to differentiate esoteric discourse from 'gnosis' (i.e., "knowledge"). Since the term 'gnosis'—and, to a certain extent, 'gnosticism' too—is a highly biased term, there is good reason to agree with Michael A. Williams' argument for

---

[55] Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 202–204.
[56] This is the quintessence of Magee's *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*.

dismantling this "dubious category."[57] On the other hand, this cat-
egory played an important role in Christian heresiological debate, as
in Gottfried Arnold's influential *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-
Historien*. Arnold defines 'gnosis' as follows: "1) That you understand
the things properly; 2) that you fulfill what you know; 3) and that
you expound what is hidden in truth in divine fashion."[58] The gnostic
search for higher understanding is "really a completion of man […]
through the wisdom of divine things, both in words and in practice
and in whole life, as they talk about it. That is why those Christians
called themselves *Gnosticos*, particularly those who are interested in
studying divine things in a contemplative life."[59] 'Gnosis' is introduced
in Arnold's treatment as an emic term whose function we can ana-
lyze with reference to an esoteric field of discourse.[60] It illustrates what
Michael Pauen nicely phrased the "self-empowerment of the under-
standing subject" (*Selbstermächtigung des erkennenden Subjektes*).[61]
With the concept of esoteric discourse proposed here, we can easily
relinquish the terms 'gnosis/gnosticism' and describe passages such
as *Corpus Hermeticum* I.20; XI.22; XIII.18; *Asclepius* 6 and 41 as *eso-
teric*. Discourses of *redemption*—rather than self-empowerment and
perfect knowledge—are characteristic of gnosticism as distinguished
from esotericism.

We encounter claims of perfect knowledge not only in religion and
philosophy, but also in science. While many scientists today regard
their work as the application of heuristic models in order to under-
stand natural phenomena—thus modestly answering questions about
nature or satisfying human curiosity—until the nineteenth century (at
times even today) the objectives of science often transgressed these
limits. As I will explain at several instances in subsequent chapters,
scientists undertook to unveil the master key to the world.

---

[57] Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*; see also Hanegraaff, "Gnosticism."
[58] "1) Daß man die sachen wol erkennet: 2) auch vollbringet was man weiß: 3) und
darlegen kann / was in der warheit auf Göttliche art verborgen ist."
[59] "[…] eine rechte vollendung des menschen […] durch die weißheit in Göttlichen
dingen, so wol in worten als in wercken und im gantzen leben / wie sie davon reden.
Und daher haben sich nun auch die Christen selber Gnosticos genennet, zumal die,
welche sich auf betrachtung Göttlicher dinge in einem beschaulichen leben geleget
haben" (Arnold, *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie*, I, 70; in the original
partly bold).
[60] See Gilly, "Das Bekenntnis zur Gnosis"; Schlögl, "Hermetismus als Sprache der
'unsichtbaren Kirche'."
[61] Pauen, *Dithyrambiker des Untergangs*, 36.

Thus, esoteric discourse can take on various forms and can materialize in various social and cultural locations. For my analysis, it is particularly useful to look at two specific modes of gaining access to perfect knowledge—mediation and experience. I understand *mediation* in the same sense as Antoine Faivre introduced it into academic language, albeit not as a typological characteristic of esotericism but as a strategy to substantiate the claim for secret or higher wisdom that is revealed to humankind. The mediators can be of quite diverse natures: gods and goddesses, angels, intermediate beings, or superior entities are often described as the source of esoteric knowledge. Examples are Hermes, Poimandres (in the *Corpus Hermeticum*), Enoch, Solomon, the "Great White Brotherhood" and "Mahatmas" of the Theosophical Society, or the mediator and later the guardian angel "Aiwass" who revealed higher knowledge to Aleister Crowley in *Liber AL vel Legis* in 1904. From this perspective, the large field of 'channeling'—a term coined in the context of the New Age movement—is a typical phenomenon of esoteric discourse, no matter whether the channeled source is "Seth" (Jane Roberts), "Ramtha" (J.Z. Knight), or "Jesus Christ" (Helen Schucman).

In addition to—and sometimes in combination with—mediation we can identify the claim of individual *experience* as an important mode of gaining access to hidden treasures of perfect knowledge. Again, this mode is prominent in the Corpus Hermeticum and in subsequent literature, where a vision indicates the process of revelation. The complex genre of *ascension* to higher dimensions of reality—in the Hekhalot literature, gnostic texts, and also in various mystical contexts, through meditation, trance, or drug-induced altered states of consciousness— belongs to the category of experience as well. Repeatedly, the claim of individual experience of ultimate truth was a threat to institutionalized forms of religion, as the reaction of the Christian churches to these claims clearly reveal. Furthermore, the mode of experience explains (among other reasons) why in early modern times esoteric currents were more openly embraced by Protestant denominations, especially in the spiritualistic and pietistic milieus that focused on the formation of an 'inner Church' through personal experience, than in Roman Catholic circles.[62]

---

[62] Cf., for instance, the notion of "True Christianity" as an inner phenomenon in Johann Arndt's *Vier Bücher vom Wahren Christentuhmb*. The esoteric components

My interpretation does not qualify as a definition of esotericism; rather, it should be seen as a framework of analysis. In doing so, I refer to Max Weber who wrote in *Die "Objektivität" sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis* (1904):

> It is not the "factual" association of the "things" [*die "sachlichen" Zusammenhänge der "Dinge"*] but the intellectual association of the problems [*die gedanklichen Zusammenhänge der Probleme*] that underlie the fields of scientific research: if scholars apply new methods to new problems and subsequently discover new truths, which open up new important criteria, a new "science" will emerge.[63]

Put differently: The study of esoteric discourses in European history of religion generates a field of research along the lines of *Problemgeschichte* ("history of problems").[64] The problems addressed by the academic study of esotericism relate to basic aspects of Western self-understanding: how do we explain rhetorics of rationality, science, Enlightenment, progress, and absolute truth in their relation to religious claims? How do we elucidate the conflicting pluralities of religious worldviews, identities, and forms of knowledge that lie at the bottom of Western culture?

If we answer these questions, perhaps we will not need the term 'esotericism' any more. We will regard the concept of esotericism as a Wittgensteinian ladder that once was necessary to reach a better understanding of historical processes. If esoteric dynamics are seen as normal elements of European culture, we can relinquish the term altogether and will start talking about constructions and identities of Europe and 'the West.' Put in a nutshell, *'esoteric discourse in Western culture' is an analytical framework that helps to identify genealogies of identities in a pluralistic competition of knowledge.*

---

of this influential book are treated extensively in Geyer, *Verborgene Weisheit* (cf. the remarks on Geyer in Neugebauer-Wölk, "Esoterik und Christentum vor 1800," 154–156).

[63] Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, 166.

[64] For the implications of Weber's methodological approach on contemporary historiography see Oexle, "Max Weber—Geschichte als Problemgeschichte," 33–37.

PART TWO

SHARED PASSIONS

INTRODUCTION

If we address esoteric discourses as a secretive dialectic of concealment and revelation which is concerned with perfect knowledge, and if we interpret the claims developed in this discourse against the background of a two-fold pluralism of European history of religion, we will locate that knowledge no longer in religious 'traditions' but in various cultural systems and religious-philosophical milieus. The following three chapters identify important 'locations of knowledge' in Western culture. During the medieval and early modern periods, exploring the secrets of experience, of texts, and of time provided meaningful patterns of interpretation that were used by individuals and groups to position their own religious identities. Alliances were formed beyond religious boundaries along the lines of intellectual passions, despite the often polemical conflict that underlie these contacts and transfers.

We are confronted here with identities that are negotiated in direct reference to the Other. To be sure, the process of Othering is a characteristic of cultural history in general, but between 1200 and 1700 Judaism in particular played an important role in this process. As Robert Bonfil notes: "The history of the Jews of Italy in the Renaissance is the history of the encounter between a minority determined to perpetuate its Otherness and a majority equally bent on its assimilation."[1] Bonfil's reassessment of the complex relationship between Jewish and Christian culture in Renaissance and early modern Italy is an important step forward. Far from being isolated, Italian Jews elaborated their identity in direct confrontation with their Christian contemporaries. Bonfil sees a few specific traits in this development:

> the sensitivity of Jewish culture to some of the forms and contents of Christian culture; the existence of a cultural relationship between Jews and Christians on the personal level as well as on the level of the learning they shared; and the selective adoption of forms and contents imported from outside as integral expressions of Jewish identity.[2]

---

[1] Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 3. See also Silberstein, "Others Within and Others Without."
[2] Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 168.

The latter could mean emulation or sincere opposition to Christian society. Bonfil then asks:

> Why should one interpret this kind of participation in the mentality and general tendencies of the time as assimilation pure and simple? Why not see it as Jews' way of simply being men of their time? Or again, why claim that the Jews were influenced by the Renaissance, whereas Pico della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino, or Cosimo de' Medici were its typical representatives? Why not say that Messer Leon, Elijah del Medigo, or Johannan Alemanno were just as much men of the Renaissance as their Christian contemporaries? In my opinion, this approach renders a better service to the general understanding of the Renaissance and of the mentality of its exponents than do current theories.[3]

In the same vein, Moshe Idel has argued for a much more complex picture of Renaissance kabbalah. Comparing the kabbalistic centers in Safed and Italy, he points out that due to preconceived attitudes of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars the manifold relationships and exchanges between those centers have been marginalized. Not only Pico intended to discuss his *conclusiones* with the pope; Abraham Abulafia and Solomon Molkho, too, sought an audience with the leader of Christendom. The personal contact between Christians, Jews, and Muslims—Safed was part of the Ottoman Empire, and Sufi masters were living in Safed—is an important element of exchange and transport of ideas that has to be moved into the center of scrutiny. Therefore, "the main topics in the early Florentine Renaissance might have been influenced by Jewish and Judeo-Arabic texts available in Florence."[4]

Another voice in this reassessment of religious processes is Steven M. Wasserstrom. He coined an interesting term in order to understand the dynamic networks between Jewish and Muslim scholars in medieval Andalusia. According to Wasserstrom, "interconfessional circles" made possible an intensive exchange of thoughts between those two groups, an exchange that was fostered not least by the fact that both groups shared a common enemy—Christianity. In contrast

---

[3] *Ibid*. See also Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy; idem*, "Aliens Within: The Jews and Antijudaism"; Ruderman & Veltri (eds.), *Cultural Intermediaries*.

[4] Idel, "Italy in Safed, Safed in Italy," 244. See also Idel, "Jewish Mystical Thought in the Florence of Lorenzo il Magnifico"; Toussaint, "Ficino's Orphic Magic." Recently, Shaul Magid argued similarly and contextualized the Lurianic community in Safed in a multi-religious setting; see Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash*.

to moralistic ideas about a 'dialogue among religions,' however, Wasserstrom notes that these intellectuals were "interconfessional despite themselves," which means that they were not necessarily interested in understanding and respecting the other's tradition, but in polemical dissociation. Traditions of the competitor were presented as own tradition, hence rhetorics of 'expropriation' were a common strategy. What drove these circles together—often in direct and friendly contact—was a field of shared interest. "Specifically, it was through the shared passion for certain intellectual subsystems—Sufi, Ishmāʿīlī, Ishrāqi, Kabbalistic—that intercourse between Spanish Jews and Muslims flourished."[5] Although Wasserstrom restricts this characteristic to the specific Andalusian situation of the Middle Ages, the notion of 'interconfessional circles'—or, because 'interconfessional' is an anachronism, of 'interreligious circles'—also applies to the situation of Renaissance culture. For instance, what we see in the intense exchange of thoughts and positions between Pico and other Christian kabbalists on the one hand and their Jewish contemporaries on the other, is exactly this shared passion for certain models of interpretation that fostered religious and philosophical identities. It was the discourse of the day. And just as in the medieval case, the driving force behind this exchange was not dialogue but polemical dissociation and competition.

The ongoing debate between Jewish and Christian scholars in the fifteenth century was an overture to the humanist 'Republic of Letters':

> In fact, […] as Kristeller and many others have taught us, scholars rarely lived, and never worked, alone. They renewed the traditionally monastic customs and usages of academic life. And they created new forms of intellectual sociability and new academic institutions. Learned groups and societies, formal and informal, took shape, first in individual Italian and German cities and then across Europe. Eventually, scholars came to speak a republican language of their own. They represented themselves as citizens of a formal, international community, the Republic of Letters. Through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, even as religious polemic and warfare shook the world around them, they tried to set standards of intellectual interaction, to regulate one another's way of

---

[5] Wasserstrom, "Jewish-Muslim Relations in the Context of Andalusian Emigration," 69. Wasserstrom elaborated this idea in great detail in his important study *Between Muslim and Jew*, in which he applied the concepts of 'trajectories,' 'intimacies,' and 'symbiosis.' My own approach is partly indebted to Wasserstrom's methodological considerations.

pursuing learning, and to sustain an ideal of learned conversation that transcended the narrow loyalties of nation and church.[6]

Bonfil's, Idel's, and Wasserstrom's analyses lend themselves quite naturally to a combination with discursive and field-theoretical approaches to the history of religion that I propose in this book. Thus, the 'circles' can be described as networks, in which discursive transfers take place, and the 'intellectual subsystems' can be described as fields of discourse.

---

[6] Grafton, *Bring Out Your Dead*, 13. On the expansion of the Republic of Letters to a wider reading audience due to the advent of printing see Eisenstein, *Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 136–159.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SECRETS OF EXPERIENCE:
WISDOM BEYOND DEMONSTRATION

Although everybody has them, 'experiences' belong to the concepts that are most difficult to define and apply academically.[1] In a long and complex discussion, philosophy, sociology, psychology, neurology, theology, and the academic study of religion have established a multitude of models that aim at understanding and interpreting what is actually going on when people have experiences. When it comes to 'religious experience' the discussion is even trickier because theological and ideological normativities are entering in, along with subjective categories that are difficult to standardize or catalogue.

Ever since the nineteenth century, and particularly after William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902), the category 'religious experience' has been closely related to the category 'mysticism.'[2] Mystical experience has repeatedly been described as an individual encounter with the divine by means of dissolution of boundaries, be they physiological, categorial, or emotional. From a scholarly point of view, the major academic problem with mysticism and experience, then, is the fact that the experiences themselves are inaccessible for unambiguous academic scrutiny, particularly if we leave the experimental frameworks of analysis and turn to historical sources.[3] These sources are texts, images, or material objects that *communicate* and—in the case of texts—*report* mystical experiences. Consequently, research into experience and mysticism has turned to issues of *narrativity* and *social construction* in order to explain the dynamics of religious experience, thus leaving behind earlier ontological or

---

[1] See the overview in Sharf, "Experience."
[2] See Wilke, "Mysticism." A search on "experi* AND mysti*" in the university library database of the Netherlands rendered 677 titles in July 2008. A Google search on "mysticism AND experience" gave more than 2,700,000 hits. In October 2009 the numbers were 707 and 1,980,000, respectively.
[3] This does not mean, of course, that the results of cognitive science or experimental psychology cannot be applied profitably to historical issues. But even then our analysis is limited by the narrative nature of most sources, with the exception of visual sources, such as analyzed in chapter 8 below.

phenomenological approaches.[4] The power of explanation that these approaches provide by far exceeds the problematic search for 'understanding religious experience.'

For the purpose of this book, however, it is not necessary to enter the complicated debate about the nature of religious or mystical experience. In a discursive analysis, it is not the content or nature of religious experiences that is at stake but the very fact that people *claim* them. With regard to esoteric discourse, we can say that experiential knowledge has repeatedly served as a mode to affirm perfect knowledge of the world.[5] In the present chapter, I will illustrate this dynamic with reference to a number of historical examples, ranging from late antiquity to the seventeenth century.

Neoplatonism and Theurgy in Late Antiquity

Concepts of knowledge and cognition are a recurring issue of ancient philosophical debate. Despite considerable differences in detail, Epicureans, Stoics, and Skeptics basically agreed that all theories of knowledge have to be based on sensual perception.[6] Humans are born as a *tabula rasa* that receives sensory impressions; by applying their cognitive, rational capacities they differentiate 'true knowledge' from 'mere belief' and ultimately assent to reliable knowledge of the world.[7] Zeno, for instance, stated that we know something if we have grasped or apprehended it in such a way that our grasp or apprehension cannot be dislodged by argument.[8] Perception, thus, is a mental act that enables human beings to attain reliable, even if contested, knowledge. Rationality and language are prerequisites for this concept of knowledge.

---

[4] On narrative approaches in psychology and religious studies see Harding, "The Afterlife of Stories"; van Belzen, "Beyond a Classic?"; Yamane, "Narrative and Religious Experience." On social constructivist approaches see Forman, "Mystical Knowledge"; Forman (ed.), *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*; Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism."

[5] For an analysis of narratives of experience in twentieth-century esotericism see Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 331–453.

[6] See Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, particularly pp. 21–30; 123–131.

[7] The Skeptics even doubted the human capacity to distinguish 'imagined reality' from 'true facts.'

[8] *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* I, fragment 68.

Aristotle, too, was an empiricist.[9] For him, the ultimate source of knowledge was perception. But although there is no knowledge outside sensual perception, perception is not the same as knowledge. According to Aristotle, knowledge comes through the perception of particular facts that stay in the mind and become a "memory"; a batch of similar memories constitutes what Aristotle called "experience." Experience comes close to knowledge when the particular memories are compressed in one single thought. But to become knowledge in the full sense of this concept, it is required to grasp the *cause* of this perceived fact.[10] In short, knowledge is attained by generalization out of perception and the demonstration of the causality or even necessity of this fact. Konwledge may be demonstrated, then, by applying the tools of logic Aristotle developed. In his *Prior Analytics* he defined *sullogismos* as an argument in which, certain things being assumed, something different from the things assumed follows by necessity from the fact that they hold. Syllogism, hence, is not itself knowledge or science—a system of knowledge—but the principal way of demonstration.[11]

It is not my intention here to enter into a discussion of ancient concepts of knowledge. Nor are these sketchy remarks meant as an adequate description of the complexities of Greek and Roman philosophical debate. I refer to these interpretational concepts only to indicate a tendency of leading ancient philosophical schools' position vis-à-vis the possibility of ultimate knowledge that is based on individual experience. In general, they were skeptical regarding the human capacity to attain knowledge that is beyond rational demonstration. And Aristotelianism, despite its great interest in metaphysics, was mainly concerned with the natural world as foundation of knowledge. This tendency is a marked contrast to Platonic and Neoplatonic approaches to knowledge, in which ontological categories that escape scientific demonstration enjoy a considerably higher status. Small wonder, then, that until the fifteenth century Aristotle was regarded the principal expert for the revealed world—'science'—while Plato was

---

[9] A good introduction to Aristotle's philosophy is Barnes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle.*

[10] This principle, of course, runs the risk of an infinite regression, as skeptical philosophers rightly pointed out. Aristotle himself tried to counter this criticism by referring to final causes or "First Principles" as the end of this regression; see the extensive discussion in Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles.*

[11] See Patzig, *Aristotle's Theory of the Syllogism.*

seen as a priest and theologian, concerned with the transcendental dimensions of the cosmos.

In late antiquity, narratives addressing the direct experience of transcendental, divine truth are located in Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic discourse. This is true for almost all representatives of ancient esotericism, be they Christian, Jewish, gnostic, pagan, or Manichaean. Two fields of discourse stand out as particularly relevant here—'out-of-body-experiences' in ritual context and heavenly ascents. Both fields are linked to a secretive discourse of revelation in which the adept receives the key for accessing divine knowledge. This form of knowledge is an alternative juxtaposed to syllogism and rational demonstration; in her excellent study of linguistics, mysticism, and Neoplatonic philosophy in Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius, Sara Rappe dubbed this "non-discursive thinking":

> Non-discursive thinking does not involve thinking about anything, either by way of propositions or by way of theorems, and so on. Instead, non-discursive thinking involves, perhaps paradoxically, a kind of objectless knowing, an activity that is self-directed but refrains from any definitions or objectifications of the self. […] The object of contemplation can be connected to the practice of theurgy and very often is selected from a set of traditionally revered symbols, such as mathematical objects, traditional myths or ritually oriented narratives, and divine names. Finally, whatever insights are gained from this practice of intellectual *askesis*, the results obtained are never equivalent to any discursive formulation or expression.[12]

In my view, the notion of "non-discursive thinking" is a *contradictio in adjecto*. It seems more suitable to talk of a non-rational element of esoteric discourse.[13]

Attaining knowledge by means of mystical, bodily experience is well attested in ancient texts. Philo of Alexandria is a case in point. With clear reference to Plato's *Phaedrus* he writes:

---

[12] Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, 20–21. On p. 3 she explains that "the non-discursive aspects of the text—the symbols, ritual formulae, myths, and images—are the locus of this (non-discursive) pedagogy. Their purpose is to help the reader to learn how to contemplate, to awaken the eye of wisdom. […] These texts constitute a language of vision."

[13] As Dylan Burns notes: "I suggest that, rather than attempting to discuss 'discourses about non-discursivity,' it is more productive to speak of 'discourses of secrecy,' and, if the case can be made that the secret or hidden knowledge in question is also an absolute knowledge, of 'esoteric discourses'" ("*Teleios Logos Arrhētos*," 26).

For it would seem that the same position that the Great director holds in the entire cosmos is held by the human intellect in the human being. It is itself invisible, yet it sees all things. […] it is lifted on high and, after exploring the air and the phenomena that occur in it, it is borne further upwards towards the ether and the revolutions of heaven. Then, after being carried around in the dances of the planets and fixed stars in accordance with the laws of perfect music, and following the guidance of its love of wisdom, it peers beyond the whole of sense-perceptible reality and desires to attain the intelligible realm. (§71) And when the intellect has observed in that realm the models and forms of the sense-perceptible things which it had seen here, objects of overwhelming beauty, it then, possessed by a sober drunkenness, becomes enthused like the Cory-bants. Filled with another longing and a higher form of desire, which has propelled it to the utmost vault of the intelligibles, it thinks it is heading towards the Great King himself. But as it strains to see, pure and unmixed beams of concentrated light pour forth like a torrent, so that the eye of the mind, overwhelmed by the brightness, suffers from vertigo.[14]

Philo and other Middle Platonists were reluctant to link the experience of the ultimate divine source with claims of perfect knowledge. But the stage was well set for subsequent philosophers, theurgists, gnostics, and Hermetists to engage this topic directly. Using visionary language, these texts describe bodily experience as a direct way to knowledge. Consider, for instance, the first passage of the *Poimandres*:

Once, when thought came to me of the things that are and my thinking soared high and my bodily senses were restrained, like someone heavy with sleep from too much eating or toil of the body, an enormous being completely unbounded in size seemed to appear to me and call my name and say to me: 'What do you want to hear and see; what do you want to learn and know from your understanding?' […] I said, 'I wish to learn about the things that are, to understand their nature and to know god. How much I want to hear!' I said. Then he said to me: 'Keep in mind all that you wish to learn, and I will teach you.' Saying this, he changed his appearance, and in an instant everything was immediately opened to me.[15]

Note that this visionary bodily experience is not opposed to think-ing and understanding.[16] But it is an alternative way to understanding

---

[14] Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* XII.70–71, trans. Runia, p. 64.
[15] *Corpus Hermeticum* I.1–4 (quoted from Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 1).
[16] Contra Rappe (see above). In his analysis of Hermetic self-realization through mystical ascent and the activation of the mental faculties Jean-Pierre Mahé notes that "the vision of oneself forces man to strip off his mortal body and to get an immortal

or *gnōsis* than syllogism and rational reasoning; the truth is accessed directly: "in an instant everything was immediately opened to me." A similar example is the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, in which the Hermetist is uplifted to the eighth heavenly sphere:

> For already from them the power, which is light, is coming to us. For I see! I see indescribable depths. How shall I tell you, my son? [...] How [shall I describe] the universe? I [am Mind and] I see another Mind, the one that [moves] the soul! I see the one that moves me from pure forget-fulness. You give me power! I see myself! I want to speak! Fear restrains me. I have found the beginning of the power that is above all powers, the one that has no beginning. I see a fountain bubbling with life. I have said, my son, that I am Mind. I have seen! Language is not able to reveal this. For the entire eighth, my son, and the souls that are in it, and the angels, sing a hymn in silence. And I, Mind, understand.[17]

Often, the bodily experience of the ultimate knowledge is described as divinization, as in the *Corpus Hermeticum*:

> Thus, unless you make yourself equal to god, you cannot understand god; like is understood by like. Make yourself grow to immeasurable immensity, outleap all body, outstrip all time, become eternity and you will understand god. Having conceived that nothing is impossible to you, consider yourself immortal and able to understand everything, all art, all learning, the temper of every living thing. Go higher than every height and lower than every depth. Collect in yourself all the sensations of what has been made, of fire and water, dry and wet; be everywhere at once, on land, in the sea, in heaven; be not yet born, be in the womb, be young, old, dead, beyond death. And when you have understood all these at once—times, places, things, qualities, quantities—then you can understand god.[18]

By means of a direct, individual experience of and merging with the divine the Hermetist reaches ultimate understanding—a clear example of esoteric discourses of knowledge. Although knowledge is revealed by superior entities (Tat, Hermes, Mind), it is the adept's own active

---

one, that cannot be seen with the eyes of flesh. In other words, seeing oneself some-how means acquiring new mental faculties, or perhaps reactivating forgotten or latent virtualities" (Mahé, "Mental Faculties and Cosmic Levels," 75).

[17] Nag Hammadi Codex VI.6.57.29–VI.6.58.21 (Robinson [ed.], *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 324–325). Mahé, "Reading," 82, interprets this Hermetic praxis in terms of the mythocosmology of the *Poimandres*.

[18] *Corpus Hermeticum* XI.20 (Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 41). See also the parallel texts from the Greek magical papyri and theurgic literature that Copenhaver lists in his annotation (*ibid*., 172).

mental faculty that secures knowledge and understanding—the "self-empowerment of the understanding subject."[19] This self-empowerment and the knowledge claims attached to it provide perhaps the most important contribution in a polemical discourse of antiquity and beyond. One may only recall the famous passage of *Poimandres* that was so influential—and controversial—in subsequent esotericism, as it inaugurates the divinization of the adept:

> Thence the human being rushes up through the cosmic framework, at the first zone surrendering the energy of increase and decrease; at the second evil machination, a device now inactive; at the third the illusion of longing, now inactive; at the fourth the ruler's arrogance, now freed of excess; at the fifth unholy presumption and daring recklessness; at the sixth the evil impulses that come from wealth, now inactive; and at the seventh zone the deceit that lies in ambush. And then, stripped of the effects of the cosmic framework, the human enters the region of the ogdoad; he has his own proper power, and along with the blessed he hymns the father. […] They rise up to the father in order and surrender themselves to the powers, and, having become powers, they enter into god. This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god.[20]

This passage links the experience of becoming god to the heavenly ascent of the adept, an aspect that I will return to shortly.

We enter here a field of discourse that was shared by various religious currents in late antiquity. My analysis can easily be combined with Peter Schäfer's notion of *macroforms*, which he introduced to describe the textual structures that underlie the Hekhalot literature. According to Schäfer, macroforms are (ideal) literary units that materialize in a number of concrete *microforms*, i.e. texts.[21] If we extend the concept of macroforms to the philosophical, theurgic, magical, or astrological

---

[19] Pauen, *Dithyrambiker des Untergangs*, 36.

[20] *Corpus Hermeticum* I.25–26 (Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 6). On the *Poimandres* see also von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie*, 673–677.

[21] Schäfer defines: "I employ the term *macroform* for a superimposed literary unit, instead of the terms *writing* or *work*, to accommodate the fluctuating character of the texts of the Hekhalot literature. The term *macroform* concretely denotes both the fictional or imaginary single text, which we initially and by way of delimitation always refer to in scholarly literature (e.g., *Hekhalot Rabbati* in contrast to *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, etc.), as well as the often different manifestations of this text in the various manuscripts. The border between micro- and macroforms is thereby fluent: certain definable textual units can be both part of a superimposed entirety (and thus a 'microform') as well as an independently transmitted redactional unit (thus a 'macroform')" (Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*, 6 note 14).

texts of late antiquity, we will encounter many structural elements that are shared by representatives of different religious convictions; macroforms are a way to identify fields of discourse. When it comes to the concrete manifestation of such shared fields of discourse—the microforms—the transformation, adaptation, and polemical differentiation in a pluralistic religious environment becomes visible.

The macroform of divinization through bodily experience and gnosis is attested in Christian sources. A famous microform is the *Gospel of Thomas*: "Jesus said, 'He who will drink from my mouth will become like me. I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him.'"[22] This is followed by a claim of superiority: "Does not Jesus say, 'Whoever finds himself is superior to the world'?"[23] In pagan theurgy, we come across the same macroform, but now in full Neoplatonic rendering. In his *De mysteriis*, Iamblichus leaves no doubt about the superior power of this kind of divine knowledge. Let me quote one passage *in extenso*, because in a nutshell we have here the essence of polemical discourse of esoteric knowledge:

> So then, to the eternal companions of the gods, let there correspond also the innate cognition of them; even as they themselves possess a being of eternal identity, so too let the human soul join itself to them in knowledge on the same terms, not employing conjecture or opinion or some form of syllogistic reasoning, all of which take their start from the plane of temporal reality, to pursue that essence which is beyond all these things, but rather connecting itself to the gods with pure and blameless reasonings, which it has received from all eternity from those same gods. You, however, seem to think that knowledge of divinity is of the same nature as a knowledge of anything else, and that it is by the balancing of contrary propositions that a conclusion is reached, as in dialectical discussions. But the cases are in no way similar. The knowledge of the gods is of a quite different nature, and is far removed from all antithetical procedure, and does not consist in the assent to some proposition now, nor yet at the moment of one's birth, but from all eternity it coexisted in the soul in complete uniformity.[24]

As noted above, Neoplatonists regarded demonstration by Aristotelian syllogism proper for the physical realm only, whereas knowledge of the gods required a different form of cognition. Theurgy—the 'divine

---

[22] Nag Hammadi Codex II.2.108 (Robinson [ed.], *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 137).
[23] Nag Hammadi Codex II.2.112 (Robinson [ed.], *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 138).
[24] Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* I.3 (Clarke et al., *On the Mysteries*, 15).

work'—is a *process* in which the religious expert rises to an active understanding of the divine in ritual performance, thus blending his soul[25] with the all-encompassing source of life. According to Iamblichus, the supreme god entrusted the successful performance to some superior beings that collaborate with the theurgist. "The invocation and rites performed by the expert ascend to the superior beings and attach themselves to them by assimilation and appropriation, but not through force do they achieve their own activity."[26] Hence, Iamblichus can conclude that

> through beings deprived of knowledge [the god] reveals thoughts which surpass all knowledge. […] So he makes things unknown in nature known; things not knowledgeable he makes knowledgeable, and through these he implants wisdom in us, and by means of all beings in the cosmos he moves our mind to the truth of things that are, have been, and will be.[27]

By way of initiation into theurgic practice, the practitioners experience the ultimate truth of the gods. Iamblichus and other Neoplatonists are convinced that the Platonic dialogues indeed reveal the truth about all things, but only if they are interpreted correctly.[28] Only those initiated by the Neoplatonic mystagogue learned how to exegete the dialogues properly. There are, of course, other 'entheastic' texts that Neoplatonists held to relate the same absolute truths as the dialogues—the Orphic poems and the Chaldaean Oracles.[29] While Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus all wrote commentaries on the *Oracles,* those of Porphyry and Iamblichus are lost,[30] and only a fragment of Proclus' has survived. In his commentary, Proclus (fifth century CE) described the mystical "flowering of the whole soul," which the theurgists experience in their

---

[25] On the importance of Neoplatonic concepts of the soul for theurgy see Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul.*

[26] Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* III.18 (Clarke et al., *On the Mysteries*, 167).

[27] Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* III.17 (Clarke et al., *On the Mysteries*, 165).

[28] Lamberton correctly notes that "when we hear of a need for concealment among Platonists, the issue is more often than not the esoteric interpretation of generally accessible texts, rather than a secret teaching as such, whether transmitted orally or in unpublished texts reserved for the privileged few" (Lamberton, "Roles of Secrecy," 140).

[29] On the *Oracles*, see particularly Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*; Majercik, *Chaldean Oracles*. See also the overview in Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, 44–57.

[30] See Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 287.

union with the "noetic Father"; this is the very summit of existence, on the border of the ineffable realm of unity.[31]

In many religious milieus of late antiquity, this 'summit of existence' was at the same time the goal of heavenly journeys. According to ancient ideology, the secrets of the divine were revealed to a few religious specialists who made their way into the heavens or received their knowledge by God's own intervention: Enoch, Moses, Solomon, or other heroes of Jewish tradition guaranteed the revelatory status of this superior source of information. But secret knowledge was not only attributed to those extraordinary persons. Many people in late antiquity were engaged in heavenly journeys in order to gain insight into the mysteries of God's cosmic order. Indeed, this topic is so common that Ithamar Gruenwald notes:

> These heavenly ascents of the soul became almost a cultural fashion in many religious systems in the first centuries of the Christian Era, the spiritual climate of which was full of a constant exchange of religious ideas and practices. In this respect there was no substantial difference between religion, philosophy and science.[32]

Heavenly journeys are a key motif within gnostic and Hermetic theologies, but—contrasting the Hekhalot mysticism where the mystic serves as a mediator between God and Israel—here the intentions are individual ones. I have already quoted the passage from *Poimandres* (*Corpus Hermeticum* I.25–26) that links the self-divinization of the gnostic to a journey into the heavenly realms. The gnostic searches for redemption either in the world to come or during her or his lifetime. Pursuing this goal, it is of crucial importance 'to know one's enemies,' i.e. to understand the heavenly opponents who try to block the mystic's way into the realms of light. This Platonic notion is found in a variety of texts. In the *First Apocalypse of James* from Nag Hammadi it is Jesus himself who gives instructions: he admonishes his disciples to be confident since, after his grievous way through death, he will return and "appear for a reproof to the archons. And I shall reveal to them

---

[31] Proclus, *Commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles* (trans. Johnson). See also van Liefferinge, *La Théurgie*; Burns, "Proclus and the Theurgic Liturgy of Pseudo-Dionysius."

[32] Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 202 with note 30. Cf. on this topic Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys*; Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*.

that he cannot be seized. If they seize him, then he will overpower each of them."[33]

The recipient of the holy revelation is rescued from the powers of *heimarmenē* and can depart from this dark world heading through the planetary spheres towards the pleroma. In order to fulfill this desire, it seemed appropriate to examine thoroughly the planetary laws. Thus, the fight against the *stoicheia* led the gnostic to a different reaction than Paul who refuted astrology. What at first glance seems inconsistent becomes the gnostics' primary motivation for studying astrology. Just *because* gnostic theology strove to overcome the demonic planetary chains, it made extensive use of astrological tradition.[34]

The visionary's search for a heavenly journey calls to mind similar texts of the Hekhalot tradition, and even rabbinical parallels may be mentioned.[35] But there are also marked differences. One such difference is, as noted above, the aspect of individual salvation prominent in gnostic texts, while the *yored merqabah* is acting on behalf of his community.[36] Linked to this functional difference is another one, namely the temporary nature of the heavenly journeys of Hekhalot texts. The *yored merqabah* ascends the heavens and returns to report his people about what he experienced. A third difference pertains to the evaluation of stars and serving angels;[37] for the Hekhalot mystic, the angels usually are friendly entities, assigned to keep the unworthy out of the highest heavens. The gnostics, however, typically identify the angels with the archons that are dependent on the demiurge.[38]

---

[33] Nag Hammadi Codex V.3.30,2–6 (Robinson [ed.], *Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 264). Cf. also the *2nd Book of Jeû* ch. 52; the *Left Ginza* 3:56; Nag Hammadi Codex VII.127.20–21. Those documents witness the correctness of Origenes' bold remarks in *c. Cels.*7.40 and 6.30–31.

[34] On gnostic astrology see von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie*, 624–695.

[35] The rabbinic tradition is focused on R. Aqiba; see Tosefta Chagiga 2:3; Jerusalem Talmud Chaggiga 77b; Babylonian Talmud Chagiga 14b.

[36] See Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot.*

[37] Here we come across the same positive function of the angels as attested in the Qumran literature, particularly in the *Shirot Olat ha-Shabbat*. On the astrological connotation of priestly cult in Qumran see von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie*, 168–183. From this point of view, there is much to argue in favor of Rachel Elior's thesis of continuation of priestly traditions in Hekhalot literature; see Elior, "From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines."

[38] On these differences see Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 192–193; see also Maier, "Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise und 'Gnosis,'" 39–40.

I have argued elsewhere that these differences—and also the differences *within* the Hekhalot literature—have to be taken seriously.[39] And I agree with Ithamar Gruenwald that "it seems very likely that some of the Gnostic writers were indeed familiar with certain aspects of the Merkavah tradition, while the opposite, that is, the adaptation by the Merkavah mystics of specific Gnostic doctrines, cannot so easily be proved."[40] At the same time, it is apparent that the Hekhalot mystics, the authors of gnostic literature, and others shared a common view of religious experts entering the heavenly spheres in order to explore divine secrets. That is the discursive macroform that materializes in a variety of microforms, the latter clearly displaying the different—and often competing—claims and worldviews of the respective groups and milieus.

Experiential Knowledge in Suhrawardī's Illuminationist Philosophy

As should have become clear by now, the philosophical and religious debate in late antiquity had produced a rich spectrum of approaches to reliable knowledge, with the Neoplatonists in particular claiming access to superior wisdom by means of non-syllogistic methods. While in the wake of Augustinian theology major trends in Christian thinking regarded this 'high knowledge'—and human *curiositas* in general—as forbidden,[41] Neoplatonic, theurgic, and magical[42] semantics concerned with the search for just this knowledge flourished in medieval culture as well. One may recall the Byzantine theologian Michael Psellos (eleventh century) who is a link between Proclus and Plethon. In his *Chronographia* he says:

> I heard it said by the more adept philosophers that there is a wisdom which is beyond all demonstration, apprehensible only by the intellect of a wise man, when prudently inspired. Even here my resolution did not falter. I read some of the occult books and grasped their meaning, as far

---

[39] See von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie*, 681–686, with references.

[40] Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 201.

[41] As Ginzberg argues, the differentiation of 'high' and 'low' knowledge is crucial for the polemical discourse of Christianity; see his "High and Low." On the criminalization of *curiositas* in Christian imperial law see Fögen, *Enteignung der Wahrsager*, 285–321; von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie*, 779, 791–797.

[42] Magical practice by highly educated Christian monks—what Kieckhefer calls the "clerical underground"—was common in the large field of angelic magic; see Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*; Fanger (ed.), *Conjuring Spirits*.

as my human abilities allowed, of course, for I myself could never claim that I had an accurate understanding of these things nor would I believe anyone else who said he had.[43]

With these sentences Psellos—characteristically for the heresiological discourse of his time—tried to combine the totalizing knowledge of the "wisdom beyond all demonstration" (inherent in the Chaldaean Oracles) with cautions to refute accusations of being a practitioner of 'occult techniques.' The Christian controversy on knowledge that is beyond demonstration is closely connected to Islamic and Jewish philosophy, religion, and ritual. Indeed, we can argue that medieval Europe witnessed a 'shared passion' of experiential ways to perfect wisdom.

Concepts of knowledge are of crucial importance for medieval and early modern Islamic philosophy. Many generations of scholars, from al-Kindī in the ninth century to Shāh Waliallāh of Delhi in the eighteenth century, wrote extensive treatises on this subject. For early modern thought, various intellectual schools were influential, among them the peripatetic school of al-Fārābī (870–950), the Sufism of al-Ghazzālī (1058–1111), and the *ishrāqī* or illuminationist school of Quṭb al Dīn al-Shīrāzī (1236–1311) that goes back to Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī (1154–1191).[44] For the focus of the present chapter, the latter is of particular importance because Suhrawardī clearly reveals the juxtaposition—and creative blending—of experiential and syllogistic forms of attaining superior knowledge. What is more, Suhrawardī's illuminationist philosophy is marked by Neoplatonic tradition and thus serves as an important link between philosophies of late antiquity and those of the Renaissance.[45]

---

[43] Quoted from Duffy, "Reactions of Two Byzantine Intellectuals," 87.
[44] On these three scholars see Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam*. On Quṭb al Dīn al-Shīrāzī and his relation to Suhrawardī see also Walbridge, *Science of Mystic Lights*.
[45] Although it would be tempting to make a comparison between Suhrawardī's philosophy of illumination and concepts of knowledge so important for Ismailism, this would deserve a study of its own. In this chapter, I refer to illuminationist philosophy only as an example of attempts to conceptualize 'knowledge beyond demonstration.' On Ḥāmid al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 1021), whose Neoplatonic concepts of knowledge were influential in Ismailism, see Hunzai, "The Concept of Knowledge According to al-Kirmānī," and particularly de Smet, *La quiétude de l'intellect*. De Smet demonstrates the Ismaili reception of Plotinus and Proclus, and tentatively assumes cross-references between al-Kirmānī's arithmetical mysticism on the one hand, and *Sefer Yetzirah* and early kabbalah on the other (see pp. 284–309). That *Sefer Yetzirah* is dependent on Ismailism is also argued by Wasserstrom, "Sefer Yeṣira and Early Islam"

In chapter 2, I already introduced Suhrawardī and his concept of *prisca theologia*.[46] Although he was sentenced to death at the age of 37,[47] Suhrawardī left an impressive œuvre and built up a school of his own, with a number of disciples whom he called "brethren"—initiates of the secrets of illumination. He also had a didactic program that he explained in his various writings, suggesting a step-by-step reading of his books.[48] Therefore, although his *Philosophy of Illumination* was to become his most famous philosophical treatise, for an adequate understanding of his philosophy other contributions have to be taken into account as well, particularly the *Intimations* (*al-Talwīḥāt*), the *Apposites* (*al-Muqāwamāt*), and the *Paths and Havens* (*al-Mashāriʿ waʾ l-Muṭāraḥāt*).[49]

Most generally, the philosophy of illumination is a combination of syllogistic reasoning and experiential ways to knowledge. Thus, Suhrawardī stated in the introduction to the *Philosophy of Illumination*:

> This book of ours is for the student of both intuitive philosophy and discursive philosophy. There is nothing in it for the discursive philosopher not given to, and not in search of, intuitive philosophy. We only

---

(see also note p. 96 below). The medieval Islamic concepts of *ʿilm ilahi* and *ḥikmat ilahiyah*, "divine science" and "divine wisdom," which render the Greek word "theosophy" (from *theos*, "God," and *sophia*, "wisdom"), have a Hebrew equivalent in *ḥokhmat ha-ʾelohut* that is applied by Abraham Abulafia and others. On the Arabic influence on Abulafia's kabbalah see Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, 176 with note 222; Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, 83 and 188 with note 5. On the influence of Sufi concepts of experience on Judaism in general and on Juda ha-Levi in particular see Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy*.

[46] On Suhrawardī, see particularly Walbridge, *Leaven of the Ancients*; Walbridge, *Wisdom of the Mystic East*; Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*; cf. Razavi, *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination*; Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 52–82 (with a nationalist Iranian ideology). The difference between the 'theosophical' interpretation of Suhrawardī, notably by Corbin and Nasr, and the 'philosophical' interpretation by Walbridge and Ziai, is explained in Walbridge, "Al-Suhrawardī on Body as Extension," 245 note 1 (with references to relevant literature); see also Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 7–9. On modern scholarship as part of Iranian nationalism in a discourse of Orientalism, see Walbridge, *Wisdom of the Mystic East*, 105–110.

[47] Suhrawardī was executed during his imprisonment by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (Saladin). The reasons for his execution are not entirely clear. It is said that Saladin yielded to the demand of the doctors of the law (*ʿulamā*) for the execution of Suhrawardī on the grounds of propagating doctrines that were incompatible with the tenets of the faith and *sharīʿah*; see Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 81; Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 33 (with a different role ascribed to Malik Ẓāhir Shāh, Saladin's son and friend of Suhrawardī).

[48] Explicitly so in the "Introduction" to the *Philosophy of Illumination*.

[49] See Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 9–39; Razavi, *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination*, 7–30.

discuss this book and its symbols with the person who has mastered intuitive philosophy or who seeks it. The reader of this book must have at least reached the stage in which the divine light has descended upon him—not just once, but regularly. No one else will find any profit in it. So, whoever wishes to learn only discursive philosophy, let him follow the method of the Peripatetics, which is fine and sound for discursive philosophy by itself. We have nothing to say to such a person, nor do we discuss Illuminationist principles with him.[50]

Suhrawardī does not devaluate Aristotelianism—which he received through Avicenna—as completely worthless. Peripatetic (Avicennan) methods have their value for rationalizing the revealed world. But to gain a complete knowledge of the cosmos, which includes knowledge of the divine, peripatetic methods are insufficient. According to Suhrawardī, the divine philosopher (al-ḥakīm al-muta' allih), with Plato being the ideal representative, possesses a 'wisdom' that *combines* intuitive knowledge and discursive methodology. This wise man he regards as the leader (imām) of society who "may indeed rule openly, or he may be hidden […]. He will have authority even if he is in deepest obscurity. When the government is in his hands, the age will be enlightened; but if the age is without divine rule, darkness will be triumphant."[51] Hossein Ziai notes that Suhrawardī's illuminationist philosophy is neither a neglect of Aristotelian syllogism as such nor an example of mysticism without philosophical reflection. "The combination of discursive philosophy (ḥikma baḥthiyya) and intuitive or 'experiential' philosophy (ḥikma dhawqiyya), the combination of which is said to be Divine philosophy (ḥikma muta' alliha), is what distinguishes the philosophy of illumination from both theosophy and quasi-philosophical mysticism."[52] Rather, we can say that it is an example of an *esoteric* search for perfect wisdom.

---

[50] Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination*, trans. Walbridge & Ziai, 4; see also Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 174 and 176.

[51] Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination*, trans. Walbridge & Ziai, 3; see also Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 176. The Shiite concept of the Hidden Imam clearly underlies Suhrawardī's appropriation of the Platonic Philosopher King.

[52] Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 37. This is exactly the classification of the types of knowledge that Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shahrazūrī (d. after 1288) presented in his preface to Suhrawardī's *Philosophy of Illumination*; see Marcotte, "Reason and Direct Intuition," 223.

If we now take a closer look at Suhrawardī's concept of knowledge, we see it is linked to Neoplatonic cosmology.[53] In congruence with the Plotinian One, Suhrawardī referred to a Light of Lights that emanates downward from the 'higher' to the 'lower'; this light is not created but it exists beyond time in a state of infinity. From the Light of Lights there emanates a First Light, also called "apocalyptic light" (*al-nūr al-ṣāniḥ*), which is the most receptive of all lights. Subsequently, multiple lights emanate—"controlling lights," "managing lights," etc.—that still carry the essence of the abstract Light of Lights, but differ in terms of intensity and activity. The Light of Lights is a basic concept that underlies all realms of reality, which allowed Suhrawardī to apply it both to physics and metaphysics, to immanence and transcendence. The ultimate principle of the self-emanating Light of Lights is *self-consciousness*, and here is the bridge to the illuminist theory of knowledge.

When the "heavenly illuminations" (*al-ishrāqāt al-ʿulwiyya*) reach the human soul through the intervention of the "managing lights" the human soul *instantly* receives knowledge.[54] These moments Suhrawardī described as visions of the "apocalyptic lights," that thus are the foundation for visionary experience and for obtaining absolute knowledge. Human souls that have experienced the "apocalyptic light" are "abstract souls" (*al-nufūs al-mujarrada*) that have broken free from the physical bondage of their body. They obtain an "idea of the light of God" (*mithāl min nūr Allah*) and subsequently are able to control the "creative light," which ultimately gives them power to know. Suhrawardī described the moment of illumination as a gradual experience of "light" in fifteen steps, accessible only to the Brethren of Abstraction (*ikhwān al-tajrīd*) and the Masters of Vision (*aṣḥāb al-mushāhada*).[55] Vision, experience, and knowledge thus are integral elements of illuminist philosophy.

Self-consciousness, for Suhrawardī, is not only a cosmic principle but also a psychological one. In the *Philosophy of Illumination*, he argued that everything which is conscious of its own essence is an "abstract light" and a "self-subsisting light." The rational soul, by way

---

[53] See Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 129–171; Razavi, *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination*, 92–120.

[54] This type of mystical knowledge has come to be known as a presential knowledge (*ʿilm ḥuḍūrī*). The principle underlying this experiential method is essentially illumination and is seen by Suhrawardī as the principle of an *ishrāqī* relation; see Marcotte, "Reason and Direct Intuition," 224.

[55] See the references in Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 156–157.

of an activity of self-consciousness, is identified with the abstract light and thus functions as the intermediary principle between the cosmic order and the physical order. Consequently, illuminationist knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ishrāqī*) depends on the experience of the "presence of the thing," "which is not a predicative type of knowledge, but due solely to the *relation* between the subject and the object—this knowledge is called the 'knowledge based on illumination and presence' (*al-ʿilm al-ishrāqī al-ḥuḍūrī*)."[56] In arguing for an instantaneous perception of the essence of things through self-consciousness, Suhrawardī digressed from Aristotelian philosophy: "A thing's perception of its own self is [the same as] its being manifest to its own essence, not its being abstracted from matter as is the Peripatetic theory."[57]

That according to Suhrawardī "man should first investigate the knowledge of his own essence and then ascend to what is higher"[58] is allegorically presented as an elaboration of Aristotelian philosophy in a dream-vision of Aristotle that Suhrawardī reports.[59] This vision appears to Suhrawardī at night and resembles a state of sleeping (*shibh nawm*) and induced ecstasy (*khalsa*), along with overwhelming pleasure (*ladhdha*), flashes (*barq*), and glittering light, described as one of the intermediary stages of illuminationist visionary experience.[60] After having recovered from his first awe at the appearance of Aristotle—the "master of philosophy" who "comes to the aid of souls"—Suhrawardī interrogates Aristotle about the nature of knowledge, how it is obtained, and what it constitutes. In the master's answer, "Return to your soul (or self)" (*irjiʿ ilā nafsika*),[61] the problem of knowledge is relocated in the human soul as self-knowledge.

> Self-consciousness and the concept of "I," i.e., the self-as-self or its ipseity, are the grounds of knowledge. What is ultimately gained through the initial consciousness of one's essence is a way to knowledge, called the "science based on 'presence, and vision'" (*al-ʿilm al-ḥuḍūrī al-shuhūdī*),

---

[56] Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 149–150, with reference to Suhrawardī, *Opera II*, 487. See also above note 54.

[57] Suhrawardī, *Opera II*, 114, quoted from Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 152.

[58] Suhrawardī, *Opera II*, 484; see Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 145.

[59] See Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 145–147. Ziai argues that the "Aristotle" of the dream-vision should be identified with the real Aristotle. See also Razavi, *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination*, 58–62.

[60] Suhrawardī identifies fifteen 'states of consciousness' within the illuminationist visionary experience, each of them being accompanied by the experience of a different kind of light. See Suhrawardī, *Opera II*, 252; *idem, Opera I*, 108 and 114.

[61] Suhrawardī, *Opera I*, 70, quoted from Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 146.

which is said to be higher than the type of knowledge obtained by the philosophers for whom it is based on union with the Active Intellect.[62]

What is important for us here is the fact that Suhrawardī established a philosophical system that integrated rational modes of demonstration with experiential modes of gaining truth, the latter being itself part of a demonstrable system of interpretation. What Suhrawardī called "judgments of intuition" (*aḥkām al-ḥads, ḥukm al-ḥads*) are valid forms of inference and thus part of a philosophy that transcends syllogistic demonstration.[63] With Roxanne D. Marcotte we can conclude that "mystical contemplation (*mushāhada*) will become essential as the basis for judgements. Direct intuition or mystical contemplation now acquires a new status, superior to that of demonstration."[64] In an attempt to conceptualize 'wisdom beyond demonstration,' Suhrawardī not only claimed perfect knowledge on the basis of experience and illumination, but presented this claim as part of a superior philosophical system.

The search for perfect knowledge that lies beyond demonstration was a shared passion of philosophers and scholars from various religious communities. In the following chapter, we shall see that a similar transfer of ideas and claims of knowledge has taken place on another, yet related field—the search for the secret depths of language.

---

[62] Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 146.
[63] See Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 155.
[64] Marcotte, "Reason and Direct Intuition," 222.

THE SECRETS OF TEXTS: ESOTERIC HERMENEUTICS

> De Creatione mundi factâ per conversiones & rotationes literarum.
>
> Christian Knorr von Rosenroth

The Readability of the Cosmos: Europe's Obsession with Words

Looking at the influence of the so-called 'life sciences' in contemporary Western societies, one cannot but wonder whether we are indeed opening a new chapter in the history of science: what used to be the deterministic paradigm of physics has been transformed into a dynamic paradigm of 'life,' in which ecology, biology, and genetics play a decisive role. In fact, the influence of these disciplines is so strong that it exerts its impact on various other domains of modern societies. Metaphors of coding and decoding have captured the imagination of a wide public—from the *Bible Code* to the *Da Vinci Code*—and are also part and parcel of genetic language.

That the DNA chromosomes are to be described as a 'code' is not self-evident. Among the first scholars who used this metaphor for the smallest units of human life was the famous mathematician Erwin Schrödinger. In 1927 he said:

> It is these chromosomes, or probably only an axial skeleton fibre of what we actually see under the microscope as the chromosome, that contain in some kind of code-script the entire pattern of the individual's future development and of its functioning in the mature state. Every complete set of chromosomes contains the full code […].[1]

When Marshall Nirenberg and Heinrich Matthaei at the *National Institutes of Health* in Bethesda (USA) succeeded in explaining the correlation between the bases of the nucleic acid and the amino acids in proteins—a problem known as the 'problem of molecular coding'—this scientific breakthrough quickly entered the fields of literature and

---

[1] Schrödinger, *What is Life*, 20.

public discourse. Biochemist and science-fiction author Isaac Asimov immediately understood what was going on; he responded to the new development in molecular biology and biochemistry with his book *The Genetic Code*. Asimov opened his book, published in 1961, with the following statement: "All of us, whether or not we realize it, are living through the early stages of one of the most important scientific break-throughs in history."[2] In the final section of his book, Asimov made an attempt to "peer into the future" and to speculate how the life sciences would look in 2004.[3] In enthusiastic words he praised the ability to use fragments of cells to manufacture specific proteins. "The ability to do so—an ability we possess *now*—is in essence a declaration of independence from life forms."[4] And he ended his essay with the question: "Will the day come, then, when we can reach the ultimate goal of directing our own evolution intelligently and purposefully towards the development of a better and more advanced form of human life?"[5]

The past five decades have shown that Asimov was right. At the turn of the twenty-first century, we are witnessing the blending of religious metaphors of creation with scientific projects, a blending that is even celebrated in the political sphere. US President Clinton announced the completion of the first phase of the Human Genome Project in 2000 with the statement: "Today we are learning the language in which God created life." Francis S. Collins, a pioneering medical geneticist who once headed the Human Genome Project, used Clinton's enthusiastic quote as the title of his book *The Language of God*, with the subtitle announcing that *A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*.

In a recent analysis, Christina Brandt demonstrated how the 'genetic code' became a central element of a wide discursive reorientation of the life sciences.

> With the idea that the 'genetic information' of an organism is 'stored' in the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), during the 1950s and the 1960s a turn took place that radically led the discourse of the life sciences of the twentieth century away from concepts of earlier epochs. In addition to concepts taken from the information technologies it was the talk of 'genetic script' and 'textuality' that found its way into the mental world of biologists. The secret of life was derived from a universal 'code' that

---

[2] Asimov, *The Genetic Code*, vii.
[3] Cf. *ibid.*, xiv.
[4] *Ibid.*, 149.
[5] *Ibid.*, 155.

was based on an 'alphabet' of 'four letters' (the four bases of the DNA). Within just one decade these illustrations of molecular processes of information storage and transfer, of procedures of copying, writing, and translation, became the key concepts in the discourse of molecular biology. They provided the rhetoric repertoire that today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, apparently has freed itself from its metaphorical origins. 'Genetic code,' 'information,' and even the rhetoric of a 'genetic script' today are highly conventional parts of biological terminology. […] At the end of the twentieth century the life sciences articulated themselves through their practices as a new form of 'textual science.' The metaphor of 'genetic script' finds its technological equivalent in the molecular 'writing' practices of genetic engineering. What is more, with the possibilities of an active changing of genetic material the function of the scientist as author-like instance is newly defined.[6]

Such an observation is certainly correct. But in my opinion these developments are even more important than Brandt has it. On the one hand, they are not really new but engrained in Western cultural history, a fact that I hope to show in this chapter. On the other hand, they are more than metaphors; in fact, these metaphors are representative of an episteme. In this episteme, the human being is the agent of the divine, the creator. Ultimately, what we are witnessing is the deification of the human through combinations of letters.

But why, we may ask, are these metaphors of coding, decipherment, and language so successful in modern science? What do they tell us about Western conceptualizations of nature and the cosmos? What is the place of knowledge in texts? The present chapter engages these questions by addressing the genealogy of the underlying concepts of nature and by exploring their various manifestations in early modern discourses of knowledge.

In his celebrated book *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, Hans Blumenberg described the "readability of the world" as a central characteristic of Western conceptualizations of cosmos and nature. The idea that the building blocks of reality are letters and numbers is by no means self-evident. In fact, as Blumenberg points out, the metaphors of reading and talking have not been there all the time: "In Greek cosmogony there is no talking."[7] Later, major philosophical and religious discourses determined the basic structure of reality by metaphors of reading and writing, with a decisive impact on what can be called the *ontology of*

---

[6] Brandt, *Metapher und Experiment*, 8–9.
[7] Blumenberg, *Lesbarkeit der Welt*, 22.

words or the *textile of reality*. The linguistic structure of the cosmos is particularly important for Pythagorean traditions, and also for kabbalistic speculation, the impact of which is often underestimated. Even Blumenberg does not address (Jewish or Christian) kabbalah, which reveals the change of scholarly attention that has taken place during the past decades.

Before addressing the kabbalistic impact in more detail, a closely related and highly influential concept has to be mentioned. The notion of the 'Book of Nature' that is compared to the 'Book of God,' or the Bible, can be traced from antiquity through the modern period.[8] The conviction that tools of textual hermeneutics can be applied to the natural world as well—with the related conviction that divine revelation has a scriptural and a natural or material aspect—has become an important ontological and methodological component not only of religious, but also of philosophical and scientific discourses.

These discourses can take on very different forms, of course, and some of them will become clearer in the subsequent passages. But in order to explain the underlying idea, let me briefly refer to two relevant examples—Paracelsus (1493–1541) and Jacob Böhme (1575–1624), who both elaborated on the idea of the Book of Nature. While Paracelsus developed from this idea a complex and influential natural science,[9] Böhme applied the metaphor to the revelatory potential of nature and to a mystical illumination of the knowing human being. In his *Theological Letters* he writes:

> Thus I have written, not about the doctrines of man or the science that we learn from books, but about my own book, which has been opened/revealed [*eröffnet*] to me—as the noble allegory of God. I was granted to read the book of the noble image (to be understood as the image of God), and in that book I found my study, like a child in its mother's house that sees what the father has made, and that imitates him in its childish game. I don't need another book for that. My book has only three pages, which are the three principles of eternity; in these I can find

---

[8] There are innumerable publications on this topic. For an overview and introduction, see Vanderjagt & van Berkel (eds.), *The Book of Nature in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*; van Berkel & Vanderjagt (eds.), *The Book of Nature in Early Modern and Modern History*. See also Bono, *The Word of God and the Languages of Man*; Howell, *God's Two Books*. See further the literature mentioned in the present chapter.

[9] See also the *Gemma magica* of Ps.-Abraham von Franckenberg, completed in 1641 and published in Amsterdam in 1688. The *Gemma magica* is a presentation of Paracelsian speculation about the Book of Nature and as such one of the most interesting compilations of the seventeenth century. See Ohly, "Die Welt als Text."

everything that Moses and the prophets, but also Christ and the apostles have spoken. I can find the ground of the world and all secrets in them—but it's not me but the spirit of the Lord does this in the measure that he determines.[10]

Böhme explicitly links the biblical notion of the human being as the *imago Dei* to the metaphor of the book as a source of knowledge. In so doing, he can introduce a third book, the 'Book of Man,' as the inner source of human knowledge that reflects the absolute knowledge of the divine. Böhme was not alone in his conviction that this inner divine knowledge of nature and world is superior to a scientific knowledge of nature that would limit itself to the outward appearance. It was Johann Arndt (1555–1621) in particular who influenced this understanding of an inner spiritual awakening that will lead to the ultimate unity of the Books of God, Nature, and Man.[11] Here, we come across the intimate relation between religious and philosophical understandings of *natura naturans*, namely the creative power of nature that can illumine human knowledge. Reading the *liber naturae* leads to perfect knowledge and ultimate insight into the dynamics of the divine process.

The Textile of the Divine in Early Kabbalah

Ideas relating to the Book of Nature and to the readability of the cosmos had been developed already in antiquity. However, with the rabbinic writings during Judaism's formative period the 'ontologization of the text' gained new momentum, resulting in a mystification of the

---

[10] "Also habe ich nun geschrieben, nicht von Menschen=Lehre oder Wissenschaft aus Bücher=Lernen, sondern aus meinen eigenen Buche, das in mir eröffnet ward: Als die edle Gleichniss GOttes; Das Buch der edlen Bildniss (zu verstehen das Ebenbild GOttes) ward mir vergönnet zu lesen, und darinn habe ich mein Studieren gefunden, als ein Kind in seiner Mutter Hause, das da siehet was der Vater machet, und demselben in seinem Kinderspiel nachspielet; ich darf kein ander Buch dazu. Mein Buch hat nur 3 Blätter, das sind die 3 Principia der Ewigkeit; darinnen kann ich alles finden, was Moses und die Propheten, so wohl Christus und die Aposteln geredet haben. Ich kann der Welt Grund und alle Heimlichkeit darinnen finden: Doch nicht Ich, sondern der Geist des Herrn thut es nach dem Mass, wie Er will" (Böhme, *Epistolae theosophicae, oder Theosophische Send-Briefe* [from Peuckert & Faust (eds.), *Jacob Böhme: Sämtliche Schriften*], 12, 14/15).

[11] On Arndt's influence on Böhme see Rusterholz, "Zum Verhältnis von *Liber Naturae* und *Liber Scripturae* bei Jacob Böhme," 134. The standard study on the development and influence of Johann Arndt's theology of the 'Books' is Geyer, *Verborgene Weisheit*.

text that was more radical than it had been earlier. This mystification laid the basis for what Moshe Idel aptly calls the "world-absorbing text" and the "God-absorbing text" in subsequent kabbalistic thought.[12]

The crucial notion here is *Torah*. According to rabbinic understanding, Torah is a continuous revelation of the divine into the world. Although the revelation of the written, canonical text to Moses is an historical datum and thus no changes are possible in the (unvocalized) biblical text—Scripture—this does not mean the end of Torah. Understanding the full meaning of the revealed text is itself Torah. This involves the rabbinic hermeneutical strategies, as well as what the rabbinic tradition calls the *torah she be al-pe*, or the "oral Torah." The notion of the oral Torah is more than a simple trick to fill the lacunae of the biblical text and to make the text translatable into normal life; it is a way to secure the process of revelation of Torah and to explore new dimensions in the already revealed text.[13] As Elliot R. Wolfson remarks, this strategy can be interpreted as a circular process of revelation in the rabbinic understanding of Torah. "While one must be on guard about making general claims with respect to the rabbinic sages, I feel confident that it is conceptually sound, and even methodologically valid, to speak of a rabbinic notion of time that is intimately connected to understanding the revelation of Torah as a recurring phenomenon."[14]

In addition to the hermeneutic strategies of literal understanding, allegory, and symbolic reading, the interpretation of the *sōd*, or "secret," of the biblical text had been an element of rabbinic argumentation from the beginning, often being linked to the term *ras/rasīm* which also translates as "secret/secrets."[15] The communication of these

---

[12] Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 26–79. On the determining function of *grammatica* for the development of the *artes* see Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*. Interestingly, Irvine does not reflect on the importance of textual cultures for religious, particularly Jewish, discourses in medieval Europe. Aaron W. Hughes has convincingly argued that the idea of 'reading the divine' is a shared passion of Jewish and Muslim authors in the Middle Ages and that aesthetics and imagination are an important aspect of this discourse; see Hughes, *Texture of the Divine*.

[13] It is interesting to note that a similar understanding of Torah as an ongoing revelation is also attested in the Qumran texts. The Teacher of Righteousness could adopt the role of the "Prophet as Moses" (Deut. 18:18; cf. Josephus, *Antiquitates* IV.216–218) who served as a *doresh* ("giver, interpreter") and *morē* ("teacher, demonstrator") of Torah, thus securing a continuous stream of divine revelation.

[14] Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, 63–64.

[15] A *chakham ha-rasīm* is a master of interpretation who is able to engage the divine knowledge, in contrast to human knowledge; see, for instance, the benediction

secret dimensions of the text was restricted, with a particular warning against the disclosure of the works of creation and of the Merkabah, as is explicitly stated in the highly influential passage of Mishna Chagiga II, 2: "You do not lecture about cases of inbreeding to three, not about the work of creation to two, and not about the work of the Merkabah to one, be it not that he is a wise man (*chakham*) who understands from his knowledge (*da'at*)."[16] It is not by chance that the Mishna regulates knowledge concerning the "work of creation" in this way. Elaborating on the idea of Torah as a living and dynamic text, rabbinic thinking even went so far as comparing the act of reading to the act of creation. If Torah is a universal structure that predates creation, the very act of creation follows the pattern prescribed in Torah; hence, God himself is consulting and contemplating Torah.[17] Whether or not he pronounces the letters of the biblical text in the act of creation remains unclear. What is clear, though, is the link between the combination of letters and the act of creation. According to a well-known Talmudic passage, the knowledge of the letters as building-blocks of Torah safeguards the divine process of creation. Berakhot 55a reports that when Bezalel created the tabernacle he used his knowledge of the way in which heaven and earth were created by the combination of letters.[18]

These passages demonstrate that in fact the rabbinic hermeneutic was highly interested in mystical and magical dimensions of the biblical 'text.' The text was also a *textile*—a metaphor and etymology already mentioned by Origen *Contra Celsum* I, 24 as an old Jewish tradition with regard to the divine name[19]—in which written letters are interwoven, but in which the text also intersects with the basic structure of the cosmos. Both can be ontologized as 'Torah.'

---

of the *chakham ha-rasīm* in Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 58a (cf. Tosefta Berakhot VII, 2; Jerusalem Talmud Berakhot 13c, 10–13).

[16] This text is quoted time and again both in rabbinic and in kabbalistic literature. On the textual transmission and the various parallel passages in rabbinic writings see Wewers, *Geheimnis und Geheimhaltung*, 4–13; 119–140.

[17] As in Midrash Genesis Rabba' 1:1.

[18] See Urbach, *Sages*, 197–213; Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 32.

[19] See Morlok, "Text als Textur," 162. Morlok notes that Gikatilla is the only Jewish author who later makes use of this metaphor (but cf. the zoharic notion of "garment," on which see note 39 below); in the Hekhalot literature the metaphor did not refer to the weaving of a text but to the act of creation. On Gikatilla see also Kilcher, *Sprachtheorie der Kabbalah*, 74. For the ancient Greek history of this concept see Scheid & Svenbro, *Craft of Zeus*.

> This radical ontologization of the Torah in rabbinism is of paramount importance for understanding some later basic developments in Kabbalistic ontology in general and Kabbalistic textology in particular. The ontological approach to the sacred text, which sometimes may presuppose a unique status for Hebrew, serves as one of the most powerful nexuses between the rabbinic literature, interested mostly in the ritual and legendary aspects of the Bible, and the theosophical Kabbalah, which projected the primordial Torah into the bosom of the divine.[20]

The continuities between the rabbinic writings and the kabbalistic texts are much more important than has been noticed by scholars of religion.[21] What the kabbalists did was to single out the hermeneutical tools of *sōd* and *rasīm* as the most important ways to unlocking the meaning of the biblical text and the ultimate key to perfect knowledge of Torah and thus of the cosmos.

The close link between the process of creation and the perfect understanding of the combination of letters and numbers is already attested in the *Sefer Yetzirah* ("Book of Creation/Formation"). Although an early dating of this text (or earlier versions of it) cannot be ruled out completely,[22] Steven M. Wasserstrom's argument for an Islamic influence on *Sefer Yetzirah* is most convincing.[23] Problems with dating notwithstanding, the *Sefer Yetzirah* is a clear example of ontologization of letters and language, combined with the 'work of creation' of the world. In this text, it is not 'Torah' that is conceptualized as most relevant for the perfect understanding of the world, but the crucial ontological function of the letters themselves. "It is by exploiting the creative power of language that the *perfecti* are able to imitate God. [...] The letters were indeed created by God, but they entered the

---

[20] Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 29–30; see also Idel, "Concept of the Torah."

[21] Elliot Wolfson argues regarding the worldview of traditional kabbalists that "the mystical sensibility is a deepening of an approach found in older rabbinic sources" (*Alef, Mem, Tau*, 63). Something similar is true for the relationship between the rabbinic milieus and the authors of the Hekhalot literature. The quoted passage Mishna Chagiga II, 2 is a case in point.

[22] Recently, an early dating was attempted by Liebes, *Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetzirah*. Liebes argues for possible Indian sources and proposes Northern Mesopotamia as the location for the composition of the text. He dates this composition to the first century BCE, with the Jerusalem Temple still functioning. On this discussion see also Langerman, "On the Beginnings of Hebrew Scientific Literature"; Shulman, "Indian Connection."

[23] Wasserstrom, "Sefer Yeṣira and Early Islam." The best critical edition and translation is by A. Peter Hayman (2004; see his detailed introduction on pp. 1–41).

constitution of the world, and the mystic is able to use them."[24] This magical use of the secrets of language became highly important for medieval kabbalistic authors.

Most generally, the rise of medieval kabbalah during the thirteenth century has to be explained against the background of Jewish rationalists and the philosophical as well as religious contacts with Islamic and Christian milieus in Southern France and Spain.[25] Esoteric and ecstatic literature, such as the *Hekhalot* and *Merkabah* texts, were criticized by Islamic rationalists and also by Karaite groups. Following the influence of Saadya Gaon, during the eleventh century rabbinic thought was further intellectualized, a process that reached its peak with the writings of Maimonides, whose Aristotelian interpretation—absorbed mainly through Islamic sources—was a major critique of rabbinic hermeneutics. The alleged rationalism and reductionism of Maimonist philosophy sparked a controversy that soon involved the Jewish community worldwide. The emerging kabbalistic movement joined the anti-Maimonist position and claimed the basic knowability of the divine, ecstatic approaches to the biblical text, as well as the superiority of Platonic interpretations in the unlocking of the hidden, deeper meaning of Torah. Early kabbalah absorbed the *Hekhalot* and *Merkabah* traditions, the speculations of *Sefer Yetzirah* and related writings, and the teachings of the *Chassidei Ashkenaz*. All these influences were woven together into a complex philosophical and religious theory and practice in the thirteenth century. In addition to many commentaries on these works, the first major compilation of the new kabbalistic doctrines were the *Sefer ha-Bahir* and the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, the latter representing a vast spectrum of texts with various different layers and doctrines.

When it comes to mystical dimensions of language and texts—which is the topic of the present chapter—the bahiric and zoharic literature provides many examples of ontologization of letters and words. It is a common denominator of all early kabbalistic literature that the function of letters by far exceeds the mere linguistic or semantic function

---

[24] Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 36 and 37. Idel deals extensively with this topic in chapters 11 and 12 of his book. On the concept of language in *Sefer Yetzirah* see also Idel, *Golem*, 9–26.

[25] This is not the place to deal with these origins in detail. Tirosh-Samuelson, "Philosophy and Kabbalah," provides a very good overview.

within sentences.[26] Letters and combinations of letters are the major tool for understanding the ontological structure of the cosmos. Names in general and the divine names in particular are carriers of essences, general principles, and creative processes. The *Sefer ha-Bahir* expresses this idea as follows:

> It is said that with regard to everything that the holy One, blessed be he, created in his world, he placed its name according to its matter, as it is written, "and whatever Adam called each living creature, that would be its name" (Gen. 2:19), that is, its essence [*gufo*] was in this manner.[27]

It is the *naming* of things that gives *essence* and meaning to it. Such an understanding of Gen. 2:19 had been common to rabbinic interpretation, but it gained a particular importance in kabbalistic thought. The ontologization of the text moves from names to letters as the basic components of the cosmos. This ontology of letters is worked out in detail in *Sefer ha-Zohar*. The Genesis phrase, "God said, 'Let there be light!' And there was light" (Gen. 1:3), is interpreted as follows:

> Here begins the discovery of hidden treasures: how the world was created in detail. For until here was general, and afterward general returns, constituting general-particular-general.[28] Till here, all was suspended in space, from the mystery of *Ein Sof*. Once the force spread through the supernal palace, mystery of *Elohim*, saying is ascribed: *Va-yomer Elohim*, *God said*. Above, saying is not specified. Although *Be-reshit, In the beginning*, is a saying, *said* is not ascribed. This *said* is susceptible to questioning and knowing. *Va-yomer, Said*—a power raised, *armuta*, rising, silently from the mystery of *Ein Sof*, in the origin of thought. *God said*—now that palace, impregnated by the seed of holiness, gave birth, giving birth silently, while outside the newborn was heard. The one giving birth silently, was not heard at all. As the emergent one emerged, a voice was generated, heard outside: *Yehi or, Let there be light!* All that emerged, emerged through this mystery. *Yehi, Let there be*, alluding to

---

[26] In Pinchas Giller's words: "In the canons of Judaism, the existence of the text is primary reality; its existence precedes essence. […] This theosophical Kabbalah is really a mysticism of language, in which all the components of the written Hebrew language—its consonants, vowels, and cantillation—control metaphysical energies and specific powers. The bible is written in code and is meant to be read in ways that go beyond its plain meaning" (Giller, *Reading the Zohar*, 4–5).

[27] *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 53, p. 149 ed. Abrams; trans. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 197.

[28] This refers to the thirteen hermeneutical rules of Rabbi Yishma'el.

the mystery of Father and Mother, namely, *yod he*,[29] afterward turning back to the primordial point,[30] to begin expanding into something else: *light*.[31]

The creational process happens through the system of the sefirot; it is compared with a movement from silence to speaking. It is through speaking that space and time are created. A little later, the text explains the creation, or emanation, of the letters and links this process to the emanation of the sefirot.

> That point of light is *light*.[32] It expanded, and seven letters of the alphabet shone within, not congealing, still fluid. Then *darkness* emerged, and seven other letters of the alphabet emerged within, not congealing, remaining fluid.[33] An *expanse* emerged, dissipating the discord of two sides, and eight other letters emerged within, making twenty-two.[34] Seven letters jumped from this side and seven from that, and all were engraved in that *expanse*, remaining fluid. The *expanse* congealed, and the letters congealed, folding into shape, forming forms. Torah was engraved there,[35] to shine forth.[36]

From these passages we can gather two more characteristics of kabbalistic discourse with regard to the mystical dimensions of language and texts. First of all, kabbalistic philosophy is not only critical of rationalist reductionism, which is regarded as a limitation of understanding Torah; it is also radically opposed to the influential philosophical movement of the Middle Ages known as *nominalism*. In its

---

[29] This refers to the first two letters of the divine name, YHWH, *Yod* (Father) and *He* (Mother), also representing the sefirot *Chokhmah* and *Binah*. See also *Sefer ha-Zohar* 2:22a.

[30] From *Yod* and *He*, the creational movement turns back to *Yod*, resulting in the word YHY, which means "let there be." The primordial point is *Chokhmah*, from which emerges the first of the lower seven sefirot, *Chesed*, also known as *light*.

[31] *Sefer ha-Zohar* 1:16b, trans. Matt, vol. I, 122–123.

[32] As noted above, this point of light is *Chesed*, the sefirah that was revealed when most of the light had withdrawn to its hidden source in *Keter*.

[33] "Darkness" is related to the sefirah of *Gevurah*, which emanates and thus generates the next group of letters.

[34] As Matt *ad loc.* explains, the sefirah *Tiferet* is known as "expanse" (*raqi'a*, "firmament, expanse, sky"; cf. Gen. 1:6), but also as *Rachamim*, "Compassion." This sefirah balances the contending forces of *Chesed* and *Gevurah*, Love and Judgment. Its accompanying eight letters bring the total to twenty-two, the number of the Hebrew alphabet.

[35] The twenty-two letters of creation are now fully formed, spelled out by God's word within *Tiferet*, the sefirah that is also known as the written Torah.

[36] *Sefer ha-Zohar* 1:16b, trans. Matt, vol. I, 124.

long history in Western philosophy, nominalism has entailed two independent, though sometimes connected claims: one is the rejection of abstract objects; the other is the rejection of universals. While the rejection of abstract objects argues that abstract concepts do not constitute *objects* with an ontological status of their own, and thus independent of human construction, the rejection of universals (such as "whiteness") refutes the opinion that we can from the existence of particulars derive the existence of universals.[37] Both realism and Platonism are philosophical approaches opposed to nominalism; the Platonic tradition has always insisted on the independent existence of ideas as abstract objects and also as universal entities.

Historically, the emergence of nominalism in the Middle Ages can only be understood against the background of theological considerations. The question whether the *nomina*, the names, of things, have an ontological status of their own and thus are carriers of *essentia* or *universalia*, is fraught with theological problems. For instance, when humans are studying the Book of Nature and ultimately decipher the secret structure of the cosmos, they arrive at a knowledge that was reserved for God only. The medieval nominalists thus suggested that by studying the *nomina*, humans are not intermingling with the divine, because the names are not linked to any sort of transcendent or divine knowledge (such as in Platonism). This strategy led to what I call the *tragedy of nominalism*: Although the maneuver enabled the emergence of free and rational science—because everything in nature can be studied without intermingling with divine realms—at the same time it was no longer possible to establish a rational and reliable knowledge of the 'deep structure' of the revealed world, ranging from concepts of the divine to concepts of *natura naturans*. The idea that 'science' is restricted to the revealed world or *natura naturata*, and that knowledge of nature is arbitrary and imperfect, while true knowledge of the divine world is impossible or derived from 'belief,' is part and parcel of Western concepts of scientific knowledge that fully emerged during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and have lingered on until today). The basis of this disjunctive process was laid in the Middle Ages with the nominalist attempt to secure the independence of the divine.

---

[37] See the overview in Armstrong, *Nominalism and Realism*.

It is interesting to see that the kabbalists, as well as their Islamic fellow-Platonists, did not subscribe to this argument. Thus, Elliot R. Wolfson is right when he notes with regard to the *Bahir* passage quoted above:

> The assertion that the name (*shem*) of an entity is its essence (*guf*)—when cast in the terminology of Western philosophy, the realist as opposed to nominalist orientation—presupposes an intrinsic connection between language and being that rests in turn on the assumed correlation of letter and matter, a correlation likely springing from the mythopoeic sensibility expressed in detail in the second part of *Sefer Yeṣirah*, where the line between religion, magic, and mysticism is not so easily drawn.[38]

Kabbalistic thought represents a line within Western cultural history that combines a Platonic metaphysics with a realist philosophy of language. While the nominalist distinction helped in establishing paradigms of independent natural science, the philosophical and religious claim that knowledge is concealed in language itself has remained an alternative interpretation of the cosmos.

If the creational process is conceived as an emanation and subsequent permutation of letters and words, and if the letters have an ontological status as independent 'units' and abstract objects, the text develops into a *textile*, with innumerable threads of meaning woven into one structure; Torah becomes a 'garment' of truth.[39] Consequently—and making use of modern philosophical terms—the interpretation of kabbalistic spirituality has to take into account that these texts are characterized by many layers of *intertextuality*—the continuous presence, even if concealed, of biblical, rabbinical, philosophical, and other kabbalistic literature—by *multivalence*—sentences and words have multiple meanings and are consciously used in more than one possible reading—and by strategies of *concealment* that tend

---

[38] Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 197. Moshe Idel argues similarly: "The monadization of language, which is one of the main Kabbalistic modes of perception, means the reduction, and in some cases even the obliteration, of ordinary semantics. […] This is a far more esoteric type of sense, known by the astrologers or Kabbalists, who are in the possession of the linguistic gnosis that is not the patrimony of the common people. In lieu of an agreed language, or a symbolic one, that implies the connection between a whole word and its higher correspondent, the natural and primordial nexus between the higher entity and the isolated linguistic unit becomes the dominant factor" (Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 42).

[39] This is a well-known topic in kabbalistic texts. See, for instance, *Sefer ha-Zohar* 3:152a, where the "garment of Torah" is explained with reference to Ps. 119:18 ("Open my eyes that I may perceive the wonders of your Torah").

to reveal meaning only to those who can read between the lines and are able to grasp the hidden dimensions of the text. Put otherwise, reading these texts is a creative process in itself, as the reader becomes part of the *textile* or *texture* that constitutes kabbalistic literature; and the text becomes *present* in the very process of reading.

This is the reason why it is very fruitful to use twentieth-century philosophy in order to understand kabbalistic literature. Phenomenological continental philosophy and what sometimes is vaguely referred to as 'postmodern' philosophy, are particularly worthwhile for exploring the many dimensions of kabbalistic texts, for the simple reason that this philosophy is also characterized by intertextuality, multivalence, a dialectic of concealment and revelation of truth, and the approach of texts as textures in which the reader plays a decisive role and the time gap between texts and reader is invalidated.

With regard to such an approach, Elliot R. Wolfson's work is of special importance. For instance, in his *Alef, Mem, Tau*, Wolfson refers to the phenomenological tradition of the twentieth century, with a special focus on Martin Heidegger's consciously paradoxical philosophy. Although Wolfson explores possible historical influences of kabbalistic thought on Heidegger—especially through Böhme, Schelling, and German Idealism—his argument is not dependent on those influences only. As he explains in an important methodological passage, he has "found in the words of Heidegger a key to unlock the bahiric symbolism. […] In spite of the blatant differences between medieval kabbalists and Heidegger, too obvious to warrant delineation, applying the poetic thinking of the latter to the former is justifiable on two accounts."[40] The first is the historical connection with kabbalah that cannot be ruled out unequivocally. "The second rationale for turning to Heidegger to explicate medieval kabbalistic symbolism is the significant conceptual affinities between the two ways of thinking." Consequently, "it is perfectly reasonable to propose that a thinker like Heidegger could provide a meta-discourse to disclose structures of thought in kabbalistic literature."[41]

The reference to twentieth-century continental philosophy is relevant for another reason, too. It demonstrates the importance of an

---

[40] Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, 121.
[41] *Ibid.*, 122. This clarification is a well-taken response to Wolfson's critics who reproach him for dehistoricizing medieval kabbalah.

intellectual tradition in Europe that locates knowledge in language and that argues for the 'revelation' of truth by means of linguistic analysis. According to this intellectual tradition, there is an ontological link between letters and words on the one hand, and the basic components of reality on the other. The influence of kabbalistic spirituality in the emergence and continuity of such an interpretation cannot be overemphasized.

Linguistic Ontologies in Christian Kabbalah

All representatives of early modern esotericism were influenced by the Jewish kabbalah to a greater or lesser degree. This influence became more evident, the more Hebrew texts were available in Latin translation. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries partial translations of the Zohar, the works of Gikatilla, and other 'classical' texts were produced, so that Christian authors could make full use of them. Many Christian authors regarded Hebrew as a sacred language that had been spoken in the Garden of Eden, but as we have seen in chapter two, this interest in Jewish sources was by no means a neutral process of exchange or dialogue. More often it was marked by a polemic tone with attempts to prove the 'truth' of Christianity with the aid of Jewish sources.

This polemic notwithstanding, what we witness here is a 'shared passion' of Jewish and Christian authors for the Platonic alternative to nominalist positions. That is why the kabbalistic tradition attracted so many Christians who were interested in the ultimate ontological structures of the cosmos. The rediscovery of the Platonic tradition in the fifteenth century went hand in hand with the emergence of kabbalistic approaches to language in Christian milieus. Even the formation of an academic discipline called 'philology' was informed by the search of absolute sources of wisdom. But before I deal with humanistic philology in more detail, let us have a look at Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin, two of the most influential Christian kabbalists.

Despite a nominalist tendency in a number of his *conclusiones*, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola participated in the ontologization of language in his reception and interpretation of kabbalah. For instance, the nominalist thesis, "No definition is adequate to the thing defined," is preceded by an ultimately Platonic thesis, saying that "Quiddities

[*quiditates*, i.e. 'whatnesses'] possess their formal existence from eternity from themselves, not from something outside themselves."[42] Stephen A. Farmer notes that the "views expressed here illustrate the inadequacy of traditional labels such as 'realist' or 'nominalist' when applied to premodern philosophers and their hierarchical systems. Both elements can commonly be found at different levels of those systems."[43]

Although we should indeed look very closely at what the differences between realist and nominalist approaches in those authors are, and even if we cannot generalize these arguments, the basic challenge and dilemma of nominalist argumentation remain. What we see in Pico is a very creative, though not really consistent, attempt to bridge the gap between those conflicting positions. Pico is wrestling with the dilemmas and paradoxes of perfect knowledge and does not arrive at a less paradoxical argumentation. Thesis 3>6 (ed./trans. Farmer), for instance, alludes to the 'wisdom beyond demonstration' as discussed in the previous chapter, stating: "Just as knowledge through demonstration [*cognitio per demonstrationem*], due to the general state that we experience here, is the most perfect knowledge [*perfectissima cognitio*] had by man, so simply speaking among all knowledge it is the most imperfect." That human understanding must transgress syllogistic demonstration in order to know something in the realm of metaphysics and the divine, is expressed in thesis 3>9 (ed./trans Farmer): "True metaphysics, treated metaphysically, deals with whatever is a true form as its first subject, and with whatever exists formally as its secondary object, in its methods disregarding demonstration [*in modo procedendi demonstrationem negligens*]."

For Pico, kabbalah provides a means to link rational demonstration with a perfect knowledge of the divine. Language and the combination of letters and numbers are the most important tools in his approach. In the dialectic of concealment and disclosure the sefirotic world serves as the major metaphor for understanding the process of creation and revelation. Thesis 11>35 (ed./trans. Farmer) states:

---

[42] Theses 3.6 and 3.5 in Farmer's edition. For nominalist tendencies, see also theses 7.41, 13.1, 2>2–3, 2>46, 3>2–7 ed. Farmer.

[43] Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 400 note.

> If God is known in himself as infinite, as one, and as existing through himself, we recognize that nothing proceeds from him, but know his separation from things, and his total closure of himself in himself, and his extreme, profound, and solitary retraction in the remotest recess of his divinity; and we recognize him as he conceals himself inwardly in the abyss of his darkness, in no way revealing himself in the dilation and profusion of his goodness and fontal splendor.

Falling back on the kabbalistic concept of *Ein-Sof* as God's transcendent nature enables Pico to study the revelatory form of the divine without intermingling with the divinity itself. Although the ultimate truth of the divine remains unknown, it is through the sefirot that the human being can experience and grasp the perfect source of all knowledge. Consequently, Pico makes use of the traditional metaphor of 'garments' to explain this paradox: "From the preceding conclusion we can know why the Cabalists say that God dressed himself in ten garments [*decem uestimentis*] when he created the world" (11>36, ed./trans. Farmer). The 'garments' are the necessary form of transmitting ultimate metaphysical truth into the revealed world. "Nothing spiritual, descending below, operates without a garment" (thesis 38>35, ed./trans. Farmer). Like Jewish kabbalists, Pico, too, describes the sefirot as garments of divine speech. The written Torah is the direct result of such a process, as Pico explains in thesis 11>70 (ed./trans. Farmer). "Through the method of reading without points [vowel signs] in the Law, we are shown both the method of writing divine things and the unial containment of divine things through an unlimited compass." Consequently, the process of creation is an act of naming and writing, which leads Pico—again in congruence with the *Sefer Yetzirah* and Jewish kabbalistic thought—to make the link between language, magic, and creation. "Voices and words have efficacy in a magical work, because in that work in which nature first exercises magic, the voice is God's"; "Every voice has power in magic insofar as it is shaped by the voice of God" (theses 9>19–20, ed./trans. Farmer). And finally: "Out of the principles of the more secret philosophy it is necessary to acknowledge that characters and figures are more powerful in a magical work than any material quality" (9>24 ed./trans. Farmer).

This brings us to Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522), indisputably the most important representative of Christian kabbalah at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Scholars such as Joseph Blau und Gershom Scholem celebrated him as the first researcher of kabbalah in history,

who did more for Jewish literature than many a rabbi.[44] Both his
major works, "The Wonder-Working Word" (*De verbo mirifico*,
1494) and especially "The Art of the Kabbalah" (*De arte cabalistica*,
1517), have been held in high regard by Christian kabbalists. With
his Hebrew grammar, published in 1506, he laid the basis of research
into the Hebrew language and biblical studies.[45] Writing also under the
pseudonym Capnion, Reuchlin was an ardent follower of Pico della
Mirandola and took up several of the Italian's kabbalistic theses in
order to elaborate them into a general theory.[46] In *De verbo mirifico* it
was primarily the kabbalistic derivation of the name of Jesus, which
Reuchlin used and which provided the book with its title. By inserting
a *Shin* into the middle of the Tetragrammaton YHWH, one obtains
YHShWH, which is no one else but "YeHoShUH," that is "Jesus."[47]
Reuchlin further explains that the letter *Shin* occurs in such significant
words as *shemen* ("oil") and *mashiach* ("anointed," "Messiah"), and
every individual can experience the supreme knowledge of the sci-
ences and ultimately the deification of human nature once he has been
anointed by Jesus Christ. Both this interpretation and his emphasis of
the wonder-working word demonstrate how strongly Reuchlin wished
to integrate magical traditions into Christianity.[48]

De arte cabalistica, then, is also the first complete account of a kab-
balistic system written by a non-Jew. Like *De verbo mirifico*, Reuchlin's
second major work is composed in the form of a discussion between

---

[44] On Reuchlin and the kabbalah see Grözinger, "Reuchlin und die Kabbala";
Schmidt-Biggemann, "Johannes Reuchlin und die Anfänge der christlichen Kabbala";
Herzig & Schoeps (eds.), *Reuchlin und die Juden*. See also the introductions to the
editions of Busi & Campanini, *Johannes Reuchlin: L'arte cabbalistica*, VII–LXX; Good-
man & Goodman, *Johann Reuchlin: De Arte Cabalistica*, 7–32 (by G. Lloyd Jones).

[45] Reuchlin's *Rudimenta linguae hebraicae* was one of the first Hebrew grammars
for Christians. It was based on the *Michlol* by David Kimchi. On the history of Hebrew
grammar going back to the tenth century, see Kotjatko, "Geschichte der hebräischen
Grammatik."

[46] See Beierwaltes, "Reuchlin und Pico della Mirandola."

[47] Pico did not take this step. However, Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) offered a
precedent for Reuchlin in his sermon *Dies sanctificatus* (1445); see Schmidt-Biggemann
(ed.), *Christliche Kabbalah*, 19. The unutterable Jewish Tetragrammaton becomes pro-
nounceable for Reuchlin as a Pentagram (i.e., a word with five letters); this utterability
is once again interpreted as a symbol of the incarnation of the divine in Jesus.

[48] See Zika, *Exorcising Our Demons*, 21–67. The magical aspect of his doctrines
and their clear traces of Jewish and Muslim tradition—for example the *Picatrix* or the
magic of "Abramelin of Worms"—have been more fully discussed than heretofore in
recent research; see Roling, "Complete Nature of Christ."

three persons: Marranus, a circumcised and baptized Muslim, Simon[49] as a Jewish kabbalist, and Philolaus, a Christian and Pythagorean. In the idiom of his age, Reuchlin describes the kabbalah as a precursor of Pythagoreanism, but he names only Plato and Aristotle among the other *prisci theologi*. The kabbalah is an original form of philosophical wisdom-teaching, which must now be made accessible once again. For this reason, the magical elements of the doctrine, which still loomed large in *De verbo mirifico*, play a relatively minor role twenty years later. This is not to say that Reuchlin is no longer interested in the practical aspect of the kabbalah, but his chief concern is now to 'wing' the soul upwards to God, rather than 'drawing down' the divine.

In *De arte cabalistica*, Reuchlin also engages the various forms of knowledge and the wisdom that is hidden in language. In a line of argument that we have come across so often, the supreme knowledge cannot be attained by intellectual reasoning only.

> This goes beyond the intellectual faculties of all of us: we are unable by rational methods to entertain things that are by definition contradictory. We are used to things that are by their very nature obvious. Rationality falls far short of the infinite power we have been talking about, it cannot simultaneously connect these contradictories that are separated by infinity. (A German philosopher-archbishop handed down this dictum some fifty-two years ago.)[50]

Perfect knowledge is achieved by non-rational experience and ultimately by receiving revelations from the angelic sphere. "Thus arises the Kabbalist's intimate friendship with the angels, through which he comes to know, in the proper manner, something of the divine names and does wonderful things (commonly known as miracles)."[51] It is an intuitive, experiential approach to language and names that characterizes kabbalah in Reuchlin's presentation. The ultimate goal of the process of achieving knowledge is *deificatio*.

> This is what used to be called "deification," when exterior sense passes from the immediate object to the inner sense, and that passes to the imagination, imagination to thought, thought to reason, reason to

---

[49] The name of the Jewish authority on kabbalah obviously refers to Simon bar-Yochai, the alleged second-century author of the *Sefer ha-Zohar*.

[50] Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica*, ed./trans. Goodman & Goodman, 123. The "German philosopher-archbishop" is Nicholas of Cusa.

[51] *Ibid.*

understanding, understanding to reflection, and reflection to the light which enlightens man and clasps to itself that enlightenment.[52]

In this process of illumination the human being has to climb intellectually along ten stages to reach the ultimate goal. For Reuchlin, the kabbalistic sefirot represent those ten stages of perfecting knowledge, which is apparent when we consider the terms he uses to describe the sefirot:

> So, my friends, there you have ten sephiroth by which man apprehends things: the object, the *diaphane*, outer sense, inner sense, *phantasia*, lower judgment, higher judgment, reason, and intellect. These are not the "what" so much as the "how" of acting. The highest thing in man— mind—is something else again. Just as God wears the Crown in the kingdom of the world, so is the mind of man chief among the ten Sephiroth, and so it is rightly called "The Crown," […].[53]

The important constellation for the contemplative knowledge of the divine is the highest triad of *ratio, intellectus*, and *mens*. While *ratio* and *intellectus* still belong to the higher human faculties, *mens* attaches itself already to divine knowledge. According to Reuchlin, the *intellectus* functions as a connecting faculty between *ratio* and *mens; intellectus* moves beyond rationality, even though it is not equivalent to perfect, divine knowledge.

This description is reminiscent of the conception of kabbalah found in Abulafia and (early) Gikatilla, according to which with the aid of the intellect the human being scales the ladder of knowledge. The path to the messiah leads through the understanding of the letters in the name of the messiah, which contains the hidden name of God: "According to the Kabbalists, the Messiah has only one name, the unpronounceable YHWH. This will fulfill and perfect his ordinary name."[54] With

---

[52] "Haecilla est quae paulo ante a nobis vocabatur deificatio, cum ab obiecto praesente per medium suum exterior sensus transit in sensionem interiorem, et illa in imaginationem, et imaginatio in existimationem, et existimatio in rationem, et ratio in intellectum, et intellectus in mentem, et mens in lucem, quae illuminat hominem, et illud natum in se corripit" (*ibid*., 46; trans. p. 47).

[53] "Habetis itaque viri solertissimi decem numerationes quibus homini contingit rerum apprehensio, quae sunt obiectum, diaphanon, sensus exterior, sensus interior, phantasia, iudicium inferius, iudicium superius, ratio et intellectus. Et haec omnia non tam sunt quid, quem quo. Suprema vero mens in homine aliud quid est. Quapropter sicut deus in mundo, ita mens in homine inter decem Sephiroth regni gerit diadema, et recte cognoiatur" (*ibid*., 50; trans. p. 51).

[54] *Ibid*., 113. On the letter *Shin* as important addition to the Tetragrammaton, see also *ibid.*, 115.

such a conclusion, Reuchlin presents a messianic—or, rather, Christological—version of the ontologization of language in kabbalah.

The mystification of language by Christian kabbalists on the basis of Jewish kabbalistic spirituality exerted an enormous influence on religious and philosophical discourses in the seventeenth century. Scholars such as Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–1698) and Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1631–1689) adopted and elaborated kabbalistic speculations in a climate of high political and religious tension. For the subsequent reception of kabbalistic thought, it is particularly Knorr von Rosenroth's partial Latin translation of key sources of Jewish kabbalah, printed under the title *Kabbala Denudata* ("Kabbalah Unveiled") at Sulzbach in 1677, that has to be mentioned here.[55] This encyclopaedic work contained portions of the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, extracts from Gikatilla's work, and the treatise *De anima* ("On the Soul") by Moses Cordovero, along with other kabbalistic texts.[56] One can justifiably say that not until *Kabbala Denudata* was published did Christian Europe gain access to the Jewish kabbalah, if only in a selection indebted to the Christian interests of the age. Right up to the twentieth century, esotericists unversed in Hebrew would essentially draw their knowledge of kabbalah from this work.

In his conception of the ontological status of letters and words, Knorr made use of Gikatilla's kabbalistic speculation in particular. It was this influential Jewish kabbalist who had developed an idea of the Torah as textile of names that organically group around the Tetragrammaton like 'twigs around a tree-trunk.'

> The Torah can be read as a symbolic texture of metonymically arranged names; in a hierarchical structure all names come together in the one name of the four letters. Thus, the Torah is an encrypted theosophical text about the hidden divine nature and its presence and impact in the world. But not only Torah as building plan of the world, but ultimately all forms of revelation—hence also the world and language—are woven from the divine name.[57]

It is this speculation of Gikatilla's that Knorr von Rosenroth picks up in his own writings. What is more, he combines this ontology of words

---

[55] On the book, its context and reception history see the contributions in Kilcher (ed.), *Kabbala Denudata*.

[56] On the structure and a synopsis of *Kabbala denudata* see Kilcher, "Synopse."

[57] Kilcher, *Sprachtheorie der Kabbalah*, 74. See also Morlok, "Text als Textur," 163–165.

with speculations regarding the creation process that we have come across in Jewish spirituality since the *Sefer Yetzirah*. Programmatically he states: "The creation of the world was done by conversions and rotations of the letters."[58] In his search for the *prisca theologia*, Knorr "defines a new code for the kabbalistic deciphering of the biblical text, which offers the possibility to interpret the sefirotic world as a parallel structure of our immanent structure of being."[59]

In the seventeenth century, Knorr von Rosenroth and others linked such a mystical hermeneutics to another mirror of perfect knowledge—the encyclopaedia. I will deal with this topic in chapter 9. Regarding the 'secrets of texts,' however, a brief look into the universalizing tendencies of early modern philology is important at this point.

Humanistic Philology:
Universal Languages and the Quest for the Ursprache

The movement that today is called 'humanism' was a highly polemical project. Between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries a critical response to scholasticism was formed that claimed the authority of philological scrutiny.[60] With their battle cry "*ad fontes*" ("back to the sources") the humanists applied the hermeneutical and text-critical interpretational tools for pagan literature to the biblical texts, thus contextualizing and historicizing the biblical revelation to a degree that had been impossible in earlier periods. In addition to the theological challenge related to this maneuver of contextualizing and relativizing, the humanists polemicized against the authority of theologians and clerics, ultimately leading to the Reformation endeavor of making the biblical text available to everyone. To be sure, while some saw in Luther's translation of the Bible a democratization of theology, others regarded it as a sacrilege and profanation. Be this as it may, one result was the emergence of classical philology as a distinct academic discipline, and of philological experts who critically reflected on basic

---

[58] "De Creatione mundi factâ per conversiones et rotationes literarum […]" (Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala Denudata*, vol. I, 208).
[59] Morlok, "Text als Textur," 179.
[60] See Rummel, *Humanist-Scholastic Debate*.

tenets of theology—both Christian and non-Christian—in the Republic of Letters.[61]

The humanist movement was polemical in another regard as well. The urge to go *ad fontes* was also directed against the Islamic interpretation of Aristotelianism, which had been taken over by Christian scholastics.[62] In an anti-Islamic polemic humanists argued that the Arabic tradition had distorted the original Greek philosophy and that Christians would have to come to their own conclusions regarding the heritage of ancient paganism. Thus, a two-fold religious polemic fostered the emergence of what was to become known as philology.

At first glance, academic philology of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries may look like a sober revaluation of religious texts. However, when we take a closer look at the field of philology, we encounter many actors who are well known from the history of esoteric discourses. This is because many humanist philologists were not simply interested in the objective description of the development of human languages or the exact contextualization and translation of ancient texts; many humanists applied the instruments of philological scrutiny to their overall search for the ultimate language, or *Ursprache*. The quest for the "Adamic language" that was spoken in Paradise and that therefore represented the closest affinity to the divine or sacred language is particularly relevant for experts of the Hebrew language. Within the humanist movement, the Christian Hebraists played a crucial role, both for esoteric interpretations of the cosmos and for the emergence of modern societies.

> From antiquity to the present Jewish-Christian encounters have played a key role in defining attitudes toward personal, national, and religious identity in Western culture. These definitions, in turn, involved debates about history, religion, morality, and truth in general. The work of the Christian Hebraists […] impinged on all these highly sensitive areas; they were linguists and textual critics, and their work highlighted the ambiguous role played by language and texts in transmitting natural and divine truth. The subject of Christian Hebraism is therefore not peripheral to European history but one that has direct relevance to

---

[61] On the history of humanism in general see Black, *Humanism and Education*. On the emergence of the 'Republic of Letters' see Grafton, *Defenders of the Text; idem*, *Bring Out Your Dead*. On the humanist debate about the Hermetic texts see Mulsow (ed.), *Ende des Hermetismus*.

[62] See al-Maqdisī, *Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam*.

understanding the intellectual changes and challenges characterizing the transition from the ancient to the modern world.[63]

This is not the place to engage the Christian quest for the ultimate divine language in detail.[64] Suffice it to say that this search is a common denominator of many scholars of the time, including Guillaume Postel,[65] Johannes Reuchlin, Athanasius Kircher, John Dee, Francis Mercury van Helmont, and Christian Knorr von Rosenroth. Van Helmont and Knorr collaborated at the court of Sulzbach; it was with the newly established press there that van Helmont published his *Kurtzer Entwurff des eigentlichen Naturalphabets der Heiligen Sprache* (1667), with a preface by Knorr.[66] Van Helmont argued in this philosophical work that Hebrew was the divine language of creation and that the Hebrew words exactly expressed the essential nature of things, which fits the kabbalistic ontologization of letters that I explained above. Van Helmont was convinced that while time and ignorance had led to the corruption of Hebrew, he had actually rediscovered its original form. In a climate of religious and political tension, van Helmont expected consolation and unity from the study of the primordial language that he had found. He shared this messianic expectation with his friend, Knorr von Rosenroth.

Van Helmont and Knorr were no exception in the seventeenth century. Quite the contrary: beginning with the sixteenth century, we can see a line of thought that conceptualized language as a mirror and source of universal knowledge. The quest for universal languages was part and parcel of an apocalyptic mindset and the experience of religious wars. As Robert E. Stillman notes with regard to Comenius' *Via lucis* (1641):

> Out of linguistic divisions come war, religious strife, and cultural chaos; from linguistic renewal are promised not just peace but also the utopian benefits of a Christianopolis. Such ideas are startling, but in a

---

[63] The editors' introduction to Coudert & Shoulson, *Hebraica Veritas?*, 12.

[64] Coudert (ed.), *Language of Adam*, and Eco, *Search for the Perfect Language*, provide good introductions to the topic.

[65] Kuntz, "Hebrew and the 'Other Sister' Arabic"; Klein, "Christliche Kabbala und Linguistik orientalischer Sprachen."

[66] In English the book is usually known simply as the *Alphabet of Nature*; see Coudert, *Impact of the Kabbalah*, 58–99; see also Coudert's and Corse's new translation of the text.

seventeenth-century context they were far from extraordinary. In no other period of Western culture was so much power attributed to words or such great expectations attached to their reform. At the same time, in no other period was so much suspicion voiced about their abuse. The important point here is control. For beneath the veneration of linguistic power and the fear of its abuse, in Comenius, as in Bacon, Hobbes, Wilkins, and the other writers of the English tradition, lies a strong desire to master language, which is also a desire to master history.[67]

Comenius is an important link between mystical-esoteric concepts— Böhme's *Natursprache*—and the universal languages of the later natural philosophers. In Comenius we can see "that linguistic perfection— a renewal of the bonds between language and nature—is the means to Edenic perfection, a salvation from history."[68] Thus, Stillman concludes:

> A perfect language is the fulfillment of desire: it is the marriage of words to things. When midway through the seventeenth century John Webster envisions the creation of a universal language, he makes the revealing argument that its discovery would serve "to marry the world, that is, fitly and duly to join and connex agents to their patients, masculines to faemines, superious [sic] to inferiours, Caelestials to terrestrials, that thereby nature may act out her hidden and latent power."[69]

The tragedy of nominalism has gone full circle. While nominalists had tried to divorce words and things, the quest for the universal language tied them together again. Philologists and philosophers of the seventeenth century ontologized language in such a way that the kabbalistic understanding of the ultimate qualities of letters and words could easily be adopted.

---

[67] Stillman, *New Philosophy and Universal Languages*, 30. On universal languages in early modern Europe see also Slaughter, *Universal Languages*.

[68] *Ibid.*, 31.

[69] *Ibid.*, 33. The reference is to John Webster's *Academiarum examen; or, The Examination of Academies*.

THE SECRETS OF TIME: ASTROLOGY AND SACRED HISTORY

Not only the revelatory potential of experiential knowledge and the ontological dimensions of words belonged to the shared passions of medieval and early modern intellectuals; the search for the secret meaning of time and history is another example of discursive transfers. Until the late seventeenth century, it was astrology that served as the major disciplinary tool to unlock the hidden dimensions of past, present, and future. What is more, astrology is an important link between religious traditions on the one hand, and between cultural systems on the other. In fact, medieval and early modern astrology is much more closely related to mathematics, medicine, and philosophy of nature, than to what scholars have vaguely addressed as 'occult sciences.'[1] In this chapter I will first give an overview of medieval Muslim astrology before I will turn to the Christian astrology of the same period, which can be described as an adaptation of Muslim traditions of knowledge, but which also reveals its own transmission and reworking of ancient doctrines leading to astonishing results already in the ninth century.[2]

Critical Response to Ancient Traditions: Medieval Arabic Astrology

From the beginning, most Muslim rulers were open to science and philosophy. This led to a very fruitful transmission of ancient knowledge. What is more, the pre-Islamic traditions of Mesopotamia and Persia still had a considerable influence, which is revealed by the

---

[1] On the status of astrology in these historical contexts see Newman & Grafton, "Introduction." On the notion of 'occult sciences' see also chapter 7 below.

[2] For a more detailed description of medieval astrology, see particularly Boudet, *Entre science et nigromance*; see also Tester, *History of Western Astrology*, 98–201 (surprisingly, Tester deals with the Latin Middle Ages only, thus almost completely ignoring the Islamic influence); recently Campion, *History of Western Astrology*, vol. II, 19–84 (like Tester, Campion only engages the Christian contexts, briefly acknowledging the "distinguished achievements of the scholars of the Islamic world" [vol. II, xvii]); von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie*, 159–206; see also Page, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts*.

continuing presence of alchemy, magic, and astrology, brought into new contexts in Islamic culture.[3] When in 762 the Abbasids founded their new capital in Baghdad, they built the city gates in concordance with the four directions as an *imago mundi* ("image of the world"). As it was practice already in the Roman Empire, the founding date of the city was calculated in advance.[4] The second center of Islamic culture was Spain (Arabic *al-Andalus*), where the Umayyads had founded the Emirate of Cordoba in 755. Subsequently, Cordoba became one of the most important European cultural centers of the Middle Ages.

   Between the eighth and the tenth centuries, we witness an increase of scientific activity that not only integrated and translated Hellenistic and Eastern traditions of learning but also renewed theory, practice, and technology in many ways. Therefore, it is wrong to describe Islamic science and philosophy simply as a copy of Greek thinking. One of the most fervent critics of this 'classical narrative' is George Saliba. He makes clear that even

> the translation movement of early Abbāsid times, since it was generated by social conditions of the Islamic government itself, did not simply translate the classical texts, digest them and then began to create a science of its own as the classical narrative continues to tell us. What seems to have happened is that the translation and creation were taking place at the same time [...] we can discern some creative activities to have preceded the translations of the advanced text, and that those creative activities by themselves required further translations in order to lead to more creative thinking and so on. In this manner we can understand why al-Ḥajjāj b. Maṭar had to read Ptolemy's text very carefully and to correct it whenever he thought it was in error.[5]

---

[3] Often, it has been argued that the Renaissance magic of a Marsilio Ficino and others is something entirely 'new'; see particularly Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition.* Over against this simplified view, Frank Klaassen has demonstrated that Renaissance magic is built on medieval traditions; see Klaassen, "Medieval Ritual Magic in the Renaissance." Arabic tradition plays a significant role in this transmission; see particularly Marquès-Rivière, *Amulettes, talismans et pentacles*; Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*; Burnett (ed.), *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages*; Fanger (ed.), *Conjuring Spirits*; Weill-Parot, *Les "images astrologiques" au moyen âge*; Bremmer & Veenstra (eds.), *Metamorphosis of Magic.*

[4] See von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie*, 149. The astrologer who calculated the date was Ma'shallâh (Latin Messallah), a Jew who had converted to Islam. With Jupiter as the ruler of the 'birth chart' of Baghdad, the Babylonian tutelary divinity Marduk merged with the highest god of Rome.

[5] Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance*, 66–67.

In the beginning, Persians, Indians, Jews, and Greeks were the main importers of astrological traditions, the practice of which was fostered by the Islamic rulers.[6] Particularly the Abbasid caliphates of Baghdad provided a climate that was fruitful for the development of science and philosophy, among them Abū-Jaʿfar al-Mansūr, Hārūn al-Rashīd, and ʿAbdallah am-Maʾmūn. Under the regency of am-Maʾmūn (813–833) the library of Baghdad reached the height of its influence, with its most important task being the translation of all available older literature into Arabic. Am-Maʾmūn saw to it that Greek manuscripts were shipped to Baghdad from Byzantium and Cyprus. Teams of translators worked on a critical comparison of the respective documents and tried to differentiate older from newer versions, thus within two hundred years they helped to establish a concise collection of ancient sciences. Among those translations were highly important works, such as Ptolemy's *Almagest*, the major astronomical work from the second century CE.

At that time an astronomical genre was created—the so-called *zīj*— that was to become an important resource for practicing astrologers.[7] The Persian word, in Latin versions translated as *canon*, means "table" and refers to a compilation of astronomical rules and dates that can be found in writings as early as those of Ptolemy's, and that allows astrologers to calculate in a relatively simple way the planetary positions and ascendants for specific times and places (thus, *canones* is the word not only for the tables but also for the instruction manuals that explain how to use the tables). Some of the *zījes* served as purely arithmetical or trigonometric tools, often for the calculation and conversion of calendars, others helped with the calculation of risings and settings of the sun, moon, and the planets. In many cases, they were also used for concrete tasks, for instance to calculate the hourly movement of planets, their average speed, the times of their standstills and retrograde movements, as well as prognoses of new moons and

---

⁶ An overview is provided in the following publications: Carmody, *Arabic Astronomical and Astrological Sciences in Latin Translations*; Lemay, *Abu Maʿshar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century*; Grant (ed.), *Source Book of Medieval Science*; Flint, "Transmission of Astrology"; Samsó, *Islamic Astronomy and Medieval Spain*; Grant, *Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages*; Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance*.

⁷ The astronomical relevance of this genre is explained in North, *History of Astronomy and Cosmology*, 180–183.

eclipses (which were needed for the exact calculation of the religiously important beginnings of the lunar months). Star lists—mostly derived from Ptolemy's list of 1022 stars—also served to aid in the exact determination of time and the correct use of the astrolabes that the Muslim astronomers had technically improved.

The *zījes* were of crucial importance for casting horoscopes for two reasons: First of all, they helped to figure out correct data; astrologers consulted the tables for the place of birth or transferred the data from one place to the longitude and latitude of another place in order to calculate the ascendant and the culminating point, the so-called midheaven. Furthermore, the tables comprised methods of calculating the lifetime and the life conditions to be expected for the person in question. From the middle of the eighth century through the end of the fifteenth century, more than two hundred clearly distinct *zījes* had been produced, about twenty of them presenting new parameters and calculations that were derived from empirical observation of the sky. Most *zījes* followed the theory of the *Almagest*, but there were also influential tables—among them the famous *zīj* by al-Khwārizmī (c. 840)[8]—that integrated Hindu and Persian mathematical systems. Baghdad certainly was the center of this production, the first real successor of ancient Alexandria. In the east, from the middle of the tenth century Iran became the new focal point of *zīj* production, while in the west, especially in Spain, Jews played a leading role in further developing the genre. The astrologers welcomed the use of tables because now they were able to derive more or less exact dates for their horoscopes without having to master the complex methods of calculation in every detail.

Among the most important astrologers of the time, special mention must be made of Ma'shallāh, al-Kindī, Abū Ma'shar, and al-Battānī.[9] Later Latin texts regularly call upon these four astrologers, but al-Kindī and Abū Ma'shar were undoubtedly the art's most influential representatives. Born at the end of the eighth century to an aristocratic family— his father was governor of al-Kurfan under Hārūn al-Rashīd—al-Kindī (Ya'qūb ibn Itshāq al-Kindī) laid the foundation of a philosophical defense of 'esoteric' disciplines, including astrology, magic, and other

---

[8] See North, *History of Astronomy and Cosmology*, 184–185, 210–217.
[9] Detailed references are provided in Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* VII, 98–199; Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam*, 303–358.

divinatory techniques.[10] Al-Kindī became the teacher and physician of the great patron of the sciences, the caliph am-Ma'mūn. He died presumably in 866.

According to the narrative of the great chronicler an-Nadīm, the 47-year-old Abū Ma'shar (Abū Ma'shar Ja'far ben Muhammad 'Umar al-Balkhī, Latin Albumasar, 787–886) met al-Kindī and became convinced by the famous philosopher that he had to study mathematics in order to understand philosophy; so he turned from his *ḥadīth* studies to astrology[11] and subsequently wrote an oeuvre that in its influence on later generations of astrologers and astronomers, particularly in the Christian domain, can only be compared to that of Ptolemy.[12] Abū Ma'shar is perhaps the first astrologer who undertook a conscious amalgamation of the Ptolemaic and the Persian elements of astrological and astronomical doctrine. Born in (or near) the city of Balkh in Khurasan, a place where Jews, Nestorians, Manichaeans, Buddhists, Hindus, and Zoroastrians had settled, Abū Ma'shar became familiar with these various teachings early on. Although he presumably served the Abbasid ruler in Baghdad early in his life, he always remained close to Shiite Islam.

Abū Ma'shar left an enormous body of work that includes the following titles: the *Flores astrologiae* ("Flowers of Astrology"), a collection of brief but helpful suggestions and aphorisms that many people used as a consultation book; *De revolutionibus nativitatum* ("The Revolutions of Nativities"); two works on *Electiones* ("Elections" of right moments for action), and an influential *zīj*. Particularly responsible for his impact in the West, however, was *The Great Introduction to the Predictions from the Stars*. In 1133, this treatise was translated by John of Seville (who translated other works of Abū Ma'shar as well) as *Liber introductorius maior* ("The Great Book of Introduction"). Independently of John, Hermann of Carinthia prepared another translation

---

[10] See Travaglia, *Magic, Causality and Intentionality*.

[11] Saliba argues that the "story is indicative of the relationship of astrology to the religious sciences at the time, and reflects an early attempt to attack the ancient sciences on account of their relationship to the religiously condemned discipline of astrology" (*Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance*, 36). This may be part of the story, but the Shiite interest in calculating sacred history may be another reason for Abū Ma'shar's turn to astrology.

[12] His influence is stressed particularly by Richard Lemay, *Abu Ma'shar and Latin Aristotelianism*, while others—such as David Pingree, *The Thousands of Abū Ma'shar*—are more cautious about the impact and quality of his writings.

in 1140 under the title *Introductorium in astronomiam* ("Introduction to Astronomy/Astrology"). While other works focused on technical aspects, the *Liber introductorius* was relevant in a more general way, because this book presented a detailed nature-philosophical foundation and an apologia of astrology as a mathematical science. Through this book, Aristotle was introduced to the Christian West long before his specific works were actually known. For Abū Maʿshar astrology is an important natural science, including all branches of this art, even those that the opponents of astrology called *astrologia superstitiosa*, namely the interpretation of horoscopes and the making of concrete predictions.

> This combination of a theoretical scientific foundation and a concrete overview of all branches of astrology made Abū Maʿshar's text for the Latin West an ideal handbook that immediately opened up for them central areas of knowledge about nature. Hence, three hundred years after it was written, this book exerted a much more important influence in the West than it had ever had in the Islamic East.[13]

To be sure, this evaluation does not fit the impact of Abū Maʿshar's other works in the same way. How important his contribution to the Islamic astrological discourse in fact was, becomes apparent when we look at his 'table,' the *zīj al-hazarāt*, because in this work he goes beyond the presentation of astronomical calculations and bases his science on a 'Hermetic' conceptual framework. Astrology, Abū Maʿshar tells us, was once revealed from a divine source to the wise, but people had forgotten this knowledge. His *zīj* was based on a document that according to him was hidden before the deluge in Isfahan and would now become available to the people again. Abū Maʿshar used Indian planetary parameters in his book, combining them with Ptolemy's system; thus, instead of being antediluvian, his *zīj* reveals the progressive development of ancient astrology in Muslim cultural frameworks.

The Shiites, with their theology focusing on the Hidden Imam, embraced another theory of Abū Maʿshar, as well. Already in antiquity, astrologers had been interested in interpreting the cycles of planetary conjunctions, that is, the repeated 'meeting' of planets in the sky.[14] In his influential work "On the Great Conjunctions" (also known

---

[13] Blume, *Regenten des Himmels*, 22.

[14] For ancient examples see von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie*, index "Große Konjunktion." For an interesting, though at times highly speculative, inter-

from its Arabic title as "The Book of Religions and Dynasties"),[15] the Baghdad astrologer sketches a historical picture that relates the rise and fall of human institutions—religious communities and political systems—to planetary cycles. Harking back to ancient theories, Abū Maʿshar explains that the "great conjunctions" of Jupiter and Saturn, in particular with the addition of Mars,[16] are responsible for world history. The periodic conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn are divided into three main types. (a) Saturn and Jupiter form a simple conjunction approximately every twenty years, called "lesser conjunction." (b) Due to retrograde periods of the planetary movement, there can occur a three-fold conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, which looks like a continuous conjunction of the two planets in the sky for almost one year; given the mean rate of progress of the planets, the next conjunction will take place in the ninth sign from that in which it last occurred, i.e. it falls into the same trigon of zodiacal signs twelve times. The change from one trigon to the next one occurs after approximately 240 years and is known as the "middle conjunction."[17] (c) Since there are four zodiacal trigons—fire, earth, air, and water—it takes approximately 960 years until Saturn and Jupiter get back to their conjunction in the original sign, which is called the "great conjunction."

In the Arabic version of "On the Great Conjunctions" Abū Maʿshar explains:

> At its completion of 10 rotations there may happen conditions and changes in general in the appearance of prophethood and the shift of dynasties, religions and customs, according to what we shall describe. To take an example of this in successive times: that is, when 10 rotations were completed for Saturn in the days of Dārā bn Dārā,[18] there occurred [to us] the appearance of Alexander, son of Philip, and the

---

pretation of the role of the Great Conjunctions in Western history see de Cesaris, *Congiunzioni Giove-Saturno e storia Giudaico-Cristiana.*

[15] The authoritative edition and annotated translation is Yamamoto & Burnett (ed./ trans.), *Abū Maʿšar on Historical Astrology.*

[16] The inclusion of Mars in this analysis is an elaboration of earlier theories. On the development of the theory of the great conjunctions and the world-year, see Kennedy, "The Sassanian Astronomical Handbook Zij-I Shah"; Kennedy & van der Waerden, "The World-Year of the Persians"; Pingree, "Astronomy and Astrology in India and Iran."

[17] Note that this is Abū Maʿshar's terminology, taken over by Abraham ibn Ezra and others. The three-fold conjunction (without change of trigon) is otherwise also called "great conjunction." Cf. the table of conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn between 200 BCE and 710 CE provided in von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie,* 860–861.

[18] Darius, King of the Persians.

disappearance of the Persian dynasty. When another 10 of its rotations
were completed for it, Ardašīr ibn Bābikān[19] appeared and he restored
the dynasty of the Persians and set up their affairs. When another 10
of its rotations were completed for it, ʿĪsā bn Maryam (Upon him be
peace!)[20] appeared with the change of the religion. When another 10 of
its rotations were completed for it, Mānī appeared and he produced a
religion which is between Mazdaism and Christianity. When another 10
of its rotations were completed for it, the Prophet (Upon him be peace!)
brought the revealed religion of Islam.[21]

Many Shiites who were waiting for the restoration of the rightful
caliphate in Persia were inspired by this doctrine because it provided
the philosophical and religious explanation and—often even more
important—the determination of the concrete time of this event in
salvation history.

While the Shiites used Abū Maʿshar's model for calculating the
return of the Mahdi, Christians and Jews later were to adopt the model
themselves, applying it to the expected moment of the final judgment
or the messianic time. The best-known predictions in this regard came
from al-Birūnī, Ali ben Ragel (both eleventh century), and Abraham
ibn Ezra (twelfth century). The latter is particularly interesting for us
here, because Abraham ibn Ezra represents the Jewish adaptation of
the Islamic astrological interpretation of the great conjunctions. He
refers explicitly to Abū Maʿshar and other Muslim scholars, whose
theories he critically discusses and applies to Jewish interests. The the-
ory of the great conjunctions is introduced in his discussion of mun-
dane astrology, i.e. the 'universal' world history as opposed to the lives
of individuals. This is a classic topic in astrological discussion, because
the problem arises how astrologers can explain that individuals some-
times are suffering a collective fate, for instance in wars, famines, or
natural catastrophes. Ptolemy had already argued that this is to be
explained by the fact that the horoscopes of the ruler, nation, or city
are more important than the horoscopes of individuals or particulars.[22]

---

[19] Ardashīr I, son of Pāpak (ruled 226–242 CE), the founder of the Sassanid
dynasty.
[20] "Jesus, son of Mary" is the usual designation of Jesus Christ in Muslim con-
texts.
[21] Ch. 8.34, quoted from Yamamoto & Burnett (ed./trans.), *Abū Maʿšar on His-
torical Astrology*, vol. I, 151, 153. Note that the events referred to by Abū Maʿshar
do not form a chronological order; this is an example of the contingencies of 'sacred
history.'
[22] See Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* II.1.

Medieval astrologers elaborated this solution and set up a hierarchy of factors that included other mundane calculations, particularly the great conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn. In the first of his "macro-astrological rule," Ibn Ezra argued:

> The first rule states that [the astrologer] should know to which nation the new-born (that is, the subject for whom a horoscope has been cast) belongs. Given the case that the new-born is an Israelite and that the stars' configuration of his horoscope determine that he will become a king, it is not appropriate that [the astrologer] should pronounce the judgment that this Israelite will be crowned a king. For it has already been made clear that the great conjunction, that is the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, has decreed that the nation of Israelites should remain in exile. Thus this individual power cannot abrogate the more general force. Hence it is fitting that in this case [the astrologer] should pronounce the following judgment: the new-born will be close to kings, he will mingle with kings and run affairs with them, but he himself will not become a king.[23]

The topic lingered on in interreligious debate. Around 1470 it was Isaac Abarbanel who caused a sensation with his prediction—in fact, another example of creative historiography—that the return of the great trigon into the sign of Pisces signified the arrival of the messiah and the beginning of the Jewish salvation period. Abarbanel made use of Bar Hiyya's version of this theory, which stated that the great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces saw the revelation of the Torah; their seventh great conjunction in Virgo represented the rise and spread of Christianity, while the second meeting of these planets in Pisces in the year 1464 would lead to the nations' final downfall and the beginning of Israel's deliverance.[24]

A little later, the great conjunction of the year 1483/4 led to a heated discussion among European scholars, a discussion that was related, among other issues, to the birth chart of Martin Luther; the reformer

---

[23] Abraham ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Moladot*, quoted from Sela, *Abraham ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, 347 (see also the Hebrew text provided there); cf. also Abraham ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-'Olam* ("Book of the World"), discussed by Sela, *ibid.*, 166–167. Sela concludes that "it is easy to understand why and how these astrological techniques were so extensively employed by medieval astrologers to give a comprehensive explanation of the fluctuations in human history as well as prognostications of future collective events" (p. 168). On the topic see further Rodrígues-Arribas, "Historical Horoscopes of Israel." On Jewish astral magic in the Middle Ages see Schwartz, "La magie astrale"; Schwartz, *Studies on Astral Magic*.

[24] See Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition*, 129–130.

later even faked his year of birth in order to let it correspond to the great conjunction.[25] Astrology is interreligious and open to a great variety of rhetorical charging.

In close contact with the eastern centers of the Islamic world, between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries the Spanish caliphates—in addition to the Staufer rule in Italy that I do not have the space to address here[26]—formed the most important focal points of science and philosophy. Without them, the flourishing of astrology in the early modern period would have been impossible. In the course of time the research in al-Andalus outmatched the schools of Baghdad, and Spain became the new intellectual center of Islam. Spain had a scientific tradition already before the Muslim conquest—due to the influence of Isidore of Seville whose encyclopedic work I will discuss later—but astronomy in those days was mainly interested in simple questions such as the synchronization of calendars or (later on) determining the *qibla*, that is, the direction of Mecca, toward which Muslims face to pray. Only in the tenth century can a flourishing of research be seen. During the caliphate of Abd al-Rachman III (912–961) the emirate of Cordoba began to surpass the Abbasid caliphate in scientific performance. The emir sent agents to Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo to get hold of all available publications, and in the second half of the tenth century schools for mathematics, astronomy, and other arts were founded that systematized, commentated, and extended the material from the East. The astronomer al-Majritī (died c. 1007) who worked in Cordoba, transferred al-Khwārismī's table to the meridian of Cordoba and synchronized the Islamic calendar that began with the Hijra.[27] Al-Majritī educated a whole group of famous astronomers, and soon other places on the Spanish peninsula, among them Seville, Valencia, Saragossa, and Toledo, followed the example of Cordoba.

From the beginning Spain had been characterized by a vivid exchange between religious traditions, fostered not only by the Muslim rulers. Jews and converts had a key position in these processes, since their multilingualism made them first-class translators. The

---

[25] On the overall discussion see Ernst, "From the Watery Trigon to the Fiery Trigon"; Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, 141–181; Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars*; Geneva, *Astrology and the Seventeenth-Century Mind*, 118–140; Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 69–71; von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie*, 232–241, 244–249.

[26] See von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie*, 196–199.

[27] North, *History of Astronomy and Cosmology*, 184–185.

borders between religions—we should not forget that 'conversions,' in whichever direction they may occur, are never complete—were more fluent in those days than during other periods, and all parties shared a common cultural milieu that radiated into the Latin north even before the translation endeavors actually started. This does not mean, of course, that the situation was a happy multiculturalism without any tension, quite the contrary: as in many other cases discussed in this book, religious identities were formed through polemical differentiation. The status of Jews, for instance, was extremely precarious. But those periods wherein religious tolerance was practiced—such as under Alfonso X of Castile—were culturally very productive. We thus find a rich astrological discourse in Andalusia that involved reputed followers and critics of astrology. One of them was Ali ben Ragel.

Ali ben Ragel ('Ali ibn Abīr-Rijāl, Latin Abenragel Haly, 1016–1062) is one of the astrologers who were most received in the high Middle Ages. Some scholars assume that he had enjoyed an astrological education in Baghdad, but that is not certain. What we know is that he was employed as notary and astrologer at the court of the Zirid al-Mu'izz ibn Bādis in Tunis. His major work is the "Great Book about the Judgments from the Stars," consisting of eight parts, in which the author systematically compiled the whole knowledge of his time. Ali ben Ragel refers explicitly to old masters such as 'Hermes,' Dorotheus, Ptolemy, Ma'shallāh, and al-Kindī, and he discusses the advantages and disadvantages of their respective doctrines. The work became known in Europe through the translation into Old Castilian (1254), prepared by Yehuda Moshe, the personal physician of King Alfonso X, on the latter's request. Unfortunately, only the first five books of this translation are extant. Yehuda Moshe's version was the basis for subsequent Latin translations, printed for the first time as *Praeclarissimus liber completus in judiciis astrorum* at Erhard Ratdolt in Venice (1485). Renaissance astrologers made ample use of it, which can be seen from the fact that the book was reprinted six times between 1503 and 1571. In those days, Ali ben Ragel was celebrated as *summus astrologus* ("highest astrologer") or even as *Ptolemaeus alter* ("second Ptolemy"). "It is a strange feeling to hold in one's hands a book that was written by a Muslim on request of a Christian king, translated by a Jew."[28]

---

[28] Brand, *Lehrbuch der klassischen Astrologie*, 10.

The mélange of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian contributions to astrological and astronomical debates in the Middle Ages was particularly complex and manifold in Spain between the tenth and the twelfth centuries. While this feature is increasingly acknowledged in recent research, not many scholars address the period before the tenth century. Such a lacuna can lead to the assumption that only the schools of translators in Spain and the cultural contacts of that epoch brought those regions that were dominated by Christian culture into contact with philosophy and science. This, however, is a misperception. Therefore, I have to begin my overview of Christian astrology in the early Middle Ages.

Sharing Muslim Knowledge: Christian Astrology

Quite contrary to a widely held assumption, astrology continued to flourish in medieval Christian contexts as well.[29] Not only did scholars of the time try theologically and philosophically to find a possibility for distinguishing 'permissible' from 'prohibited' astrology; politicians, too, time and again supported astrology and used it for legitimating their power, exactly as the Roman emperors had done before.[30] This is true, for instance, of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, Henry II, and the Staufer Emperor Frederick II.

Especially in the Byzantine East, within 'Greek Christianity,' we have to assume a living tradition of astrological doctrines that were, of course, transformed according to Christian myths and theological positions.[31] The history of 'Latin Christianity' in the West was somewhat different. Here, the writings of Firmicus Maternus in particular were repeatedly copied until the high Middle Ages. Slowly, the increasing exchange with the Arabic cultures of Europe and the translation of astrological texts into Latin led to an adaptation of more learned scientific astronomy and astrology.

The Roman senator Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c. 480–524), who led a tragic career under the eastern Gothic king Theodoric

---

[29] On late antiquity see von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie*, 534–800. On the subsequent history of reception see Hübner, *Zodiacus Christianus*; von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie*, 185–206. Cf. also Blume, *Regenten des Himmels*.

[30] Stierlin, *L'astrologie et le pouvoir*, especially chapters 5 and 7.

[31] An overview is provided in Gundel & Gundel, *Astrologumena*, 213–254.

the Great, was important for subsequent generations. Shortly before his death in the dungeon of Pavia, Boethius wrote his most influential work, the *Consolatio philosophiae* ("Consolation of Philosophy"). In the form of a dialogue that he has with the "Lady Philosophia," Boethius here presents once more the complete ancient tradition and thus conveys it to the Christian world.[32] With regard to astrology this was important insofar as Boethius strengthened Neoplatonism and also provided important arguments for the discussion of providence, determinism, fatalism, and free will.

Boethius' influence was significantly superseded by the impact of Isidore of Seville (c. 570–636) who worked under the western Goths and became an important point of reference for subsequent Christian opinions concerning astrology. From 601 until his death, Isidore was bishop of Seville. He penned a large number of works that addressed all sorts of knowledge important in his day. In order to improve the educational level of the western Gothic court, Isidore collected ancient pieces of knowledge and combined them in a twenty-volume encyclopedia,[33] known under the title *Origines* or *Etymologiae*, because his main method of explanation was a (more or less reasonable) etymological derivation. Besides the *artes liberales*, medicine, jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, social sciences, anthropology, zoology, physics, geography, architecture, minerals, agriculture, warfare, theater, clothing, handwork, household equipment, and other things, the learned bishop also addressed astrology and astronomy. Although delineated differently on an etymological basis, Isidore—like all of his contemporaries—saw those disciplines as two aspects of the same interest. Another work (*De rerum natura*, "On the Nature of Things") that engaged cosmology and astrology he dedicated in 613 to King Sisebut, who himself had written an astrological didactic poem.

Isidore distinguishes between *astrologia superstitiosa* and *astrologia naturalis*. The first, insofar as it intends to predict the character and fate of an individual, is regarded as superstition that has become

---

[32] The manuscripts were widely spread in the Middle Ages. King Alfred (d. 901) translated the work into Anglo-Saxon, the monk Notker Labeo (d. 1022) into German, and Maximus Planudes (d. 1310) into Greek.

[33] In fact, this work remained incomplete, and the twenty-volume edition was prepared by Isidore's friend Braulio, bishop of Saragossa, who also was initiator and addressee of the work. The *Etymologiae* are usually filed among the most important transmitters of ancient knowledge into the Middle Ages, along with Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Mercurii et Philologiae* and Cassiodorus' *Institutiones*.

superfluous due to the birth of Christ. As can be seen from his expla-
nation of the 'Star of Bethlehem,' however, this did not mean that
astrology was wrong—it simply was illicit, which is a big difference.
Thus, Jim Tester notes: "The idea, at least, of a potentially valid science
of astrology was kept alive by the very authorities who condemned
it."[34] From the reading of individual horoscopes Isidore differentiated
astrologia naturalis, which tries to scientifically fathom the nature of
things and is by no means at odds with Christian doctrine. Among
these accepted branches of astrology he listed meteorological and, in
particular, medical astrology. He even claimed that every physician
should have an astrological education, a claim that was to gain wide
acceptance up until the Renaissance. It certainly is no exaggeration
when we say that Isidore of Seville with this distinction provided an
interpretational framework for Christians that ultimately led to the
acceptance and increased practice of astrology from the eleventh cen-
tury onward.

The history of reception of Boethius and Isidore began right after
their demise. Already Bede (673–735), whom later generations called
Beda Venerabilis ("the Venerable Bede") and whom the Roman Cath-
olic Church in 1899 declared the only English doctor of the church,
built on their teachings and used them for his chronological calcula-
tions that defined the Christian festal calendar until the Renaissance.
We should not forget that dividing and measuring time was a difficult
task because precise instruments for determining the sun's positions
were scarce. Charlemagne thus must have been delighted when in 807
the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd gave him an elaborate water clock that
could exactly measure hours of equal and unequal length. Charle-
magne was highly interested in astronomy and astrology, as we know
from his correspondence with Alcuin of Tours, his friend and teacher.
His court scribe Einhard, too, repeatedly attested to Charlemagne's
interest in astronomical observation. Therefore, it is not surprising
that this king—and after him his son Louis the Pious, about whom
it was said that he had astrologers around him all the time—continu-
ously supported the educational system of his empire. Already before
Charlemagne, missionaries had founded monastery schools in Fulda,
St. Gallen, Reichenau, and Regensburg, and from the ninth century

---

[34] Tester, *History of Western Astrology*, 126.

on, interest in a good education of the clergy grew. The monks in these schools were not only engaged in theological, philological, and philosophical disciplines, but also in agriculture, music, and astronomy. The latter was, as noted, especially important for calendrical issues.

The genre of the *computus*, a system for calculating calendars developed by Bede, found wide acceptance and was soon supplemented by country sayings and astrological rulings that people took from Firmicus Maternus or from other sources. Our modern word "computer" is derived from *computus*, another indication of the fact that much of our modern concept of time stems from medieval elaborations of ancient considerations.[35] An enormous task of the ninth century was the calendrical reform of Charlemagne whose 'imperial calendar' remained valid until the thirteenth century.[36] Of this calendar there are more than fifty manuscripts in eight different versions extant, stemming from all over Europe. There are Romanic, Germanic, and Celtic versions (a Slavic has not yet been found); the oldest—Rhine-Frankish—version was written in 789 in the abbey of Lorsch.

Therefore, as early as the early ninth century, a transfer of knowledge from Muslim to Christian cultural domains took place, and Christians combined this knowledge with their own tradition. One century later—thus before the great translation projects from Arabic into Latin which began later—monks at the Benedictine monastery of Santa Maria de Ripoll, which lies before the Pyrenees, collected treatises on arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and calendrical issues, the translations of which soon circulated all over Europe. For a long time, historians did not understand how Hermann of Reichenau, also known as Hermann the Lame (1013–1054), in his remote valley of the Austrian Alps could write a detailed treatise on the use of the astrolabe. The answer is simple: he had access to an edition of the Ripoll texts.[37] Hermann, an excellent mathematician, published a critique of Bede's calculations in 1040 and synchronized the Easter calendar, so important for Christians, with the actual mathematical data. In his work *De mensura astrolabii* ("On Measuring with the Astrolabe"),

---

[35] See Borst, *Computus*.

[36] An excellent edition was published by Borst (ed.), *Der karolingische Reichskalender*; see also his sketch of the research history in Borst, *Die karolingische Kalenderreform*, 1–29.

[37] North, *History of Astronomy and Cosmology*, 205.

written around 1045, Hermann reorganized the Arabic lunar calendar of his Spanish sources into the Latin, Julian, solar calendar.[38]

With Hermann we have reached a period that was characterized by a lively process of cultural encounters between Muslims and Christians. Let me illustrate this exchange between Greek-Arabic science and Christian culture with Gerbert of Aurillac (c. 940–1003). The career of this scholar is representative of the clergy's high interest in scientific innovation in the tenth century.[39] As a novice in Barcelona, Gerbert had already been educated in the free arts; he learned Arabic, mathematics, arithmetic, and music, and was one of the first to bring that knowledge across the Alps. Soon his erudition became famous and impressed the pope in Rome. In 983 he was appointed abbot of the monastery in Bobbio and in 991 archbishop of Rheims (even if first without papal acknowledgment). While some people were hostile to him because of his negligible pedigree, it was very fortunate for his career that he was the teacher of Emperor Otto III. Pope Gregory V (996–999), Otto III's cousin, appointed him archbishop of Ravenna in 998. The Emperor elected him to succeed Gregory V as pope in 999. Gerbert took the name of Sylvester II, alluding to Pope Sylvester I (314–335), the advisor of Emperor Constantine I (324–337).

In his writings, Gerbert stresses how important it is to absorb Arabic science for the proliferation of Christianity. Due to his influence he succeeded in spreading astronomical knowledge in monastery schools and the large European centers of learning. Referring particularly to the astrolabe texts of Ripoll, he promoted the introduction of Arabic terminology and the translation of relevant texts into Latin. This policy made it possible for other Christian scholars—Fulbert of Chartres, Hermann of Reichenau, or Walcher of Malvern—to be studied intensively. "This was a time when Hindu-Arabic numerals were slowly finding favour among astronomers in Europe. The change was far from sudden."[40] Certainly, for Gerbert the science of the stars occupied the first position among the four classic arts, the so-called Quadrivium of arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy.[41]

In his work on the astrolabe Gerbert also addressed astrology. In the same vein as Isidore of Seville before him, the learned pope repudiated

[38] Borst, *Die karolingische Kalenderreform*, 329–334.
[39] See Lindgren, *Gerbert von Aurillac*.
[40] North, *History of Astronomy and Cosmology*, 206.
[41] Lindgren, *Gerbert von Aurillac*, 38–39.

the interpretation of birth charts as illicit superstition, but he clearly advocated "natural astrology" as an important element of natural science. Presumably, Gerbert had already used the astrolabe in 989 at the cathedral school of Rheims. It is not difficult to reconstruct the way in which the knowledge of using the astrolabe spread from there and other places—for instance the monastery of Reichenau—to the whole of Christian Europe in the eleventh century, and how this instrument soon belonged to the basic technical equipment of Christian astrologers. The astrolabe made observation of the sky much easier, because with this instrument it is sufficient to measure the angle of a single, well perceivable star, and calculate its position. The positions of all other fixed stars could then simply be read from the astrolabe. In this way it was easy to determine the ascendant, which is a crucial prerequisite for calculating horoscopes. In the beginning, however, its usefulness for calculating time and calendar was given priority.

The second half of the eleventh century saw an intensive occupation of Christian scholars with Arabic astronomy and astrology. With translation projects, and later also with their own research, Christians tried to catch up with the progressive knowledge of Muslims and Jews, and both upon the terrain of literature and the terrain of art and iconography a significant rise of astrological motifs can be observed.[42] The crusades had their share, too, in intensifying processes of cultural exchange,[43] with the result that from the twelfth century at the latest we have to talk of a pan-European tradition of knowledge and science. It was centers such as the School of Chartres that first adopted Muslim doctrines and combined them with Christian theology. The theologian Peter Abelard (c. 1100–1140) was affiliated with this school too. He became known for his scholastic dialectic, which he of course applied to astrology as well. He argued that astrology indeed was able to document and predict the *naturalia*, namely the natural causes of changes in agriculture or medicine, but not the *contingentia* that are dependent on chance and the will of God. This interpretation—an elaboration of Isidore's distinction—was shared by Hugo of St. Victor (died 1141) who lectured at the Victorine monastery school in Paris. It determined the official church's position for centuries.

---

[42] See Blume, *Regenten des Himmels*, 18–63.
[43] Mayer (ed.), *Kreuzfahrerstaaten als multikulturelle Gesellschaft*.

A contemporary of Peter Abelard and Hugo of St. Victor was the famous scholar Adelard of Bath who worked at the court of King Henry I of England. Although many details of his biography are still unknown, there can be no doubt that Adelard played a central role in the transmission of Arabic science and the new flourishing of astronomy and astrology in Christianity.[44] He did not restrict his studies to pure reception but carried out his own research in which he systematically interpreted the information he had collected on his travels to Sicily, Syria, and presumably also to Spain. He translated the tables of al-Khwārismī and speculated, referring back to Abū Ma'shar, on the rise and demise of world empires and religions. He explained the difference between the Christians on the one hand, and Jews and Muslims on the other, by the fact that Christians were under the influence of sun and Jupiter, while Muslims and Jews were influenced by Saturn, Mars, and Venus. One reason for this was that Muslims sanctified Friday (Venus), the Jews Saturday (Saturn), and the Christians Sunday (sun). Such speculations were picked up by other thinkers. Joachim of Fiore (died 1202), for instance, predicted in his *Evangelium aeternum* for the year 1260 the dawning of a new age of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of an entirely spiritualized church. The Lateran Council of 1215 was constrained to declare such positions, which spread rapidly, as heretical.

By the end of the twelfth century, many important works of antiquity and their Arabic successors were available in Latin translation. John of Seville, Gerard of Cremona, Plato of Tivoli, Robert of Chester, Hermann of Dalmatia, and others had contributed to a thorough renewal of the sciences in European centers of learning, a renewal for which Charles Homer Haskins coined the expression "Renaissance of the twelfth century." Although nearly all translators were clerics, the cathedral schools, particularly in France, were swamped by aspirants, and famous teachers drew students from all over Europe. The result was a dissemination of these fields of knowledge beyond the clerical domain into circles of court and nobility.

Hence, what can be termed the European Renaissance had been already prepared in this period. Absorbing ancient philosophy and

---

[44] See already Haskins, *Studies in the History of Medieval Science*, 20–42; for more recent research see Burnett (ed.), *Adelard of Bath*, with Burnett's own chapter on "Adelard, Ergaphalau and the Science of the Stars"; Cochrane, *Adelard of Bath*.

science through the Muslim transmission changed the attitude of the observing human being vis-à-vis the cosmos. Nature as a this-worldly object became the center of interest, which at the same time led to nature's desacralization and subjugation to human control. Astrology thus played a significant role in the formation of the modern natural sciences.[45]

At this point I conclude my overview. Many other examples could have been mentioned, for instance the scientific activities of the Staufer Emperor Frederick II and the scholar Michael Scot who worked at his court.[46] But the overall conclusion would be the same: despite theological critique, astrology remained an accepted science in the Middle Ages that was practiced and shared beyond religious borders. We can also conclude that the image of the Middle Ages as an era of brute violence and a lack of 'science' and 'enlightenment' is a misleading oversimplification. The example of astrology shows that in the ninth century a peaceful transfer of knowledge between Muslims, Christians, and Jews had already begun; paradigms of reason and rationality, as well as philosophical issues, belonged to the shared heritage of these religious communities, notwithstanding the difference in interpretation due to religious rhetoric and interest.

If this is true, we will have to challenge accepted periodizations of European history. The characterization of the Renaissance as the birth period of enlightened modernity is today more doubtful than ever. On closer investigation, many of the 'revolutions' between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries turn out to be a continuation of medieval thought. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the early modern period saw an enormous cultural change in the area of technical development. One change that is of particular relevance for us here is what Elizabeth L. Eisenstein called "the printing revolution in early modern Europe." Indeed, more than twenty-five years after the publication of Eisenstein's work, it is still true that the

> transformation of occult and esoteric scribal lore after the advent of printing […] needs more study. Some arcane writings in Greek, Hebrew or Syriac, for example, became less mysterious. Others became more so. Thus hieroglyphs were set in type more than three centuries before their

---

[45] See von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie*, 199–206, 213–226, 525–274.
[46] See von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie*, 196–199; on Michael Scot's *Liber introductorius* see also Blume, *Regenten des Himmels*, 52–63; Campion, *History of Western Astrology*, vol. II, 54–56.

decipherment. These sacred carved letters were loaded with significant meaning by readers who could not read them.[47]

In a dialectic between hiding and revealing primordial knowledge, the role of the printing press should not be underestimated. Being a major tool in inter-confessional polemics of the Reformation, the dissemination of esoteric treatises—even more widely than new scientific treatises—was reinforced by printing; it fostered a new trend to 'arcanization.' Thus, "one should not think only about new forms of enlightenment when considering the effects of printing on scholarship. New forms of mystification were encouraged as well."[48]

This is an apt reminder of the fact that the discursive changes that took place between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries should be analyzed in their respective scientific, social, political, religious, and cultural contexts.

---

[47] Eisenstein, *Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 77.
[48] *Ibid.*, 77–78.

Part Three

Interferences

INTRODUCTION

So far, I have developed an analytical framework for the integration of the academic study of esotericism in a broader concept of European history of religion, and subsequently traced the 'shared passions' of scholars belonging to various religious commitments and communities. These scholars are examples of interreligious transfers and polemical constructions of identity. In the following three chapters, I will change the perspective and look at the transfers and interconnections between various societal systems in Western culture. As throughout this book, my analysis is based on the idea of a plurality of forms of knowledge that interact in critical distinction, and on the idea that these cultural systems communicate on the same fields of discourse. Burkhard Gladigow's use of the term *interference* adds an interesting dimension to our analysis here. Stemming from natural science—where it does not have the negative connotation of intervention or meddling[1]—the term refers to the fact that *one and the same* physical (or, metaphorically, cultural) energy can be mediated through various 'lenses' or 'prisms' and becomes visible in different cultural systems. In other words: the interferential patterns that we see in, e.g., religion and science are part of a shared field of discourse.[2]

We will again encounter polemical differentiations and disjunctive strategies, but in this case between religion and science, religion and art, or rationalism and Hermeticism. These fields serve as examples of important 'locations of knowledge' and the formation of European identities. And they reveal rhetorical devices that underlie the genealogy of Western narratives of what it is to be modern. Charles Zika called this rhetoric *exorcism*:

> The religious, the violent, the evil, the irrational, the demonic—these are some of the contemporary demons, alive and well at the turn of the twenty-first century, which we consistently endeavour to exorcise

---

[1] One could even argue that the negative connotations are actually reflecting cultural processes, because often the communication between those cultural systems *is* a critical intervention.

[2] On interferential patterns see Tenbruck, "Religion im Maelstrom der Reflexion," and Gladigow, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte," 29.

from the common sense of our experience. And one of the fundamental techniques we employ is to ensure their distance. We exorcise them to the geographical, cultural and chronological margins—to the underdeveloped, the poor, the disadvantaged, the colonized; to the primitive, the savage, the uncivilised; to the medieval imaginary of magic and mysticism and dark age barbarism. […] From the cusp of the twenty-first century, it is difficult to understand the survival of a common sense belief in modernity as rational and enlightened, beyond ideology and unencumbered by religious zeal, graced by decorum and civilised behaviour. The most terrible of wars, a frightening expansion of destructive technologies, genocide and ethnic cleansing, all do little to dissuade us; and geared up to fight the long war on terrorism, our political leaders draw on the same cultural arsenal of 'civilisation' for its legitimation.[3]

Historiography has sometimes served as a tool for exorcism. The following three chapters intend to demonstrate that the narratives that Europeans construct about themselves are simplifications that are worthy of reassessment.

---

[3] Zika, *Exorcising Our Demons*, 4. See also Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.

SCIENTIFIC ENCOUNTERS

> And I, in turn, will do no more than this: of course,
> I shall take as my starting-point whatever unities
> are already given (such as psycho-pathology, medi-
> cine, or political economy); but I shall not place
> myself inside these dubious unities in order to study
> their internal configuration or their secret contra-
> dictions. I shall make use of them just long enough
> to ask myself what unities they form; by what right
> they can claim a field that specifies them in space
> and a continuity that individualizes them in time;
> according to what laws they are formed; against the
> background of which discursive events they stand
> out; and whether they are not, in their accepted
> and quasi-institutional individuality, ultimately
> the surface effect of more firmly grounded unities.
> I shall accept the groupings that history suggests
> only to subject them at once to interrogation; to
> break them up and then to see whether they can be
> legitimately reformed; or whether other groupings
> should be made; to replace them in a more gen-
> eral space which, while dissipating their apparent
> familiarity, makes it possible to construct a theory
> of them.
>
> Once these immediate forms of continuity are
> suspended, an entire field is set free.
>
> Michel Foucault

"Occult Sciences": The Science-Religion Divide Revisited

The history of the term "natural science" is astonishingly short. It is a result of a process of exclusion that set in with the so-called 'scientific revolution' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and reached its peak in the aftermath of the Enlightenment. Whereas earlier research into processes of nature had been carried out under the generic term "philosophy of nature"—this was even the term used in Isaac Newton's

celebrated *Mathematical Principles* (1687)[1]—the nineteenth century polemically differentiated between "exact science of nature" and "philosophy of nature," the latter being linked to metaphysics and speculative thinking.[2] The concomitant *model of competition* was developed in a time when Darwinism and Christian theology first discovered each other as opponent. This "second affront" (Freud) to human self-understanding—between the first affront by Copernicus and the third one by psychology and its theory of the unconscious[3]—led John W. Draper and Andrew Dickson White at the end of the nineteenth century to the conclusion that since Galileo Galilei at the latest, a "war" had been going on between science and religion.[4] Subsequently, twentieth-century scholars presented religion and science as two mutually exclusive cultural systems.[5] Friedrich H. Tenbruck, in agreement with others, spoke of a "cognitive rivalry of systems" that ultimately led to a decline of religious claims to attain any reliable knowledge of the world.[6]

The model of competition assumes that pre-modern—particularly medieval—culture had been characterized by a unity of Christian theology and research into nature, a unity that modernity broke into pieces. Although it might be feasible to juxtapose religion as the Other of science in the case of modernity, the model of competition does not reflect the very polemical construction of this Other. In addition, even for modernity it remains doubtful if this artificial dichotomy of religion versus science does justice to the self-understanding of contemporary scientists on the one hand, and religious specialists on the other.[7] But

---

[1] The full title is *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica*.

[2] Recent historiographical scholarship has critically reassessed such a dichotomy. For an overview, see Clark et al. (eds.), *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe*. As to the fruitful interaction between cultural sciences (*Kulturwissenschaft*) and the natural sciences in the nineteenth century—rather than their mutual polemical exclusion—see Reill, *Vitalizing Nature*.

[3] Freud did not notice that the psychological construction of the unconscious was in fact the fourth "affront"; before Darwin, *geology* marked another affront with its discovery of the fact that the earth is millions of years old.

[4] Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*; White, *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology*.

[5] See Gladigow, "Natural Science," 1303.

[6] Tenbruck, "Wissenschaft und Religion," 222–224; see also Tenbruck, "Religion im Maelstrom der Reflexion," 60, about the "war between science and religion" that according to Tenbruck characterized the nineteenth century.

[7] Cf. Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 25; Gladigow, "'Wir gläubigen Physiker'"; Jammer, *Einstein and Religion*; Löhr, "Religionswissenschaftliche Theorien und Theorieelemente." A good example is Sir John Polkinghorne (b. 1930), distinguished scholar of particle physics, president of Queens' College, Cambridge University, Templeton

even if we accept this model of competition for post-Enlightenment Europe, the question remains how the relation between science and religion can be conceptualized for earlier periods.

As a response to the model of competition scholars even postulated the opposite: religion and natural science form an inherent *harmony*. The sociologist Robert Merton claimed in 1938 that it was English Protestantism that pushed forward the scientific revolution.[8] And indeed, Puritan ideas were open to the development of independent scientific research, and the Calvinist and Protestant *ethos* of inner-worldly redemption enabled the participation of English Puritans in the emerging scientific disciplines.[9] Within the Royal Society, founded in 1660, seven of the ten members were Puritans, many of them even clerics; what is more, Puritan schools adopted scientific programs in their curricula.

The 'Merton thesis' was hotly debated in the twentieth century.[10] Today, most scholars adopt a moderate position which acknowledges the influence of Protestant theologians in the formation of modern science but does not regard this influence as the essential impetus. "In short, neither the *conflict* thesis nor the *harmony* thesis concerning science and religion fits all the evidence. A more accurate account will have to reflect the *diversity* of interactions during this crucial century."[11] It should also be noted that the harmony thesis, too, does not pay enough attention to the inherent polemic between religious and scientific claims of knowledge.

Let me mention a third interpretational model—the *model of compensation*. This model is based on Max Weber's famous theory of disenchantment: the cultural process of disenchantment and rationalization of the modern world, along with the disbanding of religious systems of meaning, causes deficits. The vacuum that this rationalization creates can be filled by other societal systems, particularly by art and natural science. There can be no doubt that the twentieth century witnessed

---

laureate (2002), and Anglican priest; Polkinghorne has published numerous books on the 'dialogical' relation between science and religion. See also the case of Francis S. Collins whom I introduced in chapter 5.

   [8] Merton, *Science, Technology and Society.*
   [9] See Barber, *Science and Social Order*, 58.
   [10] See Bernard (ed.), *Puritanism and the Rise of Modern Science.*
   [11] Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 27.

the compensating functions of art[12] and natural science in a rationalized world:[13] in 1875, the young Sigmund Freud wrote in a letter to Silberstein that Darwin and Haeckel are "our most modern saints"; Franz Marc claimed that the artist has the task of creating symbols "that belong on the altars of a future spiritual religion";[14] or we may recall Oswald Spengler who called the engineer the "knowledgeable priest of the machine."[15] However, the model of compensation, too, operates on the basis of a dichotomizing assumption. Weber and his academic contemporaries were convinced that people cannot cling to religious *and* scientific worldviews at the same time. Hence, this model prolongs a disjunction of nineteenth-century self-understanding, instead of problematizing it. It also seems grounded in a flawed postulate which is basically a form of the secularization hypothesis, positing the general senescence and failure of religious ideation as a mode of understanding.

That is why I suggest a fourth model, which I introduced earlier as the *model of interference,* and which allows us to look at the junctures and mutual dependencies between cultural systems such as science and religion. Both science and religion are closely related to knowledge. Let us assume for a moment—and only for the sake of my present argument—that 'science' is a system of interpretation that addresses the natural world, and 'religion' is a hermeneutical strategy to engage metaphysical or transcendent issues. Then it is particularly interesting to scrutinize the role of those disciplines that have fallen prey to strategies of exclusion in post-Enlightenment discourse. Many of these disciplines are today studied under the rubric of 'esotericism': astrology, alchemy, and kabbalah are examples of traditions of knowledge that had been inseparably bound to the 'scientific' systems of knowledge, while at the same time being integral parts of 'religious' systems.

---

[12] On art, Weber notes: "Art now constitutes itself as a cosmos of ever more consciously grasped, free-standing autonomous values (*Eigenwerte*). It takes over the function of an innerworldly *redemption* (no matter how this is conceived) in the face of the everyday and above all the increasing pressure of theoretical and practical rationalism. But in making this claim it comes into direct competition with redemptory religion" (Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 555 ["Zwischenbetrachtung"]; trans. quoted from Whimster [ed.], *The Essential Weber*, 231).

[13] See the overview provided in Dassen, *De onttovering van de wereld*, 234–247, who correctly refers to the importance of nationalism as another compensating factor for the loss of meaning in the world.

[14] Quoted from Dassen's Dutch translation (*De onttovering van de wereld*, 235).

[15] Spengler, *Untergang des Abendlandes*, 1191.

All three disciplines represent *interfaces of cultures of knowledge* from the Middle Ages through the Enlightenment. Metaphorically speaking, they provide a good projection screen for observing interferential patterns.

How kabbalah comes into play here should be clear from my discussion in chapter five above. With regard to *astrology*, also dealt with above, let me add some remarks concerning astrology's 'occult' qualities because this is relevant for the present discussion. While astronomy and astrology had both been part of the canon of legitimate bodies of knowledge (*artes liberales*) for centuries, epistemological and disciplinary reconfigurations associated with the Enlightenment movement encouraged a dismissive attitude that distinguished legitimate from illegitimate knowledge in ways different than they had previously been distinguished, framing the debate polemically in terms of 'science' vs. 'pseudo-science' and 'rationality' vs. 'superstition.' These terms, which became instruments of analysis in subsequent academic disciplines, reflect the socio-professional identities and conceptual perspectives of 'modern' people who view themselves as progressive, rational, and enlightened, against which the 'Other' was constructed as a necessary counterpart.

The discourses of inclusion and exclusion that accompany processes of modern identity formation have thus affected the way scholars have described the status of astrology in Western cultural history. Besides labels such as 'pseudo-science' or 'superstition,' astrology has often been called an 'occult science.' This term originated in the sixteenth century,[16] along with notions of *occulta philosophia*. 'Occult,' in this context, refers to hidden or secret powers that inform a substantial part of the disciplines lumped together under the rubric 'occult sciences'—notably astrology, alchemy, and (natural) magic.[17] Twentieth-century scholars turned this rubric from an emic into an etic category, indicating a 'unity' of these various disciplines. While Keith Thomas believed that astrology formed the basis of the occult sciences—and that consequently the 'decline' of astrology would inevitably lead to the decline of magic and alchemy—Brian Vickers encouraged this tendency by arguing that all 'occult sciences' share a common "mentality"

---

[16] Secret, "Du 'De Occulta Philosophia' à l'occultisme du XIXème siècle."
[17] Wayne Shumaker also adds witchcraft to this mélange; see his *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance*.

that is clearly distinguished from a rational 'scientific' mentality.[18] For Vickers, science as "open" and "progressive" is distinguished from the occult as "closed" and "ignorant of criticism."[19]

Such a distinction is problematic for several reasons. First, although these disciplines overlap in varied and complex ways, all of them have distinct histories with quite different and complex, multiply branching and mutually interacting trajectories. "Even during the heyday of Renaissance neoplatonism, astrology and alchemy lived independent lives, despite the vast inkwells devoted to the rhetorical embellishment of occult philosophy."[20] Second, as I tried to show in chapter six, there are other disciplines and practices that had direct and longstanding links to astrology, notably mathematics, philosophy of nature, ethics, medicine, historiography, theology, and politics. Configuring astrology with the other 'occult sciences' tends strongly to distort our understanding of its relationship with these other (and to many scholars more legitimate) areas of knowledge. Third, the analytical notion of 'hidden powers' continues to remain important within the 'legitimate sciences' from the 'scientific revolution' to the present. Wouter J. Hanegraaff concludes:

> [I]n a context that insisted on science as a public and demonstrable rather than secret and mysterious knowledge, the very notion of "science" came to be seen as incompatible *ex principio* with anything called "occult". As a result, any usage of the term "occult science(s)" henceforth implied a conscious and intentional polemic against mainstream or establishment science. Such polemics are typical of occultism in all its forms.[21]

Hence, relating astrology closely to magic or other 'occult sciences' is a quite modern configuration, reflecting a process of identity formation through strategies of distancing. But in premodern contexts astronomy and astrology have often been utilized for explaining historical processes, in both political and religious frameworks, as the material presented in chapter six reveals. Consequently, some scholars

---

[18] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 631–632; Vickers (ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, 286.
[19] Vickers, "On the Function of Analogy in the Occult," 39, referring to Ch. Schmitt.
[20] Newman & Grafton, "Introduction," 26; see the whole passage pp. 18–27.
[21] Hanegraaff, "Occult/Occultism," 887. See also the important analysis by Hutchison, "What Happened to Occult Qualities in the Scientific Revolution?"

have recently pointed out that astrology is more accurately configured with mathematics, natural philosophy, and medicine.[22]

But what about *alchemy* as a discipline that is located on the interface of cultures of knowledge? In general, we can observe a pattern of development similar to astrology. It was not until the eighteenth century that people started to distinguish between the "old" alchemy and the "new" chemistry. The domain of alchemy was then almost entirely restricted to gold making or transmutational alchemy (*alchemia transmutatoria* or "chrysopoeia" in technical parlance). "Indeed, for most writers and thinkers of the eighteenth century, alchemy was synonymous with gold making and fraud. […] These Enlightenment writers drew heavily on metaphors of light and darkness to describe the dawning of chemistry out of the misty obscurity of the medieval delusion of alchemy."[23] This *disjunctive strategy* has led to a problematic historiographical framework of analysis that ultimately distorted the many links between empirical research into nature and metaphysical interpretations that *both* had been characteristics of so-called "alchemy" before it was 'distanced away' by the Enlightenment movement. From a historiographical point of view, things got even worse due to the popularity of psychological interpretations of "transformational alchemy," with C.G. Jung being the main source of inspiration here. The biased understanding of "alchemy" was positively charged by these interpreters as a metaphor of spiritual development—the disjunction turned into a positive earmark.[24]

In order to overcome the dichotomy between religious or pseudo-scientific alchemy on the one hand, and empiric-scientific chemistry on the other, Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman (re-) introduced the term "chymistry" to refer to a scholarly engagement of the natural world that was not yet 'dichotomized' by post-Enlightenment discourse.[25] If we follow this reasonable advice, we will recognize a whole field of chymistry with many different subfields. Besides scholars who were entirely focused on processes within the natural world (*natura naturata*), there were others who saw the natural world as a

---

[22] Rutkin, "Astrology, Natural Philosophy and the History of Science"; Azzolini, "Reading Health in the Stars."

[23] Principe & Newman, "Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy," 386.

[24] On these developments and a critique of Jungian psychologization, see Principe & Newman, "Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy,"

[25] Newman & Principe, "Alchemy vs. Chemistry."

revelation of and interaction with transcendent levels of reality and subsequently searched for the power behind these processes (*natura naturans*). Leading alchemists of the early modern period applied both scientific-empirical strategies and metaphysical ones,[26] such as communicating with angels and superior beings or directly addressing the divine. Notable examples are John Dee and Robert Boyle.[27]

In what follows, I want to exemplify the complex relationship between science and religion, more particularly between esotericism and experimental science, with one of the leading figures in Renaissance natural philosophy. John Dee (1527–1608/9) served Queen Elizabeth I as adviser and astrologer and wrote works on many subjects, including mathematics, alchemy, and astronomy. Given his wide reputation as a natural philosopher, for many historians it was somewhat surprising that Dee in his later career began to communicate with angels, using a crystal ball and a variety of assistants with visionary abilities. Recent scholarship makes clear, however, that Dee's angel conversations—or, as he himself calls them, the "colloquium of angels"—were a consequence and an element of his scientific quest for the ultimate truth. Focusing on this chapter of early modern science I will address the experimental dimension of sixteenth-century esotericism, the relationship between Dee's empiricism, visionary interests, and philosophy of nature, and the apocalyptic cultural framework that structured his experiments.

John Dee: A Scholar Gone Mad?

Depending on the perspective, John Dee has been described as natural philosopher, scientist, mathematician, magician, astrologer, alchemist, kabbalist, or eschatological theologian. Scholars have been interested in him because his life and works lend themselves to such different interpretations that he may well serve as an example of quite diverse

---

[26] William R. Newman has recently demonstrated that it was not the newly established dominance of physics and mathematics that led to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century but the experiments of early modern "chymists" who elaborated medieval corpuscular theory; see Newman, *Atoms and Alchemy* (see particularly pp. 1–20 on "The Problematic Position of Alchemy in the Scientific Revolution").

[27] On Boyle, see Newman & Principe, *Alchemy Tried in the Fire*; Principe, *Aspiring Adept*. It may be noted that this strategy was not abandoned after early modernity. Emanuel Swedenborg is an Enlightenment-era example, and John C. Lilly was still at it in the late twentieth century.

currents in sixteenth-century Europe.[28] Frances Yates, after she had tackled Giordano Bruno as quintessential character for the Hermetic element of rational science, turned her attention to John Dee and saw in his work a clear forerunner of the Rosicrucian movement. This was a step forward insofar as earlier scholars—E.G.R. Taylor and Frances R. Johnson in particular—had more or less ignored Dee's esoteric interests and focused on his contributions to mathematics and navigation. The Warburg School, then, represented by I.R.F. Calder, Frances Yates, and Peter French, regarded Dee as a typical Hermetic magus. This interpretation, in turn, led to a harsh critique by later historians. Nicholas H. Clulee persuasively argued that the "myth of coherence" necessarily leads to a one-sided and biased perception of Dee's work. Instead, one should acknowledge Dee's complexity and must contextualize each of his interests in the social, religious, and scientific worlds of the late sixteenth century.[29]

So, the ground was well prepared for revisiting John Dee's 'occult' interests. In 1999, Deborah E. Harkness stepped forth with a fresh approach to Dee's conversations with angels, based on a thorough reading of previously unedited material. Instead of discussing Dee's 'occult endeavors' as a break with his scientific interests, she presents them as a kind of continuation of science with different means. By so doing, we can see better the complexities of Renaissance science on the one hand, and the interferences between religion and science on the other. I will return to this interpretation. But first, I want to give a brief overview of Dee's career and his angel experiments.[30]

John Dee was a quick learner. At age fifteen, he enrolled at St. John's College, Cambridge, and followed the traditional education—Aristotelian logic, philosophy of nature, humanistic dialectic, Greek, and

---

[28] In 1975, Paolo Rossi wrote: "Faced with Feyerabend's *mythical Galileo* or the *legendary Bacon* of Popper and his followers, it is time that historians of science assert the need for a careful and detailed examination of the actual historical process. They must refuse to be reduced to the role of gatherers of exemplary cases to be used by philosophers of science as evidence for their theoretical constructs" (Rossi, "Hermeticism, Rationality and the Scientific Revolution," 248 [italics original]).

[29] This nuanced and balanced interpretation of John Dee's natural philosophy can be found in Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*; on the angel conversations and the question of Dee's occultism see also Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*; Szőnyi, *John Dee's Occultism*; and particularly Håkansson, *Seeing the Word*. The most recent state of the art in Dee studies is represented in Clucas (ed.), *John Dee*.

[30] For details of Dee's life, see French, *John Dee*; Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*, esp. pp. 19–29.

mathematics. Subsequently, he got more and more interested in magic and astrology, which he tried to combine with his mathematical and scientific inclinations. With the Masters Degree of Trinity College in hand, from 1548 on Dee traveled widely through Europe, visited Antwerp, Brussels, Paris, and Leuven, where he polished his mathematical and astrological skills. Therefore, the often-sketched picture of an eccentric scientist or peculiar magus who spent his days in solitude is misleading. Instead, in recent studies "Dee is beginning to be seen as a contemplative natural philosopher and a vocal participant in the intellectual and cultural life of late-sixteenth-century Europe."[31]

Throughout his life, Dee communicated extensively with other scientists, and it was in the field of navigation that he first received a good reputation. From 1562 through 1564 he lived in the Netherlands and wrote his major esoteric work, entitled *Monas Hieroglyphica, mathematice, magice, cabbalistice et onagogice, explicata* (published in 1564). This book is not easy to access. It is composed around the interpretation of a certain 'hieroglyphic monad' that Dee had invented,[32] symbolizing the unity of the created world and the entire knowledge of it, in which the scholar is to be initiated. The *Monas Hieroglyphica* shows influences of alchemy, *magia naturalis*, and kabbalistic teachings that were increasingly received by Dee. Contrasting with his earlier work, the *Propaedeumata aphoristica* (1558), he now wanted to decode the hidden language of the Book of Nature: the "science of the alphabet contains great mysteries since He, who is the only Author of all mysteries, has compared Himself to the first and last letter" and inscribed the book of nature with his finger.[33] Again, we come across the importance of language for the process of decoding the Book of Nature, which I discussed in chapter five. For Dee, too, the grammar of the *Ursprache* was the key for understanding the grammar of divinity and the cosmos.

Dee's private library was one of the largest libraries in Europe, and it is noteworthy that it housed the largest collection of Hebrew lan-

---

[31] Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 9; she is referring to Sherman, *John Dee*.

[32] A recent attempt to solve the riddle of this symbolism is Cavallaro, "The Alchemical Significance of John Dee's Monas Hieroglyphica"; cf. Szőnyi, "Ficino's Talismanic Magic and John Dee's Hieroglyphic Monad." Dee made use of alchemical symbols and a certain hieroglyphic 'hype' that was common in the sixteenth century; see Dieckmann, *Hieroglyphics*.

[33] *Monas Hieroglyphica*, ed./trans. Josten, 125.

guage materials in England during the early modern period, even taking into account the famous Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Despite this enormous collection, however, Dee's expertise in Hebrew "certainly never eclipsed that of Reuchlin or Trithemius; his interest in Hebrew was not that of a Hebraic scholar but a cabalist."[34]

In 1570 Dee published his *Mathematicall Praeface to the Elements of Geometry of Euclid of Megara*, a book that fostered his fame as mathematician. At the same time, it shows that for Dee mathematics was a kind of link between the divine world and the created world, reminiscent of the second, "celestial world" of Agrippa of Nettesheim.[35] In 1583 Dee traveled to Prague, where the emperor Rudolf II gathered a circle of distinguished experts on the 'Hermetic' arts, namely magical, astrological, kabbalistic, and alchemical studies.[36] There he presented to the emperor alchemical experiments and his 'magic mirror,' in fact a crystal or stone he used for his angel communications. At the instigation of the papal nuncio Dee had to leave Rudolf's court and was soon hired by Queen Elizabeth I, for whom he astrologically calculated the best date for her coronation. In 1595 the queen appointed him prefect of Manchester College, where he stayed until Elizabeth's death in 1608. Since King James did not share the queen's sympathy for Dee, he left the court and stayed at his house at Mortlake. He died in due time, aged 81.

When John Dee in 1583 explained to the emperor Rudolf II his way to communicate with the angelic world and discussed it with colleagues,[37] he had experimented with this technique for two years already. The conversations with angels took place between 1581 and 1586 and again in 1607. Dee wrote a kind of diary about his experiences. Although

---

[34] Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 86. Dee's reception of major kabbalistic doctrines is beyond doubt. See de Léon-Jones, "John Dee and the Kabbalah," 144.

[35] Knoespel, "The Narrative Matter of Mathematics"; cf. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 167. Clulee refutes Yates' reading of Dee's mathematics as proof of a 'Hermetic' or 'Rosicrucian' undercurrent; see Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*, and especially *idem*, "Dee's Natural Philosophy Revisited," 25–31. On Agrippa's philosophy and magic, see particularly Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels*.

[36] See Evans, *Rudolf II and His World*, particularly pp. 196–242; Marshall, *The Magic Circle of Rudolf II*, particularly pp. 110–124.

[37] For instance, Dee talked to Girolamo Cardano—who also had a collection of showstones—about the best crystals to be used for these experiments; see below. On the reception of Dee's experiments in seventeenth-century natural philosophy and chymistry (Meric Casaubon, Elias Ashmole, George Starkey, Robert Boyle) see Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 190–201.

not intended for publication, a large part of these documents became known as *Libri mysteriorum*, the "Mystical Books" that laid the foundation for Dee's dubious fame as Renaissance magus.[38] The angel conversations address issues of the natural world, the practice of natural philosophy, the meaning of history and the apocalypse, and also personal matters. Since they were conveyed to audiences from London to Prague, they took on new meanings and connotations between these different cultural, religious, political, and intellectual settings. Therefore, scrutinizing the conversations sheds new light on the development of Dee's personal and academic fields of interest.

Two technical requirements distinguish Dee's experiments from other, more common, attempts to communicate with angels. First, a so-called *showstone* was necessary that focused the angelic 'energy' and transformed the angels' utterances into a form that was understandable to human beings. Second, Dee never communicated alone but needed the assistance of a *scryer*, a kind of crystal-gazer known from older tradition[39] but used by Dee in a different way. The scryer—whether in an altered state of consciousness or not, is by no means clear—translated or dictated the angelic messages that were then written down by Dee. Although Dee worked with different scryers, most of the time he relied on the skills of a certain Edward Kelley, himself a quite ambivalent character.

If we consider the requirements of the conversations, their experiential character is apparent. These conversations do not fit a Hermetic or magical scenario, in which a magus invokes certain spirits or performs a more or less complicated ritual to accomplish his goal. The angels even told Dee, in an allusion to Moses' contest with Pharaoh's magicians in Ex. 7:9–13, that the "Arts of the Egyptian Magicians" seemed to be powerful but were not.[40] Apart from the use of prayer,[41] there is no clear record about any kind of ritual magic involved in these

---

[38] See Whitby, *John Dee's Actions with Spirits*, vol. II.

[39] Besterman, *Crystalgazing*.

[40] Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 122. Clulee, too, argues that Dee did not see the angel conversations as "a type of magic but as a variety of religious experience sanctioned by the scriptural records of others to whom God or his angels imparted special illumination" (Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*, 206).

[41] Interestingly enough, Dee's use of prayer also followed a 'scientific' interest (Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 116–130) and was prefigured by al-Kindī's doctrine of rays.

experiments.[42] The same observation can be made with regard to the showstone. Although Dee regarded the crystal as something special, he used it in a quite technical sense. It was no more and no less than a lens that focused and transmitted energy from one area of reality to another. It is *optics*, as much as Hermeticism, that lies behind Dee's application of the crystal. Making use of medieval Muslim science—in particular al-Kindī's doctrine of rays that had influenced Roger Bacon and others[43]—Dee was interested in the change of quality that these rays underwent while passing the crystal. Already in his *Propaedeumata aphoristica* (1558) Dee had tackled the issue of sensible and 'occult' rays and how they can be described.[44]

Consequently, it is fair to say that Dee's interest in and experiments with angels fully matched his background as a natural philosopher and sixteenth-century scientist. As Harkness puts it:

> Dee's interest in the nuances of angelology demonstrates his efforts to master what he believed was a new and promising universal science. The angelic "schoolmasters" who taught him natural philosophy were an answer to his intellectual crisis of confidence, and the culmination of his earlier efforts to create a universal science capable of deciphering the Book of Nature. The angels offered Dee a role model, and a wider perspective on the decaying world, and gave him the tools to address the difficulties associated with practicing natural philosophy at a time when the natural world seemed unreliable and mutable.[45]

Harkness emphasizes the apocalyptic impetus of Dee's natural philosophy. To better understand the interferences between religion, esotericism, and science in Reformation Europe, it is important to consider this episteme in more detail.

---

[42] In the heptarchial materials, there are various ritual implements (table, talismans, ring, lamen, etc.) that the angels exhort Dee to fabricate and employ—although in several cases it is not clear that he ever did.

[43] See Travaglia, *Magic, Causality and Intentionality*. Although many of Dee's works on optics are lost, early collection lists of his library provide ample evidence that Dee knew the respective research, from the Muslim scholars and Robert Grosseteste down to Roger Bacon; see Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*, 52–53; on Cornelius Agrippa's reception of the theory of rays see Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels*, 116–119.

[44] See Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 71–77.

[45] Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 116.

Natural Philosophy in an Apocalyptic Age

From the end of the fifteenth century until the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648 Europe was in a constant apocalyptic disposition, with repeated outbursts of millenarian anticipations due to regional conflicts—the 'hot spots' of Reformation—and natural events such as comets, earthquakes, etc. that were interpreted as 'heavenly signs' indicating the approaching end.[46] Quite understandably, this eschatological fervor had its impact on the natural philosophers and their fields of interest. As Robin Barnes pointed out, in early modern times apocalypticism and natural philosophy were linked because people believed that God's plan for the cosmos comprised not only nature itself but also the *end* of nature and history.[47] Thus, to decode the Book of Nature goes along with a detailed knowledge about its last chapters.

John Dee was fully integrated in this ongoing apocalyptic discourse. During the time he had begun to contact the angels around 1569 and expanded his experiences in the 1580s, a number of remarkable 'signs' occurred that did not fail to impress him: in 1572 a new star was observed in the constellation of Cassiopeia, which ignited apocalyptic expectations to an extraordinary degree;[48] in 1577 Dee spent three days at Windsor Castle advising the queen about the significance of a comet; at Easter in 1580 London was hit by an earthquake; and for the year 1583 a great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn was expected to take place in Aries. On all of these issues Dee collected relevant literature in his private library: nine works on the new star of 1572; a printed collection of letters exchanged by fellow Englishmen Gabriel Harvey and Edmund Spenser on the Easter earthquake of 1580; and his knowledge about the great conjunction could be easily obtained

---

[46] With regard to astrology and the 'hermeneutic of the end,' see von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie*, 234–252 (with literature), as well as chapter 6 above. Studies dealing with Renaissance apocalypticism are numerous; worthwhile for our present concern are Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men*; Bauckham (ed.), *Tudor Apocalypse*; Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain*; Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*; Popkin, *Millenarianism and Messianism*; Klaassen, *Living at the End of the Ages*. On Dee's apocalyptic thinking see Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 133–156.

[47] Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, 26–27.

[48] Susanna Åkerman ("Helisaeus Roeslin, the New Star, and the Last Judgement") argues that the expectations related to the new star influenced the early Rosicrucian movement. Even if a direct link between Dee and the Rosicrucian forerunners is difficult to establish, there definitely was a common interest and a certain inclination to this 'milieu' on the side of Dee.

from the works of Regiomontanus and others.[49] Hence, Dee felt the urgent need to find a new way of gaining insight into the universal science he had sought for already in his earlier works.

> Only angelic revelations could begin to satisfy Dee's hopes for attaining certain knowledge of the Book of Nature. Those conversations included detailed information about the unfolding of the *eschaton* or final days of the earth, including symbolic and verbal information about God's plan for the dissolution and restitution of the cosmos.[50]

The role Dee gave to the angels in the revelation of scientific and theological truth is by no means exceptional. For instance, the astrologer Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576) shared Dee's interest in their power. The two natural philosophers met in 1552 or early 1553 in Southwark, where they discussed issues of astrological medicine and the use of stones that were charged with angelic or heavenly power.[51] In Cardano's view, guardian angels had inspired the work of philosophers such as Socrates, Plotinus, and Synesius, and he ascribed his own scientific success—and also his escape from captivity—to the work of his personal guardian angel. That this blending of scientific and esoteric views was not restricted to the Christian milieu becomes clear when one looks at Jewish natural philosophers of the time, such as Abraham Yagel.[52]

Dee's theological and religious assumptions were not only shaped through his reading of esoteric literature. The notion of *restitutio* as a restoration of a universal science that coincides with a primordial unity of 'true religion' was also stimulated by his potential affiliation to the *Family of Love*, or *Familia Caritatis*. This mystical-spiritualistic community was founded in 1539 or 1540 by the visionary businessman Hans (Heinrich or Hendrik) Niclaes (1501–1581) from Münster after he had received a revelation from God calling him to found a new religion. During his time in the East Frisian town of Emden (1540–1560), Niclaes published extensively and made several trips to England. In addition, Familist doctrines entered England from the

---

[49] See Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 135.

[50] *Ibid.*, 136.

[51] Cardano had a collection of such stones; see Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 112–113. It is noteworthy that Dee informs us about this meeting in a marginal note of Ficino's *De vita* (see Grafton, *Cardano's Cosmos*, 111–113), even if Dee perhaps only read Ficino's book ten years after having met with Cardano.

[52] See Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*.

Low Countries at the accession of Mary I in 1553 and were supported by Dutch booksellers and scholars. It was here that his movement of spiritualistic inner reform attracted a lot of people.[53]

As the Familists were not encouraged to openly show their affiliation with the community, it is notoriously difficult to provide concrete evidence that Dee was a member of this movement. But there are many indications that he at least sympathized with Familist ideas. In Leuven and Paris Dee had close contact with people who were either members of the community or knew its doctrines very well: Ortelius, Mercator, Postel,[54] and Frisius.[55] Dee, who regarded himself neither a Catholic nor a Protestant, shared the Familists' utopian concept of a religion that restores the primordial unity of all religions and that will be established without any institutional framework after the end of history. The Familist teaching of shared property may even shed some light on one of "the most bizarre and infamous aspects of Dee's angelic doctrine […]: namely, the angels' instruction that Dee and Kelly should share all things between them, including their wives."[56]

Be this as it may, contextualizing Dee's academic, intellectual, and religious ideas elucidates the fact that his experimental science was fostered—or even brought into existence—by the apocalyptic episteme that had swept Europe in the sixteenth century. On a more general level, the *exemplum* of John Dee leads to the following conclusion: dichotomizing interpretations such as the model of competition and the model of compensation do not really help us here. In the self-understanding of early modern scholars religion and science were by no means contradictory beliefs; they became contradictory only in the eyes of modern observers. More fitting seems to be the model of interference: religion and science posited more or less the same questions, i.e. questions about the ultimate exploration of history and nature. The interferential patterns of an early modern apocalyptic discourse mani-

---

[53] See Moss, "Godded with God"; Hamilton, *Family of Love*; Marsh, *Family of Love in English Society*.

[54] The case of Guillaume Postel is particularly interesting, because in Postel's writing the notion of a *restitutio*, drawn from the kabbalistic (Lurianic) *tiqqūn*, functions as a prominent tool of eschatological interpretation. Also, his idea of *Concordia mundi* strongly resembles Dee's own vision of an original 'true' religion.

[55] On the connection of leading proponents of the Elizabethan period and Familism see van Dorsten, *Radical Arts*.

[56] Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 155–156; see also *ibid.*, 129. Familists were repeatedly accused for their polygamous behavior, which they themselves radically refuted.

fested both on religious and scientific projection screens. Theology and empirical research were different forms and cultures of knowledge, but they were interwoven in many ways. Transfers from one system into the other were the order of the day. Therefore, Tenbruck's apodictic notion—representative of major parts of scholarship in the 1970s—should be corrected: "Religious influences had no impact on the results of science. Religion was able to fertilize science, but not to change it; conversely, science continuously had a changing and limiting impact on religion."[57]

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are replete with scholars who applied kabbalistic, astrological, magical, or alchemical techniques to scientific and religious questions. Often, these scholars were united in concrete centers, such as Prague or Sulzbach.[58] On the basis of this evidence, Allison P. Coudert argues in her analysis of Knorr von Rosenroth's experimental science and the discursive transfers at the court of Sulzbach that in the seventeenth century "it was perfectly possible to subscribe to an esoteric, animistic philosophy while adhering to a genuine scientific methodology involving a skeptical, empirical, and mathematical approach to scientific knowledge."[59] In an interpretational framework of interferences, we can see how science and religion, as well as esotericism and rationalism, were in fact two sides of the same movement in early modern Europe.

---

[57] Tenbruck, "Wissenschaft und Religion," 219.

[58] We will see in chapter 9 that Moritz's court at Hesse-Kassel and the University of Marburg should be added to this list of intellectual centers where esoteric quests were easily combined with scientific thought.

[59] Coudert, "Seventeenth-Century Natural Philosophy and Esotericism," 29–30. For more examples, see von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, 85–98.

VISUAL SEDUCTIONS

The pagan divinities are a hardy breed.

Joscelyn Godwin

If we look at interferences between various cultural systems, with regard to esotericism the field of art is particularly important. One reason for this is the fact that major contributions to the early study of esotericism were written by scholars who were affiliated to the Warburg School of interpretation, notably Frances Yates. Another reason is the visual element of esoteric truth claims; as an alternative to syllogistic reasoning, claims of perfect knowledge have often involved 'visionary experiences' or mystical *Schau*. Conversely, the counter-polemic has likewise addressed the magical elements of the visionary, particularly when it comes to the 'Egyptian tradition' of magic, ritual, and 'idolatry.'[1]

The stylization of the Renaissance as a watershed for—or even birth-place of—Western esotericism is heavily influenced by the theories of art historians about the singular moment of the Renaissance and its function for the whole emergence of modern Europe. Therefore, it is important to briefly discuss these theories in combination with new approaches to the visual that may be more suitable to understand the complex function of the 'visual' in European cultural discourses between 1200 and 1800. By focusing on the polemical role of 'paganism,' this chapter explores the advantages of these new approaches for the study of Western esoteric discourse and the interferences between religion, philosophy, and art.

---

[1] This is why Wouter J. Hanegraaff focuses on the role of images in the emergence of what modern scholars call esotericism; see particularly Hanegraaff, "The Trouble with Images."

The Problem of 'Renaissance Paganism'

Academic research into the cultural changes that took place in Europe between 1400 and 1650 is notoriously fraught with terminological difficulties. With regard to the place of paganism and polytheism in Western culture, three questions in particular stand in the foreground. Most generally, is it adequate to isolate a period as "Renaissance" or "early modernity" and what is gained by doing so? Is the period called "Renaissance" characterized by a *continuity* of pagan and polytheistic elements or do we have to address the presence of pagan semantics as *reception, revival*, or even *invention*? And finally, in terms of concepts of 'religion,' is the presence of pagan deities in public spheres an expression of 'lived religion' or of a Renaissance 'dream' of a pagan past that is syncretistically built into Christian 'religion'?

   Although Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374) already spoke of the "dark ages" (*tenebrae*), caused by the invasion of Rome, or "the civilized world," by the "Nordic barbarians," his contrast does not signify a contrast between the pre-Christian and Christian worlds. The idea of *rinascita* (the Italian precursor of the Renaissance concept) was first expressed by Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), but it was still restricted to the context of art history. *Rinascita* did not become an historical concept in Italy but in France, there known as *Renaissance*, through Voltaire (1694–1778) and other Enlightenment writers. The cultural circumstances of the nineteenth century first produced the concept of the Renaissance as a prominent and unique cultural age of preparation for 'modernity.' This occurred between 1820 and 1830, before Jules Michelet's great study *La Renaissance* (2nd ed. 1857) and Jacob Burkhardt's classic *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) finally established its usage. We can reasonably say that these concepts reflect the notions of the nineteenth century, rather than the actual events in the fifteenth century as we interpret them today.[2] Therefore, many scholars discard the notion of 'Renaissance' as a useful category;[3] the

---

[2] A critical analysis of notions of 'Renaissance,' 'early modernity,' and others is provided by Herzog & Koselleck (eds.), *Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewußtsein* (see particularly Stierle, "Renaissance"); on Michelet, Burkhardt, and Huizinga see also Tollebeek, "'Renaissance' and 'Fossilization.'"

[3] To be sure, the critical assessment of ideological biases of 'Renaissance' is by no means new, as Ferguson's influential study on *The Renaissance in Historical Thought* (1948) shows. But for today, Grendler, "Italian Renaissance," 15–17, even speaks of

alternative term 'early modernity,' however, has also been criticized, because it carries a teleological ideology, thus constructing a straight development into 'modernity.'[4]

Art historians in general and the Warburg School in particular played a crucial role in the twentieth-century debate about Renaissance paganism and the question of continuity and reform. Starting with Aby Warburg's celebrated *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike* (1932),[5] scholars described the existence of pagan symbolism in Renaissance art and culture as a conscious reception of ancient paganism. Subsequently, Erwin Panofsky introduced a differentiation between "Renascences"—i.e. the "rebirths" of the gods in the eleventh and twelfth centuries—and the full-blown "Renaissance" of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. According to Panofsky, what we witness here is a "principle of disjunction" that led to a "perspective distancing" from ancient culture in the "real" Renaissance.[6] In Panofsky's words:

> The 'distance' created by the Renaissance deprived antiquity of its realness. The classical world ceased to be both a possession and a menace. It became instead the object of a passionate nostalgia […]. The Renaissance came to realize that Pan was dead […]. The classical past was looked upon, for the first time, as a totality cut off from the present; and, therefore, as an ideal to be longed for instead of a reality to be both utilized and feared. The Middle Ages had left antiquity unburied and alternately galvanized and exorcised its corpse. The Renaissance stood weeping at its grave and tried to resurrect its soul.[7]

The French Romanist Jean Seznec had already in 1940 argued somewhat differently, questioning the notion of a 'break with antiquity' in Renaissance culture. For Seznec, there was no 'rebirth of the gods'; rather, the significant change took place as late as the sixteenth century: "From being objects of love, the gods are transformed into a subject of study. […] Increasingly erudite and diminishingly alive, less

---

a "Renaissance bashing"; on the construction and meaning of 'Renaissance' see also Gombrich, "Renaissance." Even art historians are critical about the usefulness of the category 'Renaissance'; see for instance Warnke, *Geschichte der deutschen Kunst*.

[4] Grendler, "Italian Renaissance," 17–18; on the concept of 'early modernity' see also Dürr et al. (eds.), *Eigene und fremde Frühe Neuzeiten*.

[5] See Warburg, *Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*.

[6] Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, 84–85 and 108. On a critique of Panofsky's concepts, see Hoffmann, "Panofskys Renaissance."

[7] Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, 112–113.

and less felt but more and more intellectualized—such, from now on, it seems, is to be the inescapable evolution of mythology."[8]

Categories of 'paganism'—or, rather, 'Heathendom'—had been prominent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century descriptions of Renaissance culture, from Friedrich Schlegel to Jacob Burkhardt to Friedrich Nietzsche. They reflect the dissociation of Christianity and modern culture and can be seen as a projection of contemporary identities onto an imagined past.[9] Twentieth-century analyses are no exception to this pattern. Severe battles were fought between representatives of the Warburg School such as Edgar Wind, who interpreted Renaissance art as a Neoplatonic adaptation of ancient paganism, and critics such as Horst Bredekamp and Jörg Traeger who hurled fundamental attacks against this 'arcanization' of art history.[10] No matter how modern scholars decide to position themselves in this ongoing debate, it seems as if the very notions of 'Renaissance' and 'paganism' are a powerful tool for historical imagination.

For the problem that concerns us here, special mention has to be made of E.H. Gombrich. In a revised version of his famous essay "Icones Symbolicae: Philosophies of Symbolism and their Bearing on Art,"[11] Gombrich critically assesses the way art historians analyze the function of symbolic representation in Renaissance art. "One thing is clear," Gombrich says:

> We cannot tackle this kind of question at all unless we are ready to abandon the assumptions about the functions of the image we usually take for granted. We are used to making a clear distinction between two of these functions—that of representation and that of symbolization. […] As soon, however, as we leave the ground of rational analysis we find that these neat distinctions no longer hold. We know that in magical practice the image not only represents an enemy but may take his place […] We know that the 'fetish' not only 'symbolizes' fertility but 'has' it.

---

[8] Seznec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 321. The original French study was published in the *Studies of the Warburg Institute* in 1940 under the title "La Survivance des dieux antiques"; note the shift from "dieux antiques" to "pagan gods" in the translation.

[9] See Stausberg, "Renaissancen," 702–705.

[10] Wind's classic study is *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*; cf. Bredekamp, *Edgar Wind*, and *idem*, "Götterdämmerung des Neoplatonismus." Traeger, *Renaissance und Religion*, 23–24, even notes: "Together with the return of the ancient spirit the secret of its invisible efficacy was conjured up. In doing so, art history itself was developing into an arcane science that unraveled the pictures and at the same time deprived them of their own right."

[11] Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 123–195.

In short, our attitude towards the image is inextricably bound up with our whole idea about the universe.[12]

Both 'representation' and 'symbolization' can be interpreted as academic strategies of 'distancing' the presumed inherent power of images. Gombrich does not carry his analysis that far. But he raises the crucial point: "To the modern critic, in other words, the problem of personifications and indeed of all symbolism in art is an aesthetic rather than an ontological problem."[13] After tackling the Aristotelian and the Platonic doctrines of images, including the "non-discursive way" which is superior for accessing higher truths, he uses the opinion of Renaissance Platonists for his own interpretation of Renaissance art—the idea that images have an inherent power if they preserve the proportions and rules of the Divine Intellect.[14] Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, for instance, renders the impression that "all these influences unite in it as rays in a burning-glass. Whatever the actual 'programme' was that underlies this commission we know that it is the result of passionate efforts to re-evoke the 'true' image of the goddess of love such as it had been created by the ancients."[15]

In coming to terms with the inherent 'power' of images, Gombrich makes use of psychological—mainly Freudian[16]—terminology. "In the dark recesses of our mind we all believe in image magic."[17] He talks of the "dreamlike reactions to the image which always lurk on the fringe of our consciousness."[18] But is the category of "dream" an appropriate analytical tool? Fritz Saxl had already in 1939 introduced the interpretational model of "dream" but questioned its usefulness.[19] These cautionary remarks notwithstanding, many interpreters of Renaissance

---

[12] *Ibid.*, 124–125.

[13] *Ibid.*, 126.

[14] Of particular importance here is Ficino; see Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 172–175. On the influence of Ficino's Platonism on Renaissance art theory see van den Doel, "Ficino en het voorstellingsvermogen."

[15] Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 174–175.

[16] Patrick Hutton proposed that key roots of Freudianism are in turn derived from the mnemonistic image theories of the Romantic movement. See his "The Art of Memory Reconceived," esp. pp. 386–388.

[17] Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 179.

[18] *Ibid.*, 175.

[19] "Their creations are descriptions of dreams, but who would say that they are *only* dreams? From the end of antiquity down to the 15th century these pagan ideas had never entered the mind of the dreamer in such a way as to be represented in art" (Saxl, "Pagan Sacrifice," 363, italics original).

art in general and of the role of pagan divinities in public spheres in particular still cling to the image of dreamlike states as an element of their interpretation. A recent example of such an approach is a study by Joscelyn Godwin on *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance*. Godwin introduces his book as a study "about a state of mind and soul that arose in fifteenth-century Italy, spread through Europe along certain clearly-defined fault-lines, and persisted for about two hundred years, during which, although no one believed in the gods, many people acted as though they existed."[20] It is a book about "cultivators of pagan fantasies" who are "touched by the pagan spirit."[21] In a review of Godwin's intriguing book I argued that its underlying rationale is a religionist approach to religion that—artificially—differentiates between 'genuine religion,' i.e. religion that people 'believe in,' and some sort of mental state that is vaguely described as 'fantasy' or 'dream.'[22] Besides the fact that analytical categories such as 'dream' or 'fantasy' are too vague and too close to unverifiable concepts of 'inner states of mind,' the main problem of these interpretations lies in a discourse of *singularization* that rhetorically differentiates *the* religion from alternative religious options, ultimately leading to a discourse of true versus false religion.

In what follows, I want to approach the problem of Renaissance polytheism and paganism from a different point of view. Under the heading of *material* and *visual culture*, cultural studies have recently broken grounds for a new understanding of religious dynamics in public spheres. Instead of being eclipsed by religionist concepts of religion as belief, the visual, material, and public aspects of religion are moved to the center of scrutiny. I will first make reference to major contributions to the study of medieval and early modern visual culture. Subsequently, I will apply these to examples of Renaissance pagan discourse. My goal in doing so is very modest, and mainly methodological: I do not claim a new interpretational paradigm in order to establish something like a pagan religion in Renaissance Europe; instead, I want to explore visual and material aspects for the study of Western esotericism and reflect on the underlying discourses of inclusion and exclusion that so often have characterized the academic study of religion. By suspending the scholarly focus on belief and text, new aspects of

---

[20] Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 1. Neither Saxl nor Gombrich are mentioned in Godwin's book.
[21] Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 11 and 13.
[22] Von Stuckrad, "Review Godwin."

a pagan discourse will surface that reveal the complexity of polytheism and paganism in Europe between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries. This pagan discourse also sheds new light on the complexities of an esoteric discourse. The persistence of pagan divinities in Renaissance culture—from Plethon's exclusive polytheism to the scholarly revaluation of Hermes Trismegistus—is an expression of religious conflicts that ultimately fostered a pluralization of identities.

Image Acts and Visual Culture

Referring to the images of demons that were part of Romanesque church portals and capitals, Bernard of Clairvaux (1091–1153) once wrote to the abbot William: "The multitude of these diverse forms is so rich and strange that it seems more pleasant to read in the marble stones than in books, and to spend the day with admiration of these details rather than with reflection about God's commandment."[23] In a nutshell Bernard's comment summarizes a major characteristic of Western culture from late antiquity to the present—a severe critique of images and their inherent seductive power, on the one hand, and an obsessive fascination with images, on the other. The skeptical attitude vis-à-vis images has often bordered on the phobic and led to iconoclastic action, even more so because this attitude was linked to accusations of idolatry and heresy.[24]

Another important aspect of this discourse is the common Western opinion that language and writing are the main achievements of civilization and the necessary precondition of history.[25] As Peter J. Bräunlein notes:

> The use of images is assigned to the sphere of the a-logical, the irrational, and the magical; writing and reading to the sphere of the rational. The image confuses the senses, while language brings order to reality and separates what seems to be from what actually is. Hence, the frightening

---

[23] *Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti Theoderici abbatem* XII, in: *Patrologia latina* 182, 893–913; see Mertin, "Ikonoklasmus," and Bräunlein, "Bildakte," 202. Cf. the contextualization in Rudolph, *Things of Greater Importance*.

[24] See Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*; Bryer & Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm*; Engelbart, "Image/Iconoclasm."

[25] This attitude has been criticized by anthropologists in particular, because it is part of a colonial and "normalizing discourse" that intends "to fix the Other in a timeless present" (Pratt, "Scratches on the Face of the Country," 139). See also Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 1–35; von Stuckrad, *Schamanismus und Esoterik*, 110–112.

fantasy of a world entirely ruled by images is by no means a postmodern phenomenon.[26]

This ambivalent attitude toward the power of images has had tremendous impact on how historians of art and religion approached their objects. Whereas many art historians have held that an image must be 'read like a text,' as an 'illustration' of something that might also be expressed in words,[27] scholars of religion have focused mainly on philological approaches to religion, regarding images merely as phenomena that fostered the 'readability' of religion.[28] I think Charles Zika is right in pointing out that with the help of these scholarly models of interpretation Europe exorcised her demons to the margins of power, subsequently applying strategies to secure their distance.[29] Liza Bakewell even talks of an "academic iconoclasm": "images were kept to a minimum in scholarly publications, including ethnographies, because they were considered superficial and interfered with good (verbal) scholarship."[30]

At the same time, the ancient and medieval conceptualization of the power of images survived. Despite an ongoing critique (beginning with Xenophanes and Heraclitus) "the pattern 'presence of images, presence of gods' has remained an element of a *longue durée* in the history of religion, a pattern that all iconoclastic claims first had to overcome."[31] The oscillation between fascination with and exorcism of images has been even more fundamental because it was inseparably bound to the question of idolatry.[32]

---

[26] Bräunlein, "Bildakte," 202.

[27] See Gombrich's analyses, discussed above. For an anthropological approach, see Kohl, *Macht der Dinge*. Not surprisingly, the new tendency to move the *materiality* of culture from the margins into the center of scrutiny is paralleled by developments in contemporary art: in the 1960s and 1970s the key terms in art were "concept" and "materiality"; see Schneede, *Geschichte der Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert*, 215–235 ("Der Ausstieg aus dem Bild: Material und Konzept"). The large field of *material culture* is made accessible in, e.g., Buchli (ed.), *Material Culture*.

[28] For both of these approaches the interpretation of Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* is a telling example, and Godwin (*Pagan Dream*, 21–37) is correct in pointing at the difficulties of analyzing its splendid design only as a masterpiece of art and printing or as mere illustration; see also Wilson, "Oneiriconographia."

[29] Zika, *Exorcising Our Demons*, 4.

[30] Bakewell, "Image Acts," 26.

[31] Gladigow, "Von der 'Lesbarkeit' der Religion," 118. See also Gladigow, "Präsenz der Bilder—Präsenz der Götter."

[32] Kamerick, *Popular Piety*.

That cultural studies during the last two decades have increasingly turned their attention to the visual doubtlessly has to do with the emergence of new media, a presumed loss of literacy, and developments in twentieth-century art. New studies address the *pictorial turn*, and a few scholars even talk of a shift of paradigm that has taken place in the various disciplines collaborating under the rubric of cultural studies. W.J.T. Mitchell is exemplary in defining the "pictorial turn" as "a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality."[33] There are two key differences between these approaches and the concepts of art historians, mainly of the Warburg School. First, the image is no longer seen as a mere representation of an idea but as an element of discourse that is to be studied on its own terms;[34] "the presented image is, at least in part, its own referent."[35] Second, focusing on the *materiality* and public *use* of images, a new interpretational framework is needed that transcends earlier concepts of art historians.[36] This realization does not mean that scholars have reached a consensus about the appropriate analytical instruments. In fact, as Hans Belting notes, "a general theory of visual media is still pending."[37]

---

[33] Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 16. From the perspective of religious studies, a very good assessment of the state of the art is Bräunlein, "Bildakte"; see also Bräunlein, "'Zurück zu den Sachen.'" As examples of the new scholarly interest in the visual see Mitchell, *Iconology*; Jenks (ed.), *Visual Culture*; Walker, *Visual Culture*; Heywood & Sandywell (eds.), *Interpreting Visual Culture*; Gladigow, "Von der 'Lesbarkeit' der Religion"; Knieper & Müller (eds.), *Kommunikation visuell*; Mirzoeff, *Introduction to Visual Culture*; Barnard, *Approaches to Understanding Visual Culture*; Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie*; Sturken & Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*; Faßler, *Bildlichkeit*; Howells, *Visual Culture*. Cf. also Schanze (ed.), *Handbuch der Mediengeschichte*; Klimkeit (ed.), *Götterbild in Kunst und Schrift*. Of particular importance are the publications that emerge from the very fruitful interdisciplinary research center at the University of Münster, Germany. Of the new series *KultBild: Visualität und Religion in der Vormoderne*, I want to highlight Ganz & Lentes (eds.), *Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren*, and Ganz & Henkel (eds.), *Rahmen-Diskurse*.

[34] Gombrich's analyses stand somehow on the interface between these approaches and the *visual culture* concepts. While he criticizes the artificial rationalizations of art historians, he does not take the next step that systematically interrogates the practice of looking and the acts of displaying artifacts in the public sphere.

[35] Bakewell, "Image Acts," 22.

[36] For these developments in twentieth-century art, see Schneede, *Geschichte der Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert*.

[37] Belting, "Medium-Bild-Körper," 14; see also Boehm, "Bilderfrage," 326.

Instead of giving a general overview of these new approaches, I want to highlight three contributions that seem particularly important for our understanding of the role of the visual in medieval and early modern culture.[38] The first one is the pictorial theory of Hans Belting that breaks new ground for future research. In contrast to other approaches to Renaissance visual culture, which still refer to the visual as representation,[39] Belting goes a step further and construes a "pictorial anthropology" (*Bild-Anthropologie*) that integrates the three elements of *medium, image*, and *body*. In so doing, the materiality of the picture and image is not separated from its message, quite the contrary:

> What characterizes the medium is the fact that as form (mediation) of the picture it comprises both aspects that are separated in pieces of art and aesthetic objects. The common discourse of form and matter, which builds on the older notion of spirit and matter, cannot be applied to the carrier medium of the picture. We cannot reduce a picture to its form that a medium receives when it carries a picture—neither is the difference between idea and manufacture valid for the relation between picture and medium. In this relation lies the dynamic that cannot be analyzed with the traditional arguments common to the discussion of pictures.[40]

The dynamic can only be fully addressed if the sensual and bodily aspects are taken into consideration.

As Belting notes, the semiotic theory as "a modern act of abstraction separated the world of signs from the world of bodies in such a way that the signs belonged to social systems and were based on cultural negotiation. They address a cognitive, rather than a sensual, body-centered perception: even images are reduced here to iconic signs."[41]

Belting's approach can be combined with what Liza Bakewell calls *image acts*,[42] i.e. an application of Austin's theory of speech acts to the

---

[38] See Bräunlein, "Bildakte," 207–216; Bräunlein, "Religionsgeschichte als Medi-engeschichte."

[39] See, for instance, Farago (ed.), *Reframing the Renaissance*, and Erickson & Hulse (eds.), *Early Modern Visual Culture*.

[40] Belting, "Medium–Bild–Körper," 13. On the development of Belting's theory see Belting, *Bild und Kult* (particularly pp. 11–19 on "Die Macht der Bilder und die Ohnmacht der Theologen"), and Belting, *Das echte Bild*.

[41] Belting, "Medium–Bild–Körper," 14. Cf. also the theoretical considerations in Lanwerd, *Religionsästhetik*.

[42] Similar to Belting, Liza Bakewell notes that the study of image acts begins "not with texts or objects […] but with the human body" (Bakewell, "Image Acts," 27–28).

field of pictorial communication. Now we no longer ask, "How to do things with words" (Austin), but "How to do things with images" and "What to do with pictures." Bakewell understands images to mean human-made images, "from body gestures to 'great works of art' and everything in between."[43] Hence, it is not only the materiality that is at stake here, but the *visual act of communication* that images involve.

A third important contribution to the theorizing of visual culture comes from Thomas Lentes. His research is crucial here because Lentes conceptualizes the role of the visual in medieval and early modern discourse.[44] To understand the *image acts* of that period, it is necessary to take concepts of medieval anthropology and aesthetic theory into account.[45] Well into the sixteenth century, when the Reformation started to challenge these assumptions about the visual,[46] outer images were often regarded as being closely linked to the inner visions of human beings. The interior of the human being was a projection surface for good and evil images, subsequently transforming the human being into these images. The ideal case, of course, was the *imago Dei*, the transformation of the inner person into Christ. With reference to Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's *De imaginatione* Lentes makes clear that *imago, imaginatio*, and *imitatio* were closely related in a medieval culture of seeing.[47]

> Ultimately we should ask whether the doctrine of *imago Dei* is indeed the basic key to understand why the theories of imagination were able to spread far beyond the theological demarcations into the imaginary

---

[43] Bakewell, "Image Acts," 22. Reference could be made to Jan Assmann, as well, who developed the idea of "iconic action" and showed its applicability for understanding pictorial communication in ancient Egypt; see Assmann, "Macht der Bilder." Cf. also the notion of "pictorial acts" by Bräunlein, "Bildakte."

[44] Lentes, "Inneres Auge"; cf. the whole volume, which is an example of the new appreciation of materiality and the body in historiography. See also Mertin, "Ikonoklasmus"; Ganz & Lentes (eds.), *Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren*.

[45] As has been done by Gombrich (see above); cf. also Ganz & Lentes (eds.), *Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren*. The complicated scientific, religious, aesthetic, and philosophical discussions often focus on the concept of imagination; on this, see the overview and literature in van den Doel & Hanegraaff, "Imagination."

[46] As many contributions in Ganz & Henkel (eds.), *Rahmen-Diskurse*, demonstrate, the actual discursive processes were much more complex, however. Strategies for legitimizing cultic veneration of images were also applied in Protestant contexts; at the same time, the revival of image cults played a decisive role for Catholic identities in the age of confessionalization. Jan N. Bremmer notes that the concept of 'iconoclasm' is itself a very ambiguous one that emerged much later than is usually assumed (see Bremmer, "Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm").

[47] Lentes, "Inneres Auge," 193–195.

apparatus of entire societies: because the human being has always been an image—so a tentative thesis can be formulated—all human education, change, and communication is organized by seeing and being seen.[48]

With regard to ritual practice, this attitude—which we can describe as a *communicational approach to images*—had a decisive effect on the way pre-Reformation culture handled images and artifacts, from limitations of sight in monasteries and their fashioning as visual spaces to the development of complex exercises of imagination and the ritualized form of displaying relics in processions. The latter is particularly interesting, because the ritual 'unveiling' of relics, statues, and other material objects had been a crucial element of religious culture until the Reformation.[49] These rituals were full-blown image acts that aimed at the invocation of an image inside the observer.

> The confrontation with images was regarded as an elementary event of communication, an exchange of looks. It is not only that the observer perceives the image with his eyes; conversely, the observer is looked at by the image. The prayers and the orientation of looks—*intentio*[—] […] were inseparably linked and the answering of looks was considered self-evident. What was at stake here was a physical connection through the contact of the eyes, ultimately a transfer of power.[50]

Hence, the practices of looking, displaying, visualizing, and imagination are sensual actions that create a relationship between the observer and the object of observation.

The Presence of Images as Visual Practice

The *materiality* of pagan and polytheistic images—and their *uses*—in medieval and Renaissance culture is a good test case for the dynamic between image, medium, and body. As we have seen, recent contribu-

---

[48] *Ibid.*, 195.
[49] See particularly Schnitzler, "Illusion"; Kühne, *Ostensio reliquiarum*. Bräunlein, "Bildakte," 215–216, gives further references, for instance of the pilgrimage to the Nuremberg *Heiltumschau* where since 1424 once a year the holy lance, a nail of Jesus' cross, and other objects were shown to the public. When the audience was not able to view the relic directly, people used mirrors to get contact, a 'glance,' of the relic. Let me add another obvious example, namely the consecrated host: the act of *sacring* in the Mass, in which the host was exposed to view, came to be taken as its climax. The host was also exhibited in the Corpus Christi Day processions.
[50] Bräunlein, "Bildakte," 215, with reference to Guy P. Machal and the late Bob Scribner who relate this concept to medieval optical theories.

tions to pictorial theory and interpretation bring in a new dimension
of analysis: the element of action and public performance. Put differ-
ently, the concept of visual culture allows us to interpret Renaissance
artifacts and pictures with a framework of analysis that includes the
sensual and bodily acts of imaging. Although this chapter is primarily
concerned with methodological considerations, let me briefly elucidate
the dimension of visual practice with two examples: the myth of Diana
(Artemis) and Actaeon on the one hand, and the function of magic
gardens in the Renaissance on the other.

The ancient myth of the hunter Actaeon, who happened to observe
the naked Diana with her nymphs during their bath and subsequently
was transformed into a stag and killed by his own hounds, was a favor-
ite theme for sixteenth-century artists and their patrons. As Godwin
tells us, this theme

> afforded the pleasure of painting as many nymphs as one liked, yet
> with a wholesome and simplistic moral: that for men to look lustfully
> at women drags them down to the animal level. Thus the joke is on the
> viewer, who by enjoying the painting is also spying on Diana's bath, and
> sharing in Actaeon's offense. Is it, however, an offense, or was Actaeon's
> punishment unjust? Does his painful metamorphosis, like the flaying of
> Marsyas, have a redeeming, spiritual meaning? Is it esoterically about
> using sexuality as a path towards the initiatic death of the ego? It all
> depends on one's point of view.[51]

This is, of course, an apt remark that calms down overextended inter-
pretations and generalizations, which too easily derive fundamental
theses from individual contexts. For me here, it is not so much the art
historians' interpretation that is at stake but the very effect of these
images on the visitors.

We can compare two quite different visualizations of the Diana-
Actaeon myth in the sixteenth century—the cycle of frescos by Cor-
reggio in the Camera di San Paolo in Parma (1518/19), and that by
Parmigianino in the Rocca Sanvitale in Fontanellato, which was cre-
ated in 1523 and 1524.[52] The first of these frescos was painted for the
Benedictine abbess Giovanna Piacenza who received in her *camera*
nuns and visitors—hence, the images decorated a more or less public
Christian room. Nova argues that the themes of the fresco purposely

---

[51] Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 16.
[52] See Nova, "Beobachten und beobachtet werden."

strengthen the absolute power of the abbess herself, who is identified with Diana and able to punish and control her nuns.[53] Diana on the chimney, as well as a Putto carrying Actaeon's head, dogs, and even ram heads, directly *face* the visitor. As visitors,

> we find everything charming, but we are also uneasy. […] The observer feels isolated, encircled, and threatened. The Camera di San Paolo was set up as a self-conscious manipulative machinery of power. The observer, if he does not watch out, is hunted as Actaeon, because Giovanna keeps him under surveillance and punishes him.[54]

With regard to our guiding question, we can say that we are confronted with an image act that symbolically transfers Diana's power to the person of the abbess—a Christian abbess who is carrying the power of a Roman goddess.

Five years later, Parmigianino painted the same myth for an entirely different usage. Although he was inspired by the Camera del Correggio, the interpretation of this image act has to take into account that here the fresco is created for very private use—maybe as a bath[55]—by Galeazzo Sanvitale who ordered the fresco for his wife Paola Gonzaga. Contrasting the Correggio fresco, Parmigianino created an eroticized and voyeuristic version of the myth, in which the (male) observer can enjoy the beautiful Diana and her nymphs without feelings of guilt. This scene is a "patriarchal longing for the Other," as Nova points out.[56] But this longing is only part of the message, because the artist worked ambivalent elements into the fresco. Most important is a real *convex mirror* that was built into the central oculus of the room, surrounded by the engraving RESPICE FINEM ("Consider your end" or "Consider your death"). Exactly at the moment when the observer recognizes his own—distorted—image in the mirror, he understands that he has been transformed into Actaeon because he has seen the naked goddess. "Hence, we can say that the mirror in the middle of the vault marked the center of a ludic and at the same time self-destructing

---

[53] *Ibid.*, 89. See also the photographs provided by Nova.

[54] *Ibid.*, 90.

[55] The function as bathroom or boudoir is discussed in Nova, "Beobachten und beobachtet werden," 90 (with references). For our purpose, it is enough to assume that the frescos decorated a private, and somehow eroticized, area of the house.

[56] Nova, "Beobachten und beobachtet werden," 91. Heinrich, "Der Untergang von Religion," 85, interprets the Diana-Actaeon-myth as "an allegory of truth that includes the tension of the sexes." On the role of eroticism in Renaissance culture see Talvacchia, *Taking Positions.*

procedure, in which Galeazzo repeated the metamorphic experience of Actaeon on a visual level."[57] In this image act an *experience* is induced that transgresses the boundaries of 'mere seeing' or intellectual rationalization.

Now, let us turn to the magic gardens. If we consider Gladigow's notion that the pattern of "presence of images—presence of gods" is a *longue durée* in European history of religion, it will be particularly interesting to look at the statues of pagan divinities that were part of Renaissance public spheres. Furthermore, these statues were crucial elements of Italian 'magic gardens,' which rich individuals and clergymen—interestingly enough, even high cardinals—laid out for their own use. Godwin gives a fascinating overview of these gardens and their particular 'sense of wonder' that captures the visitor even today.[58] The images of Greek and Roman divinities are integrated in a carefully constructed garden architecture, with grottos, fountains, and sometimes even technical tricks that make the statues appear as animated.

The garden of Villa d'Este in Tivoli, near Rome, is a telling example. Constructed between 1563 and 1572 under the governor of Tivoli, Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este (1509–1572), with Pirro Ligorio as architect and archaeological advisor, the garden contains huge and complex fountains depicting dragons, heroes, the Diana (Artemis) of Ephesus with water pouring forth from her many breasts, and other installations. No matter how we want to interpret the 'message' of this garden—whether we see in it a Hermetic, mystical way to initiation, or a symbol of resurrection, or a Neoplatonic parable[59]—from a visual culture point of view the unity of medium, image, and body created a strong impression of 'divine presence'[60] in the individual visitor (note

---

[57] *Ibid.*, 91. See also Nova's discussion of the role of convex mirrors in changing attitudes toward the capability of images to directly address the observer. Heinrich, "Der Untergang von Religion," 86, talks of a "power of transforming and tearing apart the intellectual existence" ("Verwandlungs- und Zerreißungsmächtigkeit der intellektuellen Existenz")—a community with the image that transcends the privacy of humanistic speculation into a kind of "mystery community" ("Mysteriengemeinschaft").

[58] Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 153–180.

[59] Cf. Godwin's discussion of the respective interpretations by David Coffin, Emanuela Kretzulesco-Quaranta, and Maria Luisa Madonna (*ibid.*).

[60] Here, I refer to Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 153, who states: "The Garden Magic is a mood that descends especially on the solitary visitor, a trancelike atmosphere of suspended excitement beyond words or the rational mind. In earlier times, when consciousness was less rigidified, it must have been stronger, leaving no doubt of the

that the visitor is no longer a mere observer). That in fact the visitor is part of the whole ensemble can be seen from the fact that he or she is at times even addressed directly. The sibyl, for instance, a classic image of the *nympha loci*, is a recurrent theme in early modern garden architecture, as here in the Ariadne Fountain of the Villa d'Este.[61] She is understood as the guardian of the place, securing its sanctity as long as she is sleeping. Often, the arrangement is accompanied by a warning, addressed to the visitor, as in the Belvedere in Rome: "I sleep, whilst I hear the murmur of the soft water. Whoever should touch this marble basin, do not interrupt my sleep. Whether you drink or wash, be silent." Hence, the visitor is not only participating in the scene, he or she has an important role to play in securing the sanctity of the place—a clear example of an image act with the visitor being drawn into ritual practice.

The motif of the sleeping nymph is a popular element not only in Renaissance gardens.[62] An example from the eighteenth century is the private garden of England's famous Enlightenment poet and architect, Alexander Pope (1688–1744) who in 1720 built an artistic nymphaeum accompanied by verses of consecration to the pagan divinities: "Nymph of the Grot, these sacred springs I keep, / And to the Murmur of these Waters sleep, / Ah spare my slumbers, gently tread the cave / and drink in Silence or in Silence lave."[63] Joanna Geyer-Kordesch highlights the "agency of place" in these installations: "To engage the gods and the agency of place is indeed to involve oneself in ancient wisdom." Put differently: "The occult here is not a received tradition to be learned through the difficult ciphers of the secret world of hermetic tracts. Instead it is a place to go to and, through architectural enhancement or landscape gardening or the appreciation of nature, to participate in a glimpse of Elysium."[64] The garden, literally, is a *location of knowledge* that combines 'wisdom beyond demonstration' with art and ritual practice.

---

presence of Pan and his retinue." Cf. my critical remarks in von Stuckrad, "Review Godwin."

[61] As Klaus Heinrich argued, the demigods and nymphs were even more powerful in the imagery of Renaissance culture than the Greek and Roman gods and goddesses; see Heinrich, "Götter und Halbgötter."

[62] See Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 149–151, on the transition from grotto to nymphaeum in Italian garden architecture.

[63] See Geyer-Kordesch, "Hieroglyphs of Nature," 243.

[64] *Ibid.*, 245 and 246.

At this point, I want to drive my argument home. How can we apply these examples and considerations to our initial question about the presence and discourse of polytheism and paganism in Western culture? The most general impression is that focusing on the visual presence of Greek and Roman deities challenges common notions of a 'Christian occident' with a monotheistic creed that in late antiquity won the upper hand over a 'pagan' past, a narrative I engaged in chapter one. This narrative is dependent on a conceptualization of 'religion' that is based on faith, inner states of mind, belief-systems, and (holy) texts.[65] On a deeper level of analysis, these conceptualizations correspond to two strong currents in the academic study of religion: a *religionist conviction* and a *philological orientation*. Both currents in my view reflect processes of distancing that influence the way historians describe the cultural and religious history of Europe.

With the focus on faith and belief-systems, largely informed by religionist traditions of the nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, scholars employed a strategy of singularization and purgation on the basis of their terminological differentiation between 'religion' on the one hand and 'folk-belief'[66] or 'superstition' on the other.[67] In so doing, they could easily dismiss 'pagan' or polytheistic phenomena as belonging to something else, but certainly not to the 'domain of religion.' In addition to folk belief or superstition, there are other candidates of domains where these phenomena can be distanced to: art,[68] philosophy, music, or literature may be mentioned here. In establishing concepts of religion that work in the hands of Christian identity

---

[65] This is what Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, describes as a "discourse of *sui generis* religion."

[66] Likewise, the concept of 'popular piety' can be interpreted as a result of this process of Othering and distancing; as an example see Kamerick, *Popular Piety*. In this interpretational framework, idolatry and image worship appear to be something for simple folks. Talking of a *pagan field of discourse* would blur or even dismantle such normalizing differentiations.

[67] A classic example of this strategy is the 10-volume dictionary on superstition in German-speaking countries (Bächtold-Stäubli [ed.], *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*). This example also reveals that the singularizing discourse on superstition is inseparably linked to the discourse on magic.

[68] See, once again, Heinrich, "Der Untergang von Religion," who claims that "we should then also leave behind the limitation of our research material—religion here and no religion there—but should look for the coming and going of such constructions outside the traditional domain of religion" (p. 78).

formation, the academic study of religion helped to secure the distancing of these seemingly threatening elements of Western culture.[69]

The focus on text as the basis of religion likewise fostered interpretations of a unified Judeo-Christian monotheistic heritage in Europe; the philological orientation of the academic study of religion, so influential in the formation of the discipline, regarded 'sacred books' as a corner-stone of religions, and subsequently lost sight of the possibility that religion can happen elsewhere.[70] Discursive approaches in cultural studies in general, and the concept of image acts and visual culture in particular, challenge these analytical frameworks. If we take seriously the notion that religious ideas, convictions, and traditions are 'acted out' in the public sphere, that they form part of people's identities in a unity of image, message, and body, and that the materiality of religion is something to move to the foreground, we will perhaps arrive at a better understanding of the status of paganism in post-ancient Europe.

"The pagan divinities are a hardy breed," says Godwin.[71] Maybe they are. But from the perspective of visual culture, they are definitely not a dream, nor do they belong to a system outside religion. They can be actualized in religious discourse as positive or negative identity markers. It is precisely the processes of distancing, singularization, and exorcism that the academic study of religion has to engage.

---

[69] At the same time, scholars were fascinated by the existence of these 'survivals' that lurk right under the surface of modernity; see Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History*, 51–112; Gladigow, "Anachronismus und Religion."

[70] See Kippenberg & von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, 42–44.

[71] Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 1.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATION

> What is theoretically innovative, and politically
> crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of
> originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on
> those moments or processes that are produced in
> the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-
> between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating
> strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that
> initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of
> collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defin-
> ing the idea of society itself.
>
> Homi K. Bhabha

After having addressed the interferences between religion, science, and
art, I now turn to another cultural system that witnessed the materi-
alizations of a discourse of knowledge in early modern Europe—the
learned debate in German universities and the political endeavors to
come to terms with a climate of religious conflict. In such a climate,
the reference to *prisca theologia* or other forms of primordial, perfect
knowledge functioned as an optimistic attempt to overcome political
tension.

   In this chapter I argue that it was the discourse of the day, with its
political and cultural implications, that fostered new blends of ratio-
nalism and Hermeticism in early modern Europe. Rather than stick-
ing to predefined borders of philosophical and religious debate, early
modern scholars took from these traditions what they needed in order
to cope with the pressing issues of their time. This development also
reflects the fact that philosophical demarcations had been fluent and
open on all sides. Distinguishing Aristotelianism from Platonism in
early modern philosophy and religion is not as easy as it seems at
first glance. While Plato and Aristotle certainly had different opin-
ions about many issues, the polemical distinction between the two is a
product of Renaissance discussions. And if we consider Neoplatonism
as an attempt to combine Platonism with Aristotelianism, the recep-
tion of Neoplatonism in early modern Europe must be regarded as

a creative mixture of Platonic and Aristotelian elements. A similar hybridity of philosophical traditions is attested to in the case of rationalism and syllogistics on the one hand, and Hermeticism and mystical traditions on the other. These traditions represent different ways of attaining knowledge of the world, sometimes polemically juxtaposed, sometimes creatively combined.

The situation in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Germany is a particularly good example of this complexity, for several reasons: Germany was scattered into a multitude of small counties, principalities, and political bodies, with local princes following their own political, religious, and educational agendas; the Reformation and its various responses were heavily felt in German universities and in intellectual life; and the apocalyptic tension that had seized Europe was particularly influential in these regions, additionally inflamed by the disastrous course of the Thirty Years War.

The lives and works of individual scholars reveal this tense situation.

Looking at the amazingly productive life of Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638), we see at work the complex dynamics of esoteric discourse in an age of crisis. Alsted, who absorbed the humanistic and scholastic positions prominent at Heidelberg University, as well as the Hermetic discussions at Marburg University, who witnessed the beginnings of the Rosicrucian movement as well as part of the Thirty Years War, was deeply concerned about the prospects of the future. As professor of theology and philosophy at the Academy of Herborn, Alsted attempted to bring reformation to its ultimate end, namely a 'universal reform' that would restore the human being's original dignity. Thus, Alsted combined Aristotelian rationalism with Lullism and an eclectic reception of kabbalah and *alchymia* ("Mosaic physics"), *magia*, and Hermeticism. This highly original combination materialized in several influential works, from the *Physica Harmonica* (1610, expanded ^{2}1612, ^{3}1616) to the celebrated *Encyclopaedia* (7 vols., 1630). For Alsted, who was in contact with leading scholars across Europe, the program of 'further reform' provided the answers to the pressing issues of his time: apocalypticism, millenarianism, and religious and social violence.

In what follows, I will look at the most important influences on Alsted and the way he integrated these in his major work, the *Encyclopaedia*.

Johann Heinrich Alsted: Hermeticism and Universal Reform

Johann Heinrich Alsted was born in the little village of Ballersbach that belonged to the imperial county of Nassau-Dillenburg.[1] After having been educated at nearby Herborn, and after preparatory studies in the Paedagogium from 1599 onwards, Alsted matriculated in the new Academy of Herborn in 1602 and participated in a philosophical dissertation under Matthias Martinius and a theological one under Johannes Piscator. In April 1606, he enrolled at the University of Marburg, where he studied under the influential scholars Rudolf Goclenius the Elder, Gregor Schönfeld, and Raphael Eglinus, among others. In July 1607, Alsted was in Basle and studied mathematics with Leonhardt Zubler, theology with Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf, and Hebrew with Johann Buxdorf the Elder. On his way back—through Freiburg and perhaps Strasburg—he stopped at Heidelberg in April 1608 and attended classes with the leading reformed theologian, David Pareus. Alsted was twenty, when he was appointed teacher at the Herborn Paedagogium. On 10 October 1608 Alsted became extraordinary professor of the academy in Siegen (where the Nassovian academy had been moved to due to an outbreak of the plague in Herborn). The following year he was appointed leader (Paedagogiarch) and teacher at the Paedagogium and started to lecture in the academy proper. In response to a call to Bremen, he was appointed extraordinary professor of philosophy in Herborn, while a call to the University of Frankfurt led to the transformation of his Herborn position into an ordinary chair. In the summer of 1619 Alsted participated in the Synod of Dort (Dordrecht) and subsequently was honored with the third chair of theology and with the rectorship for one year. After a second rectorship in 1625, and with the death of Johannes Piscator, Alsted was appointed the first chair of theology in January 1626. However, the Thirty Years War had disastrous effects on the Herborn Academy's prosperity, and thus, after having declined further calls to the Dutch Gymnasium Velavicum of Harderwijk and the Athenaeum of Deventer, Alsted finally accepted an invitation to the newly founded

---

[1] On Alsted's life, see Cuno, "Johann Heinrich Alsted"; Schlosser, "Johann Heinrich Alsted." On the context, see Menk, *Die Hohe Schule Herborn in ihrer Frühzeit*, particularly pp. 274–281.

Calvinist academy in Gyulaferhérvár (Alba Julia), Transylvania, in 1629. He died in Transylvania in 1638.

As these naked facts reveal, Alsted was actively involved in the ongoing theological and philosophical debates of his time. They also make clear that his career was influenced by contingent political and military developments. Examining how he managed to make his way through these conflicting interests, and how he responded to these various intellectual challenges, will provide us with a better under-standing of the character and status of his work.

Alsted's small home county of Nassau-Dillenburg certainly was a minor player in the political and religious scene around 1600. Its prince, Count Johann VI of Nassau-Dillenburg, younger brother to William "the Silent" of Nassau-Orange (the leader of the Dutch revolt against Spain), pursued a careful policy of supporting William's military cam-paigns on the one hand, and of securing the integrity of his county, on the other. This was a very delicate task, given the strong powers that surrounded the county. In the 1570s and 1580s, Johann VI took decisive measures on military, economic, religious, and educational terrains,[2] combined in a program of domestic reform that would turn his small county into a sustainable and united territory. One impor-tant element of his program was higher education. When in 1584 the Herborn Paedagogium and Academy were founded, the first professor of philosophy, Johannes Piscator, laid the basis of what was to become the characteristic Herborn blending of Ramism and Aristotelianism. The reasons for this innovation were mainly pragmatic, because the clear, yet simple, systematics and pedagogy of Petrus Ramus (1515–1572) provided a framework of education that seemed superior to the difficulties of Aristotelian logic. "The problem with Aristotle […] was not that he was a pagan philosopher or a scholastic authority; it was that his philosophy was complex, difficult, and inessential."[3]

When Alsted took office in Herborn, he basically followed the pro-gram of uniting Aristotelianism and Ramism in order to set up a sim-plified and practical pedagogy that served the objectives of the so-called 'second reform.'[4] To Ramism was added the theology of Melanchthon,

---

[2] See Menk, "'Qui trop embrasse, peu estreind.'"
[3] Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 20–21. On Ramism in Herborn, see also Michel, "Der Herborner Philosoph," 46–93.
[4] The term 'second reform' is problematic; usually, it refers to the confessionaliza-tion of the reformed churches, while the 'first reform' was that of Lutheranism. Similar

as the latter seemed more sophisticated at many points than Ramus, but still more easily accessible than Aristotle.[5] For Alsted, contemplative knowledge was not enough. In his *Panacea philosophica*, he states that there is no discipline based on mere knowledge without applying it for the benefit of human life. "Theory without practice is dead."[6] Alsted's didactic focus—based on Ramism—had a decisive impact all over Europe and in the American colonies. "Boys at Harvard were made to defend a great many theses explaining not what they learned, but what the structure of the curriculum was."[7] Yet, despite the pragmatic political reasons for adopting a Ramist attitude to educational programs, Alsted never became a 'Ramist' in the full sense. He did not follow the anti-humanist attitude of some of his colleagues and managed to integrate a further element into his philosophy: the scholasticism he was confronted with in Heidelberg.

The University of Heidelberg was a European center of reformed theology in the sixteenth century. Both politically and academically it differed considerably from the intellectual climate in Herborn, although the ties between Nassau-Dillenburg and the Palatinate were indeed close. One major difference was the reception of Ramism. When Petrus Ramus visited Heidelberg in October 1569, Friedrich III even wanted to offer him the vacant chair of ethics until the religious war

---

to the biased term 'Counter-Reformation,' which tends to exclude Catholicism from 'real' reform, it reduces the complex dynamics of confessionalization to a *Kampfbegriff*. Therefore, historians prefer to describe the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the 'age of confessionalization'; see Schilling (ed.), *Die reformierte Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland*, 7–9 and 439–467; Schilling, "Das konfessionelle Europa." However, the notion of *reformatio* is itself a central element of what was discussed around 1600 as a 'universal reform' not only of church and belief, but of the whole of society and the world. It is this particular aspect of reformation as *restitutio* of a primordial order—both in Protestant and Catholic milieus—that I am referring to here with the term 'further reform.'

[5] On Ramism in Herborn, see Menk, *Die Hohe Schule Herborn*, 203–217.

[6] Alsted, *Panacea philosophica*, 37. Similarly, in the *Praefatio* to the third volume of the *Encyclopaedia*, Alsted notes that *in his omnibus ea proponimus, quae aliquem usum habent in vitâ humanâ* (see Alsted, *Encyclopaedia*, 572). This combination of complete, encyclopaedic knowledge with practical applicability was taken over by Leibniz who defined an encyclopaedia as follows: *Est enim Encyclopaedia Systema omnium, quousque licet, propositionum verarum, utilium, hactenus cognitarum* (G.W. Leibniz, *Judicium de scriptis Comenianis*, quoted from Couturat, *La logique de Leibniz*, 571).

[7] Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, 165. On the impact of the Herborn model on Germany, the Low Countries, Switzerland, Hungary, Transylvania, Scotland, England, and North America, see also Menk, *Die Hohe Schule Herborn*, 282–326.

in France was over. This, however, was not approved by the Faculty of Arts and Theology, and severe battles were fought against Ramus' anti-Aristotelianism, often revealing personal rather than academic motives.[8] No wonder, then, that from the more than 800 editions of Ramus' works not a single one was published in Heidelberg.[9] It was the political and intellectual climate that distinguished the reception of Ramism in Heidelberg from that in Herborn. In Hotson's words: "Just as Johann VI's withdrawal from the international arena to concentrate on domestic reform best explains Herborn's support for Ramism, the Pfalzgrave's consistently international orientation best explains Heidelberg's consistent hostility to Ramism."[10] Problems arose between those cities because they belonged to the same academic community, with students coming in from Herborn to study in Heidelberg. The young theologian Bartholomäus Keckermann regarded it as "one of the calamities of our time" that due to the lack of Aristotelian logic "those fundamental disciplines, preparatory to all remaining higher learning, [are] now seldom seen among students."[11] Keckermann set out to remedy this problem with a highly creative new program. In order to avoid the limitations of both the Peripatetic and Ramist traditions he transformed the content of Aristotle's philosophy into a methodical form that almost looked like Ramism. He was convinced that Aristotle's texts were far too complicated, obscure, corrupt, and inaccessible to form the basis of introductory courses on a university level. Ramus must be praised for highlighting this problem, but his solution was, as Keckermann pointed out, a disaster, because it disregarded the very essence of Aristotelian teaching and would lead to a decline of metaphysics and logic. Hence, Keckermann proposed what he called "methodical Peripateticism."[12]

The influence of Keckermann's program on Alsted's concept of his encyclopaedia (on which see below) can hardly be overestimated. Keckermann divided Aristotelian doctrine into three logically distinguished steps of learning, namely *praecognita, systemata*, and *gymnasia*, each of which were then divided into *praecepta, regulae*, and *commentaria*.

---

[8] See the references in Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 25.
[9] See the lists in Ong, *Ramus and Talon Inventory*.
[10] Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 27.
[11] Quoted from Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 29.
[12] Keckermann, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, 61 E–F; see Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 30–31.

The first step, *praecognita*, treated the nature of the discipline under consideration; the second, *systemata*, described the things that this discipline contains. The third step, *gymnasia*, translated the theoretical doctrines into practice, teaching, and mental habit, thus applying the practical impetus of Ramist education.[13] Hotson concludes: "The logical and pedagogical principles which structure Alsted's *Encyclopaedia*, therefore, were developed by Keckermann in response to a confessional impetus felt particularly acutely in Heidelberg's faculty of theology."[14]

After Keckermann had accepted a call to his hometown Danzig, he worked on a three-year curriculum that had to cover all philosophical learning. He could not finish this Herculean task, however, and died in 1609 with his systematic treatment of the *cursus philosophicus* still incomplete.[15] His students and admirers took up the issue and published everything they could find, from unpublished manuscripts to their own notes of his lectures. Keckermann's printer, Wilhelm Antonius in Hanau, was particularly active here, as the fusion of Ramist structural clarity with Aristotelian thought appeared to be highly attractive for many universities struggling with Aristotelianism. It was Antonius who persuaded Alsted to pursue the program; not surprisingly, Alsted was easily convinced of the worth of Keckermann's concepts. In 1613 Antonius published a complete edition of Keckermann's logical and philosophical works under the title *Systema systematum*. This edition was organized by Alsted into an integrated *cyclopaedia* of the three-year philosophical course.

But directly after Keckermann's death, Alsted began to produce his own systematic work that built on his teacher's concepts. One year later, in 1610, and thus well before the *Systemata systematum*, Alsted published his "Philosophical cure-all," the *Panacea philosophica*, with the subtitle, "an easy, new, and carefully devised method of teaching and learning the whole circle of the disciplines." In this work, Alsted applied the Keckermann methodology, but added a fourth systematic component to *praecognita, systemata*, and *gymnasia*, namely *lexica*, which contained the definition of terms that Keckermann had

---

[13] On Keckermann, see particularly Freedman, "The Career and Writings of Bartholomew Keckermann."

[14] Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 32.

[15] See Adam, *Vitae Germanorum philosophorum*, 501–502; Keckermann, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, 1387–1388.

subsumed under *commentaria*. In fact, "the *Panacea philosophica* is
[…] a remarkably accurate blueprint of the encyclopaedia which he
finally completed twenty years later."[16]

We have now traced two important ingredients of Alsted's
encyclopaedic endeavor, Ramism and reformed Aristotelianism. The
picture becomes more complex if we add Hermeticism. For this ingre-
dient, we must look at the University of Marburg. The state of Hesse,
bordering on Nassau-Dillenburg, has a complex confessional and
political history. From the beginning the Hessian Landgrave Philipp
the Magnanimous had tried to reconcile Lutheranism in the north
with Zwinglianism in the south of his county, but after his death
in 1567 the situation became much more difficult.[17] His patrimony
was divided among his four sons (reduced to three after 1583), and
whereas Ludwig IV of the upper Hessian lands around Marburg and
Georg of the territory of Hesse-Darmstadt applied the strict criteria
of the Formula of Concord,[18] Philipp's eldest son, Wilhelm IV, who
inherited the largest territory of Lower Hesse with its residential city
Kassel, tried to enhance unity through the broad and inclusive formu-
lae of Melanchthon's modified Augsburg Confession, thus accepting
confessions that were excluded elsewhere.[19]

Of decisive influence for the development that concerns us here is
the politics of Wilhelm IV's son, Moritz (1572–1632), who explicitly
pursued a program of further reform that resembled the model of Her-
born.[20] Collaborating closely with the theologians of Herborn, Johannes
Piscator and Wilhelm Zepper, Moritz introduced reforms on religious,
educational, political, and military matters and thus received enthusi-
astic response from centers of reform across Europe, particularly from
Nassau-Dillenburg. But Moritz went further than his Herborn friends.
Although following the tradition of the court of Hesse-Kassel,[21] Moritz

---

[16] Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 33.
[17] See Press, "Hessen im Zeitalter der Landesteilung."
[18] See Rudersdorf, "Lutherische Erneuerung und Zweite Reformation?"; Ruders-
dorf, *Ludwig IV. Landgraf von Hessen-Marburg*; Menk, "Absolutistisches Wollen und
verfremdete Wirklichkeit," particularly pp. 168–169.
[19] See Menk, "Absolutistisches Wollen und verfremdete Wirklichkeit," 170–173;
Menk, "Landgraf Wilhelm IV. von Hessen-Kassel"; Gräf, *Konfession und internatio-
nales System*.
[20] See Menk, "Die 'Zweite Reformation' in Hessen-Kassel," 167–168; Menk, "Abso-
lutistisches Wollen und verfremdete Wirklichkeit."
[21] His father Wilhelm corresponded with leading philosophers and scholars across
Europe, from Tycho Brahe to Rudolf II. Wilhelm also constructed the first purpose-
built astronomical observatory in Germany on the roof of his castle in Kassel.

changed his father's academic focus—astronomy and botany—to alchemy and Hermetic traditions.[22] He corresponded with Benedict Figulus, Joachim Morsius, Michael Maier, and Johann Thölde, among others. While the famous observatory of his father went out of use, Moritz established an impressive alchemical laboratory instead. The intellectual climate attracted scholars from adjacent disciplines, such as astrology, iatrochemistry, and Hermeticism. This marked a decisive difference between Nassau, with its attempt to purify theology and ritual from magical elements, and Hesse-Kassel. After the unification of Hesse and Kassel, the 'Hermetic inclinations' of the Kassel court changed the situation at the University of Marburg as well. Following a severe conflict with the newly founded University of Gießen—only a few miles away from Marburg but belonging to the Lutheran state of Hesse-Darmstadt—the reforming endeavors of Moritz's court led to the appointment of Johann Hartmann to the first European chair of medical chemistry in Marburg.[23] Subsequently, Moritz made eighteen personal appointments to the university, all of them part of the specific Mauritian reformation: Calvinist theology and occult philosophy. Marburg became a European center of Hermetic research.[24]

Such was the situation Alsted encountered when he matriculated at Marburg University in April 1606.[25] Interestingly enough, from his youth Alsted had a fascination with esoteric disciplines in general and with the art of memory in particular. In Marburg, several scholars were well versed in Giordano Bruno's mnemonic techniques, among them Gregor Schönfeld, first professor of theology and superintendent of the Marburg church, and particularly Raphael Eglinus, recently appointed fourth professor of theology.[26] Through Schönfeld and Eglinus, Alsted became acquainted with Bruno's art of memory. An indication of this knowledge is his edition of a previously unpublished manuscript by Bruno under the title *Artificium perorandi* in 1612. Another Marburg professor who influenced Alsted's Hermetic interests was Rudolf

---

[22] The standard work on Moritz's alchemical interests is Moran, *Alchemical World of the German Court*.

[23] See Moran, *Chemical Pharmacy Enters the University*.

[24] See Moran, *Alchemical World of the German Court*, 36–49; Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 54–65.

[25] Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 51.

[26] See references in Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 59 note 228. On Eglinus, see Moran, *Alchemical World of the German Court*, 40–49. On Alsted's use of mnemonic techniques, see T. Leinkauf, "*Systema mnemonicum* und *circulus encyclopaediae*."

Goclenius the Younger,[27] appointed professor of physics, astronomy, and mathematics in 1608.[28] With Goclenius, Alsted shared an interest in encyclopaedianism. In his *Conciliator philosophicus* (1609), Goclenius conceptualized the encyclopaedia as a division of knowledge based on principles of cognition. Philosophy was equated with the principal system (*syntagma*) of all knowledge that ultimately transcended theological doctrines: *philosophia est similitudo Dei*.[29]

Alsted could easily combine these fields of research with his long-lasting interest in Lullism.[30] Using the doctrine of Raymundus Lullus (c. 1232/3–c. 1316) eclectically and discussing its various aspects with Keckermann and others, Alsted published in 1609 his first Lullian work, entitled *Clavis artis Lullianae*, followed by a *Systema mnemonicum duplex* in 1610, the latter stating on the title page: *Cum Encyclopaediae, Artis Lullisticae et Cabbalisticae perfectissima explicatione.*

All these combinations of seemingly contradictory programs mirror the characteristic of Landgrave Moritz's intellectual endeavor for further reformation: strict Calvinist theology linked to occult philosophy; purification of worship with anti-magical and iconoclastic attitudes linked to an increased preoccupation with alchemy, Hermeticism, and the art of memory. This program had a strong anti-Jesuit impetus.[31] That we are confronted here with 'intellectual passions' and ultimately contingent political contexts, rather than with neat philosophical and theological distinctions, is further attested to when we add yet another element to Alsted's encyclopaedic program—*Rosicrucianism*.

As is well known through the research of Carlos Gilly and others, the Rosicrucian manifestos were by no means an isolated phenomenon.[32] Not only the Tübingen circle around Tobias Hess and Johann Valentin Andreae must be addressed here, but also the events in Kassel and Marburg. The Rosicrucian tracts were printed in Kassel in 1614 and 1615 by Wilhelm Wessel, court printer to Landgrave Moritz; but

---

[27] See Moran, *Alchemical World of the German Court*, 36–39.

[28] Alsted's link to the alchemical scene was intellectual as well as personal. Several relatives of his were involved in the second reformation in Hesse, among them his maternal grandfather Johann Pincier the Elder, pastor in Wetter, and Johann Pincier the Younger, his mother's second cousin who became professor of medicine in Herborn and later in Marburg. See Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 55.

[29] Goclenius, *Conciliator Philosophicus*, 2: "Philosophia est systema disciplinarum liberalium. Alias orbis doctrinarum: Encyclopaedia. Orbis doctrinae liberalis syntagma."

[30] Michel, "Der Herborner Philosoph," 14–45.

[31] Holz, *Wider die Philosophie der Gegenreformation*, 8.

[32] See particularly Gilly, *Adam Haslmayr*; Gilly (ed.), *Cimelia Rhodostaurotica*.

during the decades before the Rosicrucian 'coming out,' the printers of Hesse had already published many books dealing with occult philosophy as integral part of a program of universal reform. Among the authors were Rudolf Goclenius the Elder, his son, and Raphael Eglinus, all of them close friends to Johann Heinrich Alsted, as we have seen.[33] Calvinism and Rosicrucianism were closely related in Hesse's intellectual circles, again not due to strictly theological reasons but because "it was a further extension of the logic linking the ecclesiastical, political, and pedagogical components of the existing programme of further reform."[34]

No doubt, Alsted followed the intensive debate during the first decades of the seventeenth century.[35] However, although he published extensively during that time, he did not comment on the Rosicrucian question. The years 1612–1614 seem to be a time of crisis for him; he ceased to write on Lull, the art of memory, and other issues that had intrigued him earlier. His readers had to wait until the year 1620 to read one small personal statement in the five thousand columns of the *Cursus philosophici encyclopaedia*: "What is to be decided concerning the philosophers of the Rose Cross, as they are called, is not yet clear to me."[36] In the eight years before this statement, personal correspondence reveals that Alsted struggled with the Rosicrucian movement, mainly because it suggested the same reformist program that he himself had supported ever since, if perhaps in an exaggerated way. Apparently, he decided to wait until the dust had settled and the impact of the Rosicrucian manifestos on the vision of further reform had become clear. We will see later how the issue returns in his *Encyclopaedia*.

Howard Hotson has convincingly argued that Alsted, despite his public silence on esoteric issues between 1614 and 1618, has remained a "private pansophical pupil" during those years,[37] to the extent that Alsted actively practiced alchemy. Hotson concludes:

---

[33] See Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 97–109.
[34] *Ibid.*, 104.
[35] This debate included the astrological speculations that surrounded the beginnings of the Rosicrucian movement; see Åkerman, "Helisaeus Roeslin, the New Star, and the Last Judgement." On Alsted's astrology and its relation to his millenarianism, cf. also Hotson, *Paradise Postponed*, 41–84.
[36] Alsted, *Cursus philosophici encyclopaedia libris XXVII*, vol. 1, 16.6: "Quid de philosophis Rosae Crucis, ut vocant, sit statuendum, mihi nondum liquet."
[37] Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 144–153.

> What so strikingly differentiates the private correspondence from the published writings is the way in which the conventional Peripatetic material recedes almost completely, leaving only Alsted's chemical, astrological, physiognomic, and combinatorial additions to it. But even within the encyclopedia Alsted occasionally allows brief glimpses of an intellectual world in which Ramus and Aristotle still take second place to Lull and Paracelsus.[38]

It can be assumed that during the 1620s, when the disastrous events of the Thirty Years War prevented Alsted from publishing as much as he had done earlier, his personal inclination toward esoteric doctrines remained very strong. The best evidence of this is the seventh and final tome of the *Encyclopaedia* of 1630, with its collection of *Farragines disciplinarum*.

Perfect Knowledge in the "Circle of Learning": Alsted's Encyclopaedia

We have seen that Alsted's whole career was characterized by an attempt to reconcile different philosophical and religious approaches and to turn them into a single concept of learning. His Hermetic passions, although not revealed in public during his 'theological phase' between 1612 and 1620, had in fact never ceased to occupy him. And in his masterwork, the extraordinarily well organized *Encyclopaedia septem tomis distincta* from 1630, all these elements resurfaced in an interesting way.

Generally speaking, the *Encyclopaedia*—with its 2,500 folio pages— follows the 'circle of learning' that Alsted had already elaborated in his *Panacea philosophica* from 1610, which was based on Keckermann's *Systema systematum*.[39] Volume I starts with the *Praecognita* (four books), the theoretical foundation of science; Volume II covers *Philologia* (six books). Volumes III and IV address philosophy, because this discipline is seen as fundamental and preparatory; first comes the *Philosophia theoretica* in ten books, followed by four books on *Philosophia practica*. Volume V—*Tres superiores facultates* (three books)—turns to the three 'higher' university faculties, i.e. theology, jurisprudence, and medicine. Quite unusually for encyclopaedias that go beyond the

---

[38] *Ibid.*, 152.

[39] Keckermann, *Systema systematum clarissimi viri Dn. Bartholomaei Keckermanni.* Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann provides a brief overview of the encyclopaedia's content in his preface (pp. V–XVIII) to the 1989–1990 facsimile edition.

seven *artes* re-established in humanism, Volume VI engages the *artes mechanicae* (three books), covering not only mechanics but also crafts that did not belong to the liberal arts. The 'circle of learning' ends with Volume VII, entitled *Farragines disciplinarum* (five books). At first glance, this remarkable volume looks like a hodgepodge, a veritable *farrago*, of disciplines that are 'left over' or not easily integrated into the more orthodox order of learning. Under the book headings *Mnemonica, Historica, Chronologia, Architectonica*, and *Apodemica, Critica &c.*, the reader finds a number of serious and perhaps less serious disciplines, from magnetography and pyrotechnics through the art of proverbs ("gnomology") and the art of right behavior ("dignosophistica") to riddles and paradoxes. Volume VII is also the place where Alsted discusses magic, alchemy, astrology, and kabbalah.

Quite contrary to the impression that the title *Farragines* creates in the modern reader's mind, the last volume of Alsted's encyclopaedia is not a mere *Kuriositätenkabinett* of seventeenth-century learning. In fact, all fields of knowledge are treated as equal and legitimate. On the basis of his *panacea philosophiae*, all aspects of knowledge can be covered and structured according to a general order of learning. While this totalizing idea of knowledge is in itself esoteric,[40] the way Alsted introduces Hermetic disciplines in his encyclopaedia acknowledges that he indeed retained his earlier fascination in his late masterwork.

The impression one gets when reading through Alsted's encyclopaedia is ambivalent. On the one hand, Alsted characterizes the Hermetic sciences of *Farragines* as *Foedatae* ("defiled"; see graphic in vol. I, p. 24), and in various instances he argues that they are disreputable and dangerous.[41] With regard to kabbalah, he notes that this Jewish tradition is blasphemous and ridiculous; consequently Alsted, in his *Historicae*, files the kabbalah as a heresy, together with Muslim blasphemy and the Christian heresies of Arianism and Marcionism, because "the heretical theology is endless."[42] On the other hand, Alsted presents a

---

[40] See von Stuckrad, "Encyclopedias."
[41] As with alchemy, see Alsted, *Encyclopaedia*, 1373: "Huc etiam pertinet Alchymia, quae admodum periculosa est, & ita corruptelis sophistarum abruta, ut non facile lautetur & feratur in provinciale aliquâ: licet multi Jureconsulti censeant, ipsam licitam esse jure civili."
[42] Alsted, *Encyclopaedia*, 1991: "De his copiosè disferit Heurnius in primordiis philosophia. Sequitur theologia blasphemorum Judaeorum, qui in Kabbalâ & Talmud, aliisque libris proponunt vel magica, vel blasphema, vel ridicula. Dico blasphemorum Judaeorum: quia multi doctores Hebraei fuerunt pii, ut Simeon Hazzaddik, Jeschua

quite different picture of these disciplines when he explains them in more detail in the respective sections of his encyclopaedia, a picture that is not easily reconciled with radical Calvinism or reformed theology, but consistent with the reformatory project of Landgrave Moritz. Let me explain this with respect to alchemy and kabbalah.

In the last book of the encyclopaedia, entitled *Apodemica, Critica &c.*, section 5 addresses *Alchymia*. There we find the following remarkable passage:

> There are four columns of the more solid and sublime science amongst those who are wise above the ordinary: namely Theology, natural or philosophical Magic,[43] Christian Kabbalah, and finally true Alchemy. The first [theology] is concerned with the enjoyment of God through faith in Jesus Christ; the second [magic] unfolds the secrets which God the creator has placed in nature; the third [Kabbalah] prepares us for sanctity of life; the fourth [alchemy] preserves the healthy man from disease, restores the sick man to health, raises the poor from poverty, brings the secrets of nature to light, does injury to no one, benefits all, and lastly ensures that a soul in a thoroughly healthy body is free to perform its duties successfully.[44]

Alchemy, thus, is one of the four *columnae solidioris & sublimioris scientiae*. In the *praecepta* to this chapter, Alsted defines "alchemy, or chemistry," as "the art of properly preparing the most pure medicine for perfecting the human body and imperfect metals. This art is also called *Chymia, Chemia, Spagyrica*, or *Ysopaica*."[45] Subsequently, in the

---

Ben Sirach, Rabban Schimeon, & alii. Theologia Mahometanorum in Alcorano extat, plurimis ineptiis & blasphemies referta. Theologia haereticorum est infinita, ut Arrianorum, Marcinitarum, & similium: de quibus paulò post." Note, however, that Rabbi Shim'on, the mythical author of the Zohar, is rendered as "pious."

  [43] Cf. Alsted's distinction between "natural magic" and "necromancy" in his encyclopaedic theological work, published four years earlier. Alsted, *Distinctiones per universam theologiam*, 111 (emphasis original): "*Magia est naturalis, vel necromantica; & haec divinatrix, vel operatrix.*"

  [44] Alsted, *Encyclopaedia*, 2275: "Quatuor sunt columnae solidioris & sublimioris scientiae, apud eos qui supra vulgus sapiunt: videl. Theologia, Magia naturalis seu philosophica, Kabbala Christiana, & deniq; vera Alchymia. Prima siquidem occupatur circa fruitionem Dei per fidem in Jesum Christum: secunda explicat secreta naturae, quae Deus creator in eâ deposuit; tertia nos praeparat ad vitae sanctimoniam: quarta hominem sanum à morbis praeservat, aegrum sanitati restituit, pauperem ab inopiâ sublevat, naturae abdita eruit, nulli injuriam facit, omnibus prodest, denique id procurat, ut anima in corpore bene sano sit expedita ad feliciter obeundum sua munia" (transl. Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 154).

  [45] Alsted, *Encyclopaedia*, 2274 (emphasis original): "Alchymia, seu Chemia, est ars bene praeparandi medicinam purissimam, ad perficiendum corpora hominis & metallorum imperfectorum. Dicitur etiam *Chymia, Chemia, Spagirica, & Ysopaica.*"

regulae, Alsted differentiates "common" (*vulgaris*) from "higher" (*sublimior*) alchemy. While the former is "costly, unknown to the ancients, contaminated by much sophistication, and ennobled by few experiments," the sublime branch of alchemy is simple and effective: "This art can be explained in six or seven lines, and practiced without much cost; true philosophers wrote about it: *One material, one receptacle, one regimen, one operation*."[46] The result of this simple operation is also simple—"one universal medicine" that produces a single universal, which is called *spiritus mundi*. The quintessential material is beyond the four elements and creates all individual things. In order to obtain it, one first has to read the "true philosophers" and, second, look for it in special material, in the elements and in meteors, in rain and dew, where an *aqua fulminea* is hidden. This "divine water" has been described by Democritus and Hermes Trismegistus. (Alsted also refers to Dienheim here.) Ultimately, the divine water or *spiritus mundi* is the ultimate *medicina universalis*.[47] It is apparent that Alsted sees the (true) alchemical search for a universal medicine as part of his overall project of *panacea philosophica*, and consequently the next passage is entitled "The effects of the universal medicine are universals" (*Effecta medicinae universalis sunt universalia*).

In his *praecepta* to the section on *Kabbala*, Alsted defines the kabbalah as "the art concerned with explicating the Hebrew text of Sacred Scripture in a deeper manner."[48] While this is not refutable from an orthodox Christian point of view, the next passage renders a quite different impression: "The objective of [general kabbalah] is partly to conserve and propagate the mysteries of Sacred Scripture, partly the sanctification of the divine names, and through this the deification of man."[49] As Alsted explains in the *regulae*, this deification is a gradual process of purification by "imitating the angelic and divine nature through faith in Christ" (*imitatio naturae angelicae, & inprimis*

---

[46] *Ibid.*, 2276 (emphasis original): "Ea enim est ejusmodi ars, quae sex vel septem lineis potest doceri, & absque magno sumitu exerceri; de quâ veri philosophi scribunt: *Una materia, unum vas, unum regimen, una operatio.*"

[47] *Ibid.*, 2277.

[48] *Ibid.*, 2270: "Kabbala est ars occupata circa textum Hebraicum S. Scripturae, profuniori modo explicandum."

[49] *Ibid.*: "Finis est partim mysteriorum S. Scripturae conservatio atque propagatio, partim nominis divini sanctificatio, & per eam hominis deificatio." Hotson (*Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 158) relates this notion to the "practical objective of the Kabbalah," but the statement is made about the Kabbala generalis, not about Kabbala practica; the latter contains the work of creation and the work of the merkabah (*Kabbala practica est Bereschith, vel Mercabah* [Alsted, *ibid.*]).

divinae, per fidem in Christum), a cleaving to the primordial images of the divine ([a]*d hoc factus est homo, ut adhaereat, unde emanavit, Deo nempe creatori & benefactori suo*) represented in the sefiroth, and a 'climbing' of the system of the sefiroth to the ultimate source.

> Hence, this is that scale, through which man, the student of kabbalah, ascends nearer to deification: insofar namely that the exterior sense transits from the object, through the medium or through transparency, to the interior sense, from there into imagination, and from imagination into judgment, and from judgment into reason, and from reason into intellect, and from intellect into insight, and from insight into light, which illuminates the whole man, and which transforms the illuminated into itself.[50]

Alsted adds other means for reaching the ultimate goal of human deification, well known from magical, or practical, kabbalah, namely meditation, contemplation, and prayer. Together with the idea of illumination and insight that melts into the absolute light, this program is a serious deviation from Calvinist theology with its focus on grace as God's gift to man. Furthermore, "the attainment of this state is limited not to those chosen by God but to the successful practitioners of that esoteric art. [...] While Alsted claimed to have purified the Kabbalah of 'Jewish superstitions', the basic framework within which he is working here remains far more Neoplatonic than Protestant."[51]

In order to determine the status of Alsted's encyclopaedic project in the intellectual history of early modern Europe, it is important to take both his own intention and the very structure of the *Encyclopaedia* into account. As we have seen, Alsted had published various attempts at combining the disparate fields of learning in a context of reformed theology and philosophy, applying terms such as *panacea*, *cursus*, or *reformatio philosophiae*. The last term was announced by Alsted from 1633 onwards as the title of an all-embracing encyclopaedic

---

[50] *Ibid.*, 2171: "Haec igitur est illa scala, per quam homo, Kabbalae studiosus, propiùs ad deificationem ascendit: quatenus videlicet ab objecto, per medium sive diaphanum, sensus exterior transit in sensionem interiorem, & illa in imaginationem, & imaginatio in existimationem, & existimatio in rationem, / ratio in intellectum, & intellectus in mentem, & mens in lucem, qua illuminate omnem hominem, & illuminatum in se transformat." Cf. Alsted, *Systema mnemonicum duplex*, I, 374–376. As Hotson (*Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 158–159) notes, Alsted seems to have taken this interpretation of the sefirotic system from Julius Sperber, an important source of the early Rosicrucian movement who claimed to have seen the *Fama* as early as 1597. This passage is also very reminiscent of Johannes Reuchlin.

[51] Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 159 and 160.

work that he was about to publish. In a pamphlet that is known under the title *Veraedus*, of which unfortunately only one copy has survived,[52] Alsted indicates the method through which the occult arts, the disciplines, and faculties should be reformed and presented. This includes the *Ars Lullianae, Kabbala, Alchymia, Hieroglyphica*, and *Mythologia*, the *Conclusiones* by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, as well as the whole wisdom of Sacred Scripture. The goal is to find a "short route to an extemporaneous way of contemplating, writing and speaking." And then Alsted says that the key to this endeavor is to be found in the terms *cyclopaedia* and *encyclopaedia*. "For *cyclopaedia* means 'circular instruction'; and *encyclopaedia*, 'circle of all the faculties.'" Subsequently, Alsted suggests that the right way to prepare for contemplation, writing, and argumentation is by combining three combinatorial circles: a *circulus generalissimus* with the most general terms used in any discipline whatsoever; a *circulus generalis* with the terms applied in the disciplines under consideration; and a *circulus specialissimus* that explains the terms of the principal part of the disciplines under consideration.[53]

---

[52] On the *Veraedus* and a related work entitled *Colophon de Reformatione Philosophiae ac reliquarum facultatum*, corresponding to the *reformatio philosophiae* announced a few years earlier, see Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 173–174.

[53] Alsted, *Veraedus*, 5–7 (quoted from Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 174 notes 155 and 156): "*Absolvitur hic liber capitibus numero XXVIII hâc serie:* De Reformatione 1. Lexicae et Grammaticae. (…) 14. Chronologiae. 15 universae Encyclopaediae secundùm Scripturas sacris. 16. artis Lullianae. 17 Hieroglyphicae. 18 doctrinae tradentis copiam verborum et rerum. […] 23. Kabbalae. 24. Alchymiae. 25. Conclusionum Joannis Pici Mirandulae. 26. Mythologiae. 27. exercitationis omnium disciplinarum. 28. calculi mathematico-chronologici ex mente Capelli. *Hanc Reformationem T. G. destinatam esse hic meus Veraedus nuntiat. Ut et illud, viam compendiariam ad extemporaneum meditandi, scribendi, et loquendi modum contineri egregiâ illâ Cyclopaediae, et Encyclopaediae voce. Nam cyclopaedia est disciplina circularis:* encyclopaedia*, circulus omnium facultatum. Quicunque igitur viâ planâ et expeditâ ad sapientiae et eloquentiae edita templa cum laude et fructu grassari ac pertingere cupit, sepositis omnibus aliis adminiculis, ita statuat. Omnis meditatio, scriptio, et dissertatio instituatur ex circulo generalissimo, generali, vel specialissimo.* Circulus generalissimus *exhibit omnes omnium facultatum terminus, methodicè dispositos:* generalis *continent terminus illius disciplinae proprios, ad quam pertinet res proposita:* specialissimus *repraesentat terminus praecipuarum partium, quibus haec vel illa disciplina contenetur.* […] *Quare si meditatio, scriptio, vel dissertatio aliqua sit suscipienda, oportet ita statuere, rem propositam esse veluti centrum, et terminus disciplinarum constituere circumferentiam. Proinde illi termini vel singuli, vel combinati, idque infinitis modis, possunt de re propositâ affirmari vel negari*" (emphasis original).

In his *Encyclopaedia*, this ordering of knowledge in a circular fashion—harking back to Raymundus Lullus[54]—was already introduced under the title of *Cyclognomonica*, defined as "the art of competently discussing anything knowable with the aid of dialectical or didactic circles."[55] Although put into the seventh volume of Alsted's encyclopaedia as part of the *farragines disciplinarum*, in fact the "cyclical knowledge" becomes a central tool for organizing the whole knowledge of mankind.[56] Thus, we can conclude "that at this stage *cyclognomonica* or the *artes copiae verborum et rerum* begin to subsume the entire encyclopedia. […] The 'circle of the disciplines' is thus reduced to a system of combinatorial circles; the entire *encyclopaedia* is transformed into *cyclognomonica*."[57] Referring explicitly to Raymundus Lullus, Giordano Bruno, Cornelius Gemma Frisius, and others,[58] Alsted conceptualizes these circles not merely as theoretical divisions, but as active and almost animated mirrors of the divine in the world. The "seven circles that constitute the universe" ([*s*]*unt autem in universum circuli septem*)[59] resemble the circles of the seven planets,

---

[54] Andreas B. Kilcher pointed out that Lull's combinatorial method has significantly influenced early modern encyclopaedianism. He distinguishes two types of reception: a mystical, esoteric, or magical reception (particularly in Pico della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno); and a rational, arithmetic, and semiotic method of finding, systematization, and memorization of knowledge. "It is particularly this line, from Agrippa of Nettesheim to Johann Heinrich Alsted, Athanasius Kircher, and Quirinus Kuhlmann to Leibniz, which led to the encyclopaedia of Romanticism" (Kilcher, *Mathesis und poiesis*, 361; see his whole chapter "Lullistische Enzyklopädik in der frühen Neuzeit," 361–370). I would argue, however, that the two types of reception were in fact closely related. This is why Alsted refers to Pico, Bruno, and Gemma in his definition of *Cyclognomonica* (Alsted, *Encyclopaedia*, 476).

[55] Alsted, *Encyclopaedia*, 2328 [*Praecepta*]: "Cyclognomonica est ars bene disserendi de quovis scibili, beneficio circulorum dialecticorum, seu didacticorum." See the whole chapter "Cyclognomonica, & inprimis ars Lulliana," in which Alsted divides the Cyclognomonica into "verbal" (verbalis) and "real" (realis), with subsequent subdivisions. See also Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 163–172.

[56] On Alsted's description of Lullian "circles," see Alsted, *Clavis artis Lullianae*, 24–48. Interestingly enough, the University of Amsterdam's library edition that I consulted is bound together with Lull's *Ars Magna*.

[57] Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 168.

[58] On the influence of Gemma Frisius' son, Cornelius Gemma, on the *ars cyclognomica*, see the excellent overwiew in Mulsow, "Seelenwagen und Ähnlichkeitsmaschine." On the relationship between philosophy, mathematics, astrology, and cosmography at Louvain—in which the Gemmas play a significant role—see also van den Broecke, *Limits of Influence*, 113–136.

[59] Alsted, *Encyclopaedia*, 476.

which govern the sublunar world.[60] By following these circles of living knowledge, the human being can accomplish the project of universal reformation and ultimately reach deification and sanctification.[61] This was an important change: "The Protestant encyclopaedianism carefully searched for an understanding of the *entire world* based on *natural* contexts; it not merely tried to establish a framework for natural sciences but for metaphysics without theology. This was the overture for the metaphysics of the seventeenth century."[62]

In conclusion: Johann Heinrich Alsted was not an isolated intellectual of seventeenth-century Germany. He discussed the issues of the day with leading scholars across Europe, and his works influenced many others, among them such eminent figures as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.[63] In a time of strong millennialist[64] expectations, confessional conflicts, and religious wars, scholars searched for a universal meaning of history and nature. As the example of Alsted reveals, some found the answers in a creative blending of rationalist and esoteric traditions. For them, encyclopaedianism was more than an intellectual enterprise to map the relevant fields of knowledge. It was embedded in an ongoing search for universal reform of theology, philosophy, politics, and culture, ultimately leading to a perfection or even deification of the human being.

---

[60] This dynamism is also attested in Cornelius Gemma's *De arte cyclognomica* (1619), which Alsted has used in his own approach. For instance, book II, 141–142, links the *Bonum Absolute in Homine* to the *communio divini radii*. The fact that Alsted's *Encyclopaedia* is organized in seven volumes likewise reveals the universalist intention of Alsted's project.

[61] Hotson (*Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 172) notes: "As in the pansophic dreams of Alsted's youth and the Kabbalistic fantasies of his mature years, the combinatorial encyclopedia adumbrated in 1630 is, among other things, a giant engine geared up for the great project of sanctification."

[62] Holz, *Wider die Philosophie der Gegenreformation*, 17.

[63] See Antognazza & Hotson (eds.), *Alsted and Leibniz*; Holz, *Wider die Philosophie der Gegenreformation*, 1–3.

[64] The question of Alsted's millenarianism, although important for his work, falls outside the scope of this study. Alsted's most important contribution to apocalyptic speculation, including astrological and prophetic tradition, is his *Diatribe de mille annis apocalypticis* (1627), which makes use of Johannes Piscator's and Christoph Besold's writings, among others. See Klein & Kramer (eds.), *J.H. Alsted, Herborns calvinistische Theologie und Wissenschaft*; Antognazza & Hotson (eds.), *Alsted and Leibniz*; Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, 182–222; and particularly Hotson, *Paradise Postponed*.

Scholasticism and Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism and Lullism, rationalism and Hermeticism existed side by side in seventeenth-century German intellectual discourse. While some scholars polemically distinguished the one from the other, there were others who, like Alsted, created frameworks of interpretation that merged esoteric doctrines with rationalist methods. But the example of Alsted reveals yet another fact: the reasons for adopting or refuting certain philosophical and religious assumptions were not merely intellectual; they were heavily influenced by contingent, and often precarious, political, military, and economic contexts.

CONCLUSION: LOCATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

> For now the question is not about how to define words like 'truth' or 'rationality' or 'philosophy,' but about what self-image our society should have of itself. The ritual invocation of the 'need to avoid relativism' is most comprehensible as an expression of the need to preserve certain habits of contemporary European life. These are the habits nurtured by the Enlightenment, and justified by it in terms of an appeal of Reason, conceived as a transcultural human ability to correspond to reality, a faculty whose possession and use is demonstrated by obedience to explicit criteria.
>
> Richard Rorty

The chapters of this book cover a wide range of topics and a long period of historical development and change. Rather than being arbitrary or eclectic, the reasons for me to choose the topics of the chapters were an attempt to exemplarily demonstrate a discursive structure that is operative in Western intellectual and cultural history. The study of esotericism is closely linked to these discursive structures. In fact, it is part of them.

Writing Histories, Narrating Pasts

Addressing discursive structures in historical perspective allows for a more nuanced analysis and interpretation of the past and the present. From such a perspective, historical imagination is the complex interplay of several dimensions and practices: from the innumerable traces that previous generations have left, historians select a few and call them 'sources.' The criteria for selecting data are sometimes apparent and easy to understand; often, however, historians are unaware of the episteme that determines the criteria of what can be regarded as approved knowledge, worthy of consideration. From another perspective, sociologists of science have argued that these criteria are actually influenced by social configurations and negotiations, rather than by the 'truth' of the facts.

Such a position, in turn, mirrors discussions in contemporary philosophy. If we consider, for instance, Richard Rorty's post-analytical pragmatism, we can see the parallel development—or interferences—between historiography, sociology of science, and philosophy (we can add anthropology and the study of religion to this list). In opposition to realism Rorty suggests that we should leave behind our attempt to find *objectivity* in our models that would mirror the reality of the world. Rather, what we see at work is the attempt to establish *solidarity* among peer-groups. At stake is not the truth of our models but their power of conviction.

> For the pragmatist […], "knowledge" is, like "truth," simply a compliment paid to the beliefs which we think so well justified that, for the moment, further justification is not needed. An inquiry into the nature of knowledge can, on his view, only be a sociohistorical account of how various people have tried to reach agreement on what to believe.[1]

The power of conviction is the link to the Foucauldian episteme. The criteria of what is approved knowledge in a given peer-group or society is exactly what escapes the influence of an individual. Solidarity, in this sense, can simply mean an accommodation of power and an affirmation of the determining discourse.

The episteme also determines the scholarly vocabulary. The emergence of a research field of 'Western esotericism' can itself be interpreted as a discursive event that is linked to the change of episteme that influenced European discourses after the Second World War and the 1960s.[2] People were looking for alternative models for interpreting Western culture, models that seemed more fit to explain the plurality and ambiguity of European identities. The concept of esotericism is an attempt to come up with a new vocabulary. But then we are also confronted with the paradox that Rorty reminds us of:

> On the view of philosophy which I am offering, philosophers should not be asked for arguments against, for example, the correspondence theory of truth or the idea of 'intrinsic nature of reality.' The trouble with argu-

---

[1] Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?," 7. On Rorty's pragmatism and its impact on the methodology of religious studies see von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie*, 14–68.

[2] Michael Bergunder argues similarly and notes that in esotericism research "the question, how scholars come to construct a certain object of research in the first place, is mostly neglected" (Bergunder, "Was ist Esoterik," 478). The present book is an attempt to reflect on these discursive events.

ments against the use of a familiar and time-honoured vocabulary is that they are expected to be phrased in that very vocabulary.[3]

The notion of 'esoteric discourse' allows us to explore new vocabularies without neglecting the power structures and epistemes that determine our own scholarly work.

But how, we may ask, can we cope with the problem of historiography? Is there a way to distinguish a good narrative from a bad one, a well-argued interpretation from an arbitrary one? To find answers to these questions, we can be guided both by current theories of historiography and by making use of older concepts that were elaborated in the first three decades of the twentieth century. It is not only today that historians have been aware of the constructive elements in their narration of the past. At the turn of the twentieth century scholars hotly debated the issues of subjectivity and objectivity, as well as the problem of choosing from a huge amount of data those facts that seem to fit into our presentation. This highly precarious but nonetheless inescapable methodological process was known as *reductionism*.

The discussion was pushed forward by the seminal works of philosophers and sociologists, among them Ernst Troeltsch, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber. Although they considered history to be a critical interpretation of an objective past and present, they reflected on their own role in narrating history and took the contingencies and limitations of their positions into account. To illuminate this, let me quote the first two sentences of Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic*. In his foreword (written in 1920) he introduces the reader to his main question thus:

> Problems of universal history will be dealt with by the son of the modern European cultural world unavoidably and justifiably under the question: What sequence of circumstances led to the fact that on occidental grounds in particular, and only there, emerged cultural phenomena, which lie—at least as we like to imagine it—in a line of developments towards *universal* significance and validity? Only in the occident there exists "*science*" in that state of development, which we today accept as "valid."[4]

These two sentences contain a number of methodological precautions that have gone largely unnoticed after Weber and were recovered by

---

[3] Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 8–9.
[4] Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, 1 (italics original).

critical theory only recently. First, Weber claims ethnocentricity—quite like Richard Rorty[5]—as an unavoidable yet at the same time justified limit of scholarly perception. Second, he reminds the reader of ethnicity's subjective and contingent desire to imagine universal validity in terms of its own tradition. And, third, Weber allows the scholar to generalize local and temporally limited phenomena ("we today") into something of universal validity, although this is a *circulus vitiosus*, for what turns out to be 'valid' depends on what had been defined as 'valid' beforehand. At first sight, that recursiveness seems to be a lapse in his argument. But it might also be a pragmatic way to shun the consequences of essentialism, on the one hand, and the impossibility of historic narrative, on the other.

In my opinion there are strong arguments for this position. There is no chance to escape the normative functions of speech and discourse; even when we take a radically relativistic stand, this stand implicitly carries normative judgments and preconceived rulings. Thus, the best way to deal with that problem—or, rather, to "democratize" the discussion—is not the evasion of biased terms but, rather, reflexivity in their use. This holds true in particular when we do not have a less biased alternative term in stock, as is the case with *history*.

Another consequence is also important. A confusion of the methodological functions of the term *history* is responsible for a lot of misunderstanding in contemporary debates in the field of religious studies. This outcome is because of the disregard for models and concepts that have been elaborated within the confines of historiography. An important contribution to this methodolocial discussion comes from Reinhart Koselleck, who introduced the distinction between "space of experience" (*Erfahrungsraum*) and "horizon of expectation" (*Erwartungshorizont*).

> Experience and expectation, because they interlace past and future, are two appropriate categories for thematizing historical time. The categories are suitable to find historical time also in the area of empiric research

---

[5] "To be ethnocentric is to divide the human race into the people to whom one must justify one's beliefs and the others. The first group—one's *ethnos*—comprises those who share enough of one's beliefs to make fruitful conversation possible. In this sense, everybody is ethnocentric when engaged in actual debate, no matter how much realist rhetoric about objectivity he produces in his study" (Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?," 13). On a comparison between Weber and 'postmodern' thinkers see Gane, *Max Weber and Postmodern Theory*.

because they are determining, aggregated with content, the concrete units of action in the execution of social and political movement.[6]

Recapitulating the past in the light of the present and the prospects of the future constitutes the field of tension in which historiography takes place. Historical meaning is always *ascribed* and *generated* meaning, a process that in the German discussion is referred to as *historische Sinnbildung*. Historian Jörn Rüsen distinguishes three elements that together constitute historical meaning—levels of contents, of formal construction, and of function. With regard to contents, historiography has to make sure that the (re)presented past really has empirical grounding, that is, the story told must be recognized as factitious by the recipients (or the *ethnos*, in Rorty's parlance). The formal element simply calls for the logical plausibility of the story, for instance, in its details' temporal relations. The functional level, finally, points to the high significance for contemporary discourse because the practical application of the presented past is always an inherent part of the narration. In Rüsen's words:

> Historical meaning [*Sinn*], hence, is divided in the three components of the empirical, of interpretation, and of orientation. All three refer to the past in a communicated temporal distance to the present. […] "Meaning" [appears] as an adequate term for the coherence that is crucial in this relationship [between past and present]. Meaning is the integration of all three components. They have to refer to one another, converge in one another, and enhance one another. […] The integration is practically realized and applied in narrative operations. Meaning in narrative is the red thread the story follows: it is generated by the respective cultural pattern of interpretation.[7]

Rüsen's approach is an example of the possibility of arriving at a coherent theory of history that does not hide its constructive elements and nonetheless is able to correlate facts of the past with their (re)presentation in the present under a broad concept of history. History, in this perspective, is an analytical term that does not explain anything in itself. It is located on a different level of argument. It is a metaterm needed for interpretation at the interface of past and present. It should not be mixed up with the "facts" themselves—a

---

6 Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 353. On Koselleck and others (particularly Paul Ricoeur and Hayden White) see Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History*, 187–195; Kippenberg & von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, 37–48.
7 Rüsen, "Was heißt: Sinn der Geschichte?," 36.

misunderstanding that would lead to essentialism—but, rather, should be regarded as a reminder that there are facts "out there" that influence our positions or even determine our concepts, even though our representations of history are not a mirror of actual facts.

Applying "history" in such a way means to get the facts and the data back on board.[8] "History" is based on a set of facts that happen and call for explanation. Hence, our interpretations, contingent and relative as they are, are influenced by facts that are not manipulated or even understood by ourselves. This is what discourse theory helps us to understand. The narratives of post-Enlightenment Europe about what constitutes the 'modern West' and what has been left behind when the West entered into modernity are powerful tools in a discourse of Western identity formation. It is within this discourse that we should locate esotericism and its academic study.

Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities

I have argued above that the term 'occult sciences' is a misleading category that artificially links disciplines that are in fact very diverse and historically complex. However, what unites—to some extent—the disciplines of astrology, alchemy, and magic, is the fact that all of them have been 'distanced away' by what I call the processes of disjunction since the eighteenth century. In such a dialectic, these disciplines function as a 'significant Other' of post-Enlightenment Western identities. From a discursive point of view, it is interesting to look at the formation of academic theories that legitimate the distancing of these disciplines. The episteme even determines what counts as relevant objects of study in the academy.

Let me explain this mechanism with reference to astrology. The questions, 'How should we determine the place of astrology in West-

---

8 Therefore, Jonathan Z. Smith's famous dictum—"*there is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study*" (*Imagining Religion*, xi, italics original)—appears to be misleading. It has become a scholarly fashion to quote these sentences; however, most scholars of religion do not seem to read the first part of the italicized sentence which says that "there is a staggering amount of data, of phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religious." This renders a much more nuanced impression of what Smith is actually arguing. It can be linked to my distinction between 'traces' and 'sources.'

ern culture?', and 'What is the status of astrology in the academy?' are intrinsically linked to each other because the dominant discourse that is operative in modern Western societies determines the research topics, the methodological preferences, and the symbolic capital that can be gained in the academy. With regard to the academic study of astrology, scholars who engage the history of this discipline are confronted with presupposed attitudes, prejudices, or misunderstandings more often than this is the case with other topics in Western history. Often, implicitly or explicitly, it seems to be a question of belief or the lack thereof that determines the discourse on astrology in modern universities.

This situation is the reason why many of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians who focused their research on astrology seemed to feel the need to justify what they did. Auguste Bouché-Leclercq (1842–1924), for instance, ends the preface of his celebrated study on Greek astrology with the remark that it is perhaps not a simple waste of time to study things with which other people have wasted their time.[9] At the end of the nineteenth century, it was a widespread belief that European post-Enlightenment modernity had left astrological "superstition" behind for good, and that this discipline could now only be studied as a curiosity. This easy dismissal changed with Aby Warburg (1866–1929), whose legendary lecture in 1912 on the cycle of frescos in the Palazzo Schifanoia and its astrological iconography suddenly moved astrology into the center of academic scrutiny.[10] With his study *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeit* (1920)[11] Warburg—and subsequently many scholars of the Warburg School—paid attention to the important role of astrology in the Renaissance. He interpreted the Renaissance as a conscious revival of ancient paganism.

Other scholars of Warburg's generation wrote important contributions to our historical understanding of ancient astrology. Franz Cumont (1868–1947) and Franz Boll (1867–1923) collected and edited an incredible quantity of astrological manuscripts and fragments from

---

[9] "On voudra bien ne pas prendre pour un paradoxe ma conclusion: à savoir, qu'on ne perd pas son temps en recherchant à quoi d'autres ont perdu le leur" (Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie grecque*, ix).

[10] See Warburg, "Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie."

[11] See Warburg, "Heidnisch-antike Weissagung."

the ancient Greek world in the *Corpus codicum astrologorum Grae-corum*.[12] Subsequently, Wilhelm Gundel and his son Hans Georg devoted their entire scholarly life to the history of ancient astrology;[13] and let us not forget Lynn Thorndike's encyclopedic *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (1923–1958), which covers no fewer than seventeen centuries. Thorndike and the other historians thus made accessible primary sources that had been unknown or had not been taken seriously before. At the same time, many historians of science (including Thorndike) had difficulties interpreting astrological sources in a neutral way. Representing this scholarly bias, George Sarton, in a brief review of a book on Mandaean astrology, in 1950 dismissed the so-called "Book of the Zodiac" as "a wretched collection of omens, debased astrology and miscellaneous nonsense ultimately derived from Arabic, Greek, Persian and all the superstitious flotsam of the Near East."[14] Despite the famous one-page reply by Otto Neugebauer (1889–1990), published under the title "The Study of Wretched Subjects" in the scholarly journal *Isis*, and despite Neugebauer's insistence on the importance of astrology for our understanding of the history of the natural sciences,[15] this area of scholarly research remains somewhat wretched even today.

The problems related to the academic study of astrology were noted by Paul Feyerabend in his critique of the "Statement of 186 Leading Scientists" against astrology (1975), including eighteen Nobel Prize winners.[16] "The learned gentlemen have strong convictions, they use their authority to spread these convictions (why 186 signatures if one has arguments?), they know a few phrases which sound like arguments, but they certainly do not know what they are talking about."[17] To be sure, Feyerabend did not intend his critique as a defense of modern astrology: "It is interesting to see how closely both parties approach each other in ignorance, conceit and the wish for easy power over minds."[18]

---

[12] Other influential contributions include Cumont, *L'Egyptes des astrologues*, and Boll, *Sphaera*.

[13] See particularly Gundel & Gundel, *Astrologumena*, which still is a standard work.

[14] Sarton & Siegel, "Seventy-Sixth Critical Bibliography."

[15] See also Neugebauer, *Exact Sciences in Antiquity*.

[16] Anonymous, "Objections to Astrology."

[17] Feyerabend, "The Strange Case of Astrology," 91.

[18] *Ibid.*, 96.

Steven vanden Broecke has this in mind when he tells the story of his first academic paper, devoted to an unknown astrological instrument that he had studied for months. One of the historians in the audience responded to that paper with the exclamation: "Do you believe in this? This is rubbish! Charlatanism!" Vanden Broecke remarks that this intervention highlights the problematic position of astrology "in virtually any grand narrative of the history of Western science." Although cultural historians have established the importance of astrology in early modern Europe,

> this does not seem to have convinced many historians of science that the topic might be relevant to *their* concerns. We still need an approach to early modern astrology that confirms its omnipresence and flexibility, but explores its intimate ties with other "scientific" disciplines like natural philosophy, medicine, or astronomy as well.[19]

Let me also call upon Tamsyn Barton here who, like vanden Broecke, does not feel the need anymore to justify what she is doing.

> [I]n this book there will be no prizes awarded for scientific achievement to any particular person or group, nor censure for those who fail to match up to modern ideals of science. Indeed, I think that the old tendency to see astrology as a pseudo-science is an anachronistic diversion from the more fruitful enquiry into how astrology functioned in antiquity.[20]

More recently, a few scholars even go one step further and combine their historical work with a critique of modern scientific culture, which sometimes makes them advocates of astrology.[21] It may be doubted, however, whether advocacy is a better academic position than condemnation.

The reluctance of modern historians to recognize astrology as an important element of European cultural history and the struggles between natural scientists and astrologers about the legitimacy of astrology are interesting elements of modern discourse, worthy of investigation. It may even be argued that it is *this* dialectic that is the

---

[19] Vanden Broecke, *Limits of Influence*, 1 (italics original).

[20] Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 7.

[21] Cf., for instance, Roy Willis' and Patrick Curry's position "that astrology is best understood as a divinatory technique: a dialogue with the divine in a postmodern, post-Christian, and newly reanimated, universe" (Willis & Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture*, 1). Cf. also Curry's controversial notion of the "truth of astrology" in Curry, "Historiography of Astrology," 270.

main object of research for scholars of esotericism, even if such an 'object' is located on a meta-level of historical structures. At stake here are not only historical facts but also identities. Pushing astrology to the margins of natural science or rationality confirms modern views of Western identity as enlightened, rational, and immune from its 'pagan past.'

Astrology is only one 'location of knowledge' that I have engaged in this book. The search for perfect knowledge in language, in experience, in art, or in the natural sciences has been an important dimension of European culture from late antiquity onward. Despite the processes of disjunction that started with the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, it is not the case that the fascination with this search for perfect knowledge disappeared. What we witness, rather, is a polarization of alternatives and a sharpening of contrasts between those domains. The dialectic of fascination and refutation vis-à-vis those knowledge claims still characterizes the modern world.

This radicalization of alternatives could be the ultimate meaning of modernity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Abū Ma'shar: Yamamoto & Burnett (ed./trans.), *Abū Ma'šar on Historical Astrology: The Book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions)*, ed. and trans. by Keiji Yamamoto & Charles Burnett, 2 vols., Leiden etc.: Brill 2000.

Adam, Melchior, *Vitae Germanorum philosophorum: qui seculo superiori, et quod excurrit, philosophicis ac humanioribus literis clari floruerunt*, Heidelberg: imp. Jonae Rosae, typis Johannis Lacelloti 1615.

Alsted, Johann Heinrich, *Panacea philosophica, id est facilis, nova, et accurate methodus docendi et discendi universam encyclopaediam [...] Accessit eiusdem criticus, de infinito harmonico philosophiae Aristotelicae, Lullianae et Rameae*, Herborn: Corvinus 1610.

—— *Systema mnemonicum duplex I. Minus, succincto praeceptorum ordine quatuor libris adornatum. II. Maius, pleniore praeceptorum methodo, et commentariis scriptis ad praeceptorum illustrationem adornatum septem libris*, Frankfurt/M.: Palthenius 1610.

—— *Artificium perorandi traditum à Jordano Bruno Nolano Italo, communicatum à Johan-Henrico Alstedio In gratiam eorum, qui eloquentiae vim et rationem cognoscere cupiunt*, Frankfurt/M.: Anton Humm 1612.

—— *Cursus philosophici encyclopaedia libris XXVII compectens universae philosophiae methodum, serie praeceptorum, regularum et commentariorum perpetuâ*, 2 vols., Herborn: Corvinius 1620.

—— *Distinctiones per universam theologiam; sumtae ex canone sacrarum literarum & classicis theologis*, Frankfurt/M.: Conrad Eifrid 1626.

—— *Diatribe de mille annis apocalypticis*, Frankfurt/M.: Conrad Eifrid 1627.

—— *Encyclopaedia Septem tomis distincta [...]*, 7 vols. in 2 tomes, Herborn: Hulsius 1630; new facsimile edition Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog 1989–1990.

—— *Clavis artis Lullianae [...] Accessit Novum speculum logices*, Strasburg: Zetzner 1609, second ed. 1633.

Arnold, Gottfried, *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historien, Vom Anfang des Neuen Testaments Biß auf das Jahr Christi 1699*, in three parts, Schaffhausen: Emanuel und Benedict Hurter, 1740–1742.

Arndt, Johann, *Vier Bücher vom wahren Christenthumb [...]*, Amsterdam: Joachim Nosche 1664. First ed. Braunschweig 1606.

Böhme, Jacob: Will-Erich Peuckert & August Faust (eds.), *Jacob Böhme: Sämtliche Schriften*, 11 vols., Stuttgart: Frommmanns Verlag 1955–1961.

Corpus Hermeticum: Brian P. Copenhaver, Hermetica: *The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation with Notes and Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992.

Crinito, Piero, *De Honesta Disciplina Libri XXV*, Basileae: Henr. Petrus 1532.

Dee, John, *Monas Hieroglyphica*, Antwerp: Willem Sylvius 1564.

—— Josten, C.H. (trans./ed.), "A Translation of John Dee's *Monas hieroglyphica*, With an Introduction and Annotations," *Ambix 12* (1964) 112–221.

—— Fenton, Edward (ed.), *The Diaries of John Dee,* Charlbury, Oxfordshire: Day Books 1998.

de Leon, Moses, *Sefer Sheqel ha-Qodesh of R. Moses de Leon*, ed. by Charles Mopsik, Los Angeles: Cherub Press 1996.

Ficino, Marsilio, *The* Philebus *Commentary*, a critical edition and translation by Michael J.B. Allen, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press 1975.

Gemma Frisius, Cornelius, *De arte cyclognomica tomi III doctrinam ordinum universam […] in unius communissimae et circularis methodi speciem referentis, quae per animorum triplices orbes ad spherae caelestis similitudinem fabricatos*, Antwerp: Christoffel Plantijn 1619 (first ed. 1569).

Goclenius, Rudolf, *Conciliator Philosophicus*, Kassel: Wilhelm Wesseli 1609.

Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, translated with introduction and notes by Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon & Jackson P. Hershbell, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2003.

Keckermann, Bartholomäus, *Systema systematum clarissimi viri Dn. Bartholomaei Keckermanni, omnia huius autoris scripta philosophica uno volumine comprehensa lectori exhibens*, ed. J.H. Alsted, 2 vols., Hanau: Antonius 1613.

—— *Opera omnia quae extant tomus primus [/secundus]*, 2 vols., Geneva & Cologne: Petrus Aubertus 1614.

Knorr von Rosenroth, Christian Freiherr, *Kabbala Denudata*, Sulzbach: Abraham Lichtentaler 1677, 2 vols., reprint Hildesheim etc.: Georg Olms 1999.

Leone Ebreo, *The Philosophy of Love (Dialoghi d'Amore)*, trans. by E. Friedberg-Seeley & J.H. Barnes, London: Soncino Press 1937.

Nag Hammadi Codex: James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, revised edition, San Francisco: HarperCollins 1990.

Philo of Alexandria: F.H. Colson & G.H. Whitaker (ed./trans.), *Philo I*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1971.

—— *De Opificio Mundi*: *On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses*, introduction, translation and commentary by David T. Runia, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2001.

Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni, *Opera Omnia*, Basilae: Per Heinricum Petri 1557, reprint in 2 vols. (the second volume comprises the works of Gian Francesco Pico, as well), ed. by Cesare Vasoli, Hildesheim: Olms 1969.

—— Stephen A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486). The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems*, Tempe: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 1998.

Proclus: Thomas Moore Johnson (trans.), *The Exhortation to Philosophy: Including the Letters of Jamblichus, and Proclus' Commentary on the Chaldean Oracles*, ed. by Stephen Neuville, Grand Rapids: Phanes 1988.

Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, edited and translated by F.E. Robbins (The Loeb Classical Library 435), Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press 2001 (first ed. 1940).

Reuchlin, Johannes: Martin Goodman & Sarah Goodman (ed./trans.), *Johann Reuchlin: De Arte Cabalistica—On the Art of the Kabbalah*, translation by Martin and Sarah Goodman, introduction by G. Lloyd Jones, Norwalk: Abaris Books 1983.

—— Giulio Busi & Saverio Campanini (ed./trans.), *Johannes Reuchlin: L'arte cabalistica (*De arte cabalistica*)*, Florence: Opus Libri 1995.

Sefer ha-Bahir: Reuven Margaliot (ed.), *Sefer ha-Bahir*, Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook 1978.

—— Daniel Abrams (ed.), with an introduction by Moshe Idel, *The Book Bahir: An Edition Based on the Earliest Manuscripts*, Los Angeles: Cherub Press 1994 (Hebrew).

—— Saverio Campanini (ed.), with a foreword by Giulio Busi, *The Book of Bahir: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, Turin: Nino Aragno 2005.

Sefer ha-Zohar: Reuven Margaliot (ed.), *Sefer ha-Zohar*, 6th edition, 3 vols., Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook 1984.

—— Daniel C. Matt (ed.), *The Zohar Pritzker Edition*, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt, as yet 4 vols., Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004–2007.

Sefer Yetzirah: A. Peter Hayman (ed./trans.), *Sefer Yesira*, ed., trans. and text-critical commentary by A. Peter Hayman, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2004.

Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta, ed. by Hans von Arnim, 4 vols., Leipzig 1903–1924, reprint Stuttgart: Teubner 1964.

Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā, *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica I*, ed. by Henry Corbin, Istanbul: Maarif Matbaasi 1945.

—— *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica II*, ed. by H. Corbin, Tehran: Institut Franco-Iranien 1952.

—— *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica III*, ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Tehran: Institut Franco-Iranien 1970.

—— *The Philosophy of Illumination*, a new critical edition of the text of *Ḥikmat al ishrāq* with English translation, notes, commentary and introduction by John Walbridge & Hossein Ziai, Provo: Brigham Young University Press 1999.

van Helmont, Francis Mercury, *The Alphabet of Nature*, trans. from the Latin with an Introduction and Annotations by Allison P. Coudert & Taylor Corse, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2007.

Secondary Literature

Åkerman, Susanna, "Helisaeus Roeslin, the New Star, and the Last Judgement," in: Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica (ed.): *Rosenkreuz als europäisches Phänomen im 17. Jahrhundert*, Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan 2002, 339–359.

Allen, Michael J.B. & Valery Rees, with Martin Davies (eds.), *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2002.

al-Maqdisī, Ğūrğ, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West: With Special Reference to Scholasticism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1990.

Anidjar, Gil, *"Our Place in al-Andalus": Kabbalah, Philosophy, Literature in Arab Jewish Letters*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2002.

Anonymous, "Objections to Astrology: A Statement by 186 Leading Scientists," *The Humanist* 35 (September/October 1975), 4–16; also available at The American Humanist Association, http://www.americanhumanist.org/about/astrology.html, retrieved on 16 March 2009.

Antognazza, M.R. & Howard Hotson (eds.), *Alsted and Leibniz on God, the Magistrate and the Millennium*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1999.

Armstrong, David M., *Nominalism and Realism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1978.

Asad, Talal, "Muslims and European Identity," in: Pagden (ed.), *The Idea of Europe from Antiquity to the European Union*, 209–227.

Asimov, Isaac, *The Genetic Code: The Story of DNA—The Chain of Life*, London: John Murray 1962.

Asprem, Egil, "Magic Naturalized? Negotiating Science and Occult Experience in Crowley's 'Scientific Illuminism,'" *Aries* 8/2 (2008), 139–165.

Assmann, Jan, "Die Macht der Bilder: Rahmenbedingungen ikonischen Handelns im Alten Ägypten," *Visible Religion: Annual for Religious Iconography* VII (1990), 1–20.

—— *Die mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus*, Munich: Hanser 2003.

Austin, John L., *How to Do Things with Words*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1962.

Azzolini, Monika, "Reading Health in the Stars: Politics and Medical Astrology in Renaissance Milan," in: Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2005, 183–205.

Bächtold-Stäubli, Hanns (ed., in collaboration with Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, 10 vols., Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 1927–1942 (reprint 1987).

Bakar, Osman, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study in Islamic Philosophies of Science*, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society 1998.

Bakewell, Liza, "Image Acts," *The American Anthropologist* 100 (1998), 22–32.

Balkenende, Jan Peter et al. (eds.), *De kunst van het leven: De cultuuruitdaging van de 21ᵉ eeuw*, Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum 1999.

Barber, Bernard, *Science and the Social Order*, Glencoe: Free Press 1952.

Barbour, Ian G., *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*, San Francisco: HarperCollins 1997.

Barnard, Malcolm, *Approaches to Understanding Visual Culture*, Basingstoke: Palgrave 2001.

Barnes, Jonathan (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995.

Barnes, Robin Bruce, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1988.

Barton, Tamsyn, *Ancient Astrology*, London & New York: Routledge 1994.

Bauckham, Richard (ed.), *Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth Century Apocalypticism, Millenarianism, and the English Revolution*, Oxford: Sutton Courtenay Press 1978.

Beierwaltes, Werner, "Reuchlin und Pico della Mirandola," *Tijdschrift voor philosophie* 56 (1994), 313–336.

Belting, Hans, *Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter: Form und Funktion früher Bildtafeln der Passion*, Berlin: Mann 1981.

—— *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich: C.H. Beck 1991.

—— "MEDIUM—BILD—KÖRPER: Einführung in das Thema," in: Belting (ed.), *Bild-Anthropologie*, 11–55.

—— *Das echte Bild: Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen*, Munich: C.H. Beck 2005.

—— *Florenz und Bagdad: Eine westöstliche Geschichte des Blicks*, Munich: C.H. Beck 2008.

Belting, Hans (ed.), *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, Munich: Fink 2001.

Belting, Hans, Dietmar Kamper & Martin Schulz (eds.), *Quel Corps? Eine Frage der Repräsentation*, Munich: Fink 2002.

Benavides, Gustavo, "Western Religion and the Self-Canceling of Modernity," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 1/1 (2008), 85–115.

Ben-Shalom, R., "The Converso as Subversive: Jewish Traditions of Christian Libel?," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50 (1999), 259–266.

Berger, Peter L. (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center 1999.

Berger, Peter L. & Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Garden City: Doubleday 1966.

Bergunder, Michael, "'Östliche' Religionen und Gewalt," in: Friedrich Schweitzer (ed.), *Religion, Politik und Gewalt*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2006, 136–165.

—— "Was ist Esoterik? Religionswissenschaftliche Überlegungen zum Gegenstand der Esoterikforschung," in: Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, unter Mitarbeit von Andre Rudolph (ed.), *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Rezeption—Integration—Konfrontation*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer 2008, 477–507.

Bertau, Karl, *Schrift—Macht—Heiligkeit in den Literaturen des jüdisch-christlich-muslimischen Mittelalters*, ed. by Sonja Glauch, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2005.

Besançon, Alain, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2000.

Besterman, Theodore, *Crystalgazing: A Study in the History, Distribution, Theory, and Practice of Skrying*, London: W. Rider & Son 1924.

Bhabha, Homi K., *The Location of Culture*, 2nd ed., New York & London: Routledge 2004.

Black, Robert, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001.

Bland, Kalman P., "Elijah del Medigo's Averroist Response to the Kabbalahs of the Fifteenth-Century Jewry and Pico della Mirandola," *Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1991), 3–53.

Blume, Dieter, *Regenten des Himmels: Astrologische Bilder in Mittelalter und Renaissance*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2000.

Blumenberg, Hans, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1986.

Bochinger, Christoph, *"New Age" und moderne Religion: Religionswissenschaftliche Analysen*, Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser 1994.

Boehm, Gottfried, "Die Bilderfrage," in: *idem* (ed.): *Was ist ein Bild?*, Munich: Fink 1994, 325–343.

Boll, Franz, *Sphaera: Neue Griechische Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Sternbilder*, Leipzig: Teubner 1903.

Bond, George C. & Angela Gilliam (eds.), *Social Constructions of the Past: Representation as Power*, New York & London: Routledge 1994.

Bonfil, Robert, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy*, London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization 1993.

—— "Aliens Within: The Jews and Antijudaism," in: Th. A. Brady, Jr., H. Oberman & J.D. Tracy (eds.), *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, Leiden: Eerdmans 1994, 263–302.

—— *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press 1994.

Bono, James, *The Word of God and the Languages of Man*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1995.

Borgolte, Michael, *Christen, Juden, Muselmanen: Die Erben der Antike und der Aufstieg des Abendlandes 200 bis 1400 n.Chr.*, Munich: Siedler 2006.

Borodowski, Alfredo Fabio, *Isaac Abravanel on Miracles, Creation, Prophecy, and Evil: The Tension between Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Biblical Commentary*, New York etc.: Lang 2003.

Borst, Arno, *Die karolingische Kalenderreform*, Hannover: Hahn 1998.

—— *Computus: Zeit und Zahl in der Geschichte Europas*, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag 1999.

Borst, Arno (ed.), *Der karolingische Reichskalender und seine Überlieferung bis ins 12. Jahrhundert*, Hannover: Hahn 2001.

Bouché-Leclercq, Auguste, *L'astrologie Grecque*, Paris: Ernest Leroux 1899.

Boudet, Jean-Patrice, *Entre science et nigromance: Astrologie, divination et magie dans l'Occident médiéval (XIIᵉ–XVᵉ siècle)*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne 2006.

Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1984.

Bourdieu, Pierre & Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992.

Brand, Rafael Gil, *Lehrbuch der klassischen Astrologie*, Mössingen: Chiron 2000.

Brandt, Christina, *Metapher und Experiment: Von der Virusforschung zum genetischen Code*, Göttingen: Wallstein 2004.

Brann, Ross, *Power in the Portrayal: Representations of Jews and Muslims in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Islamic Spain*, Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press 2002.

Bräunlein, Peter J., "Bildakte. Religionswissenschaft im Dialog mit einer neuen Bildwissenschaft," in: Brigitte Luchesi & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Religion im kulturellen*

Diskurs: Festschrift für Hans G. Kippenberg zu seinem 65. Geburtstag / Religion in Cultural Discourse: Essays in Honor of Hans G. Kippenberg on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2004, 195–231.

—— "Religionsgeschichte als Mediengeschichte: Eine Skizze," *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 55 (2004), 325–329.

—— "'Zurück zu den Sachen!'—Religionswissenschaft vor dem Objekt," in: *idem* (ed.), *Religion & Museum: Zur visuellen Repräsentation von Religion/en im öffentlichen Raum*, Bielefeld: transcript 2004, 1–54.

Bredekamp, Horst, "Götterdämmerung des Neuplatonismus," in: Andreas Beyer (ed.), *Die Lesbarkeit der Kunst: Zur Geistes-Gegenwart der Ikonologie*, Berlin: Wagenbach 1992, 75–83; 102–106.

Bredekamp, Horst (ed.), *Edgar Wind: Kunsthistoriker und Philosoph*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1998.

Bremmer, Jan N., "Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm: Notes Towards a Genealogy," *Church History and Religious Culture* 88 (2008), 1–17.

—— "Secularization: Notes Toward a Genealogy," in: Hent de Vries (ed.), *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, New York: Fordham University Press 2008, 432–437.

Bremmer, Jan N. & Jan R. Veenstra (eds.), *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, Leuven: Peeters 2002.

Brown, Callum G., *The Death of Christian Britain*, London: Routledge 2001.

—— "The Secularisation Decade: What the 1960s have done to the Study of Religion," in: McLeod & Ustorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe*, 29–46.

Bryer, Anthony & Judith Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, University of Birmingham, March 1975, Birmingham: University of Birmingham 1977.

Buchli, Victor (ed.), *Material Culture: Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences*, 3 vols., London: Routledge 2004.

Burnett, Charles, "Adelard, Ergaphalau and the Science of the Stars," in: *idem* (ed.), *Adelard of Bath: An English Scientist and Arabist of the Early Twelfth Century*, London: The Warburg Institute 1987, 133–145.

Burnett, Charles (ed.), *Adelard of Bath: An English Scientist and Arabist of the Early Twelfth Century*, London: The Warburg Institute 1987.

—— *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds*, Aldershot: Cariorum 1996.

Burns, Dylan, "*Teleios Logos Arrhētos*: 'The Underworld of Platonism' and Esotericism in Late Antiquity," Master Thesis University of Amsterdam, Department of Religious Studies, 2004.

—— "Proclus and the Theurgic Liturgy of Pseudo-Dionysius," *Dionysius* 22 (2004), 111–132.

Campion, Nicholas, *A History of Western Astrology*, 2 vols., London & New York: Continuum 2009.

Capp, Bernard S., *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism*, London: Faber & Faber 1972.

Carrette, Jeremy R., *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality*, London & New York: Routledge 2000.

Carmody, Francis J., *Arabic Astronomical and Astrological Sciences in Latin Translations: A Critical Bibliography*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press 1956.

Cavallaro, Federico, "The Alchemical Significance of John Dee's Monas Hieroglyphica," in: Stephen Clucas (ed.), *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in Renaissance Thought*, Dordrecht: Springer 2006, 159–176.

Chadwick, Owen, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977.

Clark, William, Jan Golinski & Simon Schaffer (eds.), *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press 1999.

Clemen, Carl, *Religionsgeschichte Europas*, 2 vols., Heidelberg: Winter 1926/1931.

Clucas, Stephen (ed.), *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in Renaissance Thought*, Dordrecht: Springer 2006.

Clulee, Nicholas H., *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion*, New York: Routledge 1988.

—— "John Dee's Natural Philosophy Revisited," in: Stephen Clucas (ed.), *John Dee*, 23–37.

Cochrane, Louise, *Adelard of Bath, the First English Scientist*, London: British Museum Press 1994.

Cohen, I. Bernard (ed.), *Puritanism and the Rise of Modern Science: The Merton Thesis*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 1990.

Collins, Francis S., *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*, New York: Free Press 2006.

Copenhaver, Brian P., *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation with Notes and Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992.

Coudert, Allison P., *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–1698)*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 1999.

—— "Seventeenth-Century Natural Philosophy and Esotericism at the Court of Sulzbach," in: Richard Caron & Joscelyn Godwin (eds.), *Ésotérisme, Gnoses & Imaginaire symbolique: Mélanges offerts à Antoine Faivre*, Leuven: Peeters 2001, 27–46.

Coudert, Allison P. (ed.), *The Language of Adam / Die Sprache Adams*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1999.

Coudert, Allison P. & Jeffrey S. Shoulson (eds.), *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2004.

Couldry, Nick, "Theorising Media as Practice," *Social Semiotics* 14/2 (2004), 115–132.

Couturat, Louis, *La logique de Leibniz d'après des documents inédits*, Paris: Alcan 1901.

Craven, William G., *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Symbol of His Age: Modern Interpretations of a Renaissance Philosopher*, Geneva: Librairie Droz 1981.

Cumont, Franz, *L'Egyptes des astrologues*, Brussels: La Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth 1937.

Cumont, Franz, Franz J. Boll, et al. (eds.), *Catalogus codicum astrologorum graecorum*, 12 vols., Brussels: Lamertin 1898–1953.

Cuno, F. W., "Johann Heinrich Alsted," *Reformierte Kirchenzeitung* 26 (1903), 26–50.

Curry, Patrick, "The Historiography of Astrology: A Diagnosis and a Prescription," in: Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2005, 261–274.

Dassen, Patrick, *De onttovering van de wereld: Max Weber en het probleem van de moderniteit in Duitsland, 1890–1920*, Amsterdam: G.A. van Oorschot 1999.

Davie, Grace, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*. Oxford: Blackwell 1994.

—— *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000.

—— *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd 2002.

Davie, Grace & Danièle Hervieu-Léger (eds.), *Identités religieuses en Europe*, Paris: La Découverte 1996.

Davila, James R., *Descenders to the Chariot: The People behind the Hekhalot Literature*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2001.

Dean-Otting, M., *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature*, Frankfurt a. M. etc.: P. Lang 1984.

de Cesaris, Giuseppe, *Congiunzioni Giove-Saturno e storia Giudaico-Cristiana*, Rome: Keybooks 2001.

de Léon-Jones, Karen, "John Dee and the Kabbalah," in: Stephen Clucas (ed.), *John Dee*, 143–158.

de Smet, D., *La quiétude de l'intellect: Néoplatonisme et gnose ismaélienne dans l'œuvre de Ḥāmīd ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī (Xᵉ/XIᵉ s.)*, Leuven: Peeters 1995.

de Vries, Hent & Lawrence E. Sullivan (eds.), *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, New York: Fordham University Press 2006.

Dieckmann, Liselotte, *Hieroglyphics: The History of a Literary Symbol*, St. Louis, MO: Washington University Press 1970.

Dodds, Eric R., *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press 1951.

Draper, John W., *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*, New York: Appleton 1874.

Dürr, Renate, Gisela Engel & Johannes Süßmann (eds.), *Eigene und fremde Frühe Neuzeiten: Genese und Geltung eines Epochenbegriffs* (Historische Zeitschrift Beihefte, N.F., 36), Munich: Oldenbourg 2003.

Duffy, Eamon, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400– c. 1580*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1992.

Duffy, J. "Reactions of Two Byzantine Intellectuals to the Theory and Practice of Magic: Michael Psellos and Michael Italikos," in: Henry Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Magic*, Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 85–90.

Eco, Umberto, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, Oxford: Blackwell 1995.

Eisenstadt, Shmuel N., *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities*, 2 vols., Leiden & Boston: Brill 2003.

Eisenstadt, Shmuel N. (ed.), *Multiple Modernities*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers 2002.

Eisenstein, Elizabeth L., *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols., Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press 1979.

Elior, Rachel, "From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines: Prayer and Sacred Song in the Hekhalot Literature and Its Relation to Temple Traditions," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 4/3(1997), 217–267.

Elman, Yaakov & Israel Gershoni (eds.), *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press 2000.

Elsas, Christoph, *Religionsgeschichte Europas: Religiöses Leben von der Vorgeschichte bis zur Gegenwart*, Darmstadt: Primus/Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2002.

Engelbart, Rolf, "Image/Iconoclasm," in: Kocku von Stuckrad (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, 4 vols., Leiden & Boston: Brill 2006, 907–912.

Engler, Steven, "Discourse," in: Kocku von Stuckrad (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, 4 vols., Leiden & Boston: Brill 2006, 516–519.

Erickson, Peter & Clark Hulse (eds.), *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2000.

Ernst, Germana, "From the Watery Trigon to the Fiery Trigon: Celestial Signs, Prophecies and History," in: Paola Zambelli (ed.), *'Astrologi hallucinati': Stars and the End of the World in Luther's Time*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 1986, 265–280.

Esser, Hartmut, *Soziologie: Spezielle Grundlagen. Band 1: Situationslogik und Handeln*, Frankfurt/M. & New York: Campus 1999.

Evans, R.J.W., *Rudolf II and His World: A Study in Intellectual History, 1576–1612*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1973.

Fabian, Johannes, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Objects*, New York: Columbia University Press 1983.

Faivre, Antoine, *Access to Western Esotericism*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1994.

——— "The Notions of Concealment and Secrecy in Modern Esoteric Currents since the Renaissance (a Methodological Approach)," in: Wolfson (ed.), *Rending the Veil*, 155–176.

——— "Histoire de la notion moderne de Tradition dans ses rapports avec les courants ésotériques (XVème–XXème siècles)," *Symboles et Mythes dans les mouvements initiatiques et ésotériques (XVIIème–XXème siècles): Filiations et emprunts*, Paris: La Table d'Émeraude 1999, 7–48.

——— "La question d'un ésotérisme comparé des religions du livre," in: *Henry Corbin et le Comparatisme Spirituel* (= Cahiers du Groupe d'Etudes Spirituelles Comparées 8), Paris: Archè-Edidit 2000, 89–120.

——— "Secrecy III: Modernity," in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2005, 1056–1061.

——— "Kocku von Stuckrad et la notion d'ésotérisme," *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 6/2 (2006), 205–214.

Faivre, Antoine & Jacob Needleman (eds.), *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, New York: Crossroad 1992.

Fanger, Claire (ed.), *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, Stroud: Sutton 1998.

Farago, Claire (ed.), *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450–1650*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press 1995.

Farmer, Stephen A., *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486). The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems*, Tempe: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 1998.

Faßler, Manfred, *Bildlichkeit: Navigationen durch das Repertoire der Sichtbarkeit*, Vienna etc.: Böhlau 2002.

Feldman, Seymour, *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis: Don Isaac Abravanel: Defender of the Faith*, London: Routledge 2003.

Ferguson, William K., *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation*, Cambridge: Riverside Press 1948.

Feyerabend, Paul, "The Strange Case of Astrology," in: *idem*, *Science in a Free Society*, London: NLB 1978, 91–96.

Fine, Lawrence (ed.), *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period*, Princeton & London: Princeton University Press 2001.

Firth, Katharine R., *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530–1645*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1979.

Fishbane, Eitan P., "Authority, Tradition, and the Creation of Meaning in Medieval Kabbalah: Isaac of Acre's *Illumination of the Eyes*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72 (2004), 59–95.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 2004.

Flasch, Kurt, *Das philosophische Denken im Mittelalter: Von Augustin zu Machiavelli*, Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun. 2006.

——— *Meister Eckhart: Die Geburt der "Deutschen Mystik" aus dem Geist der arabischen Philosophie*, Munich: C.H. Beck 2006.

Flint, Valerie, "The Transmission of Astrology in the Early Middle Ages," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 21 (1990), 1–27.

Fögen, Marie Theres, *Die Enteignung der Wahrsager: Studien zum kaiserlichen Wissensmonopol in der Spätantike*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1993.

Forman, Robert K.C., "Mystical Knowledge: Knowledge by Identity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61/4 (1993), 705–738.

Forman, Robert K.C. (ed.), *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, New York: Oxford University Press 1990.

Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Tavistock 1970.

—— *L'ordre du discours*, Paris: Gallimard 1971.

—— *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon, Brighton: The Harvester Press 1980.

—— *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. By A.M. Sheridan Smith, London & New York: Routledge 1989 (first ed. London: Tavistock 1972; French original Paris: Gallimard 1969).

Freedman, J.S., "The Career and Writings of Bartholomew Keckermann," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 141 (1997), 305–364.

French, Peter, *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus*, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1972.

Friedman, Jonathan, *Cultural Identity and Global Process*, London: Sage 1994.

Gaiser, Konrad, "Platons esoterische Lehre," in: Peter Koslowski (ed.), *Gnosis und Mystik in der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Munich & Zurich: Artemis 1988, 13–40.

Gane, Nicholas, *Max Weber and Postmodern Theory: Rationalization versus Re-enchantment*, Houndmills & New York: Palgrave 2002.

Ganz, David & Georg Henkel (eds.), *Rahmen-Diskurse: Kultbilder im konfessionellen Zeitalter*, Berlin: Reimer 2004.

Ganz, David & Thomas Lentes (eds.), *Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren: Bildtheorie und Bildgebrauch in der Vormoderne*, Berlin: Reimer 2004.

Geneva, Ann, *Astrology and the Seventeenth-Century Mind: William Lilly and the Language of the Stars*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1995.

Gephart, Werner & Hans Waldenfels (eds.), *Religion und Identität: im Horizont des Pluralismus*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1999.

Geyer, Hermann, *Verborgene Weisheit: Johann Arndts "Vier Bücher vom Wahren Christentum" als Programm einer spiritualistisch-hermetischen Theologie*, 2 vols., Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2001.

Geyer-Kordesch, Johanna, "The Hieroglyphs of Nature: The Garden, the Numinous, and the Pagan in the Enlightenment," in: Anne-Charlott Trepp & Hartmut Lehmann (eds.): *Antike Weisheit und kulturelle Praxis: Hermetismus in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2001, 243–267.

Giller, Pinchas, *Reading the Zohar: The Sacred Text of the Kabbalah*, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press 2001.

Gilly, Carlos, *Adam Haslmayr: Der erste Verkünder der Manifeste der Rosenkreuzer*, Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan 1994.

—— "Das Bekenntnis zur Gnosis von Paracelsus bis auf die Schüler Jacob Böhmes," in: van den Broek & van Heertum (eds.), *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme*, 385–425.

Gilly, Carlos (ed.), *Cimelia Rhodostaurotica: Die Rosenkreuzer im Spiegel der zwischen 1610 und 1660 entstandenen Handschriften und Drucke*, Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan 1995.

Ginzberg, Carlo, "High and Low: The Theme of Forbidden Knowledge in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Past and Present* 73 (1976), 28–41.

Giverson, Søren, Tage Petersen & Jørgen Podemann Sørensen (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Texts in the History of Religions*, Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters 2002.

Gladigow, Burkhard, "Präsenz der Bilder—Präsenz der Götter: Kultbilder und Bilder der Götter in der griechischen Religion," *Visible Religion: Annual for Religious Iconography* IV–V (Approaches to Iconology), Leiden: Brill 1985–1986, 114–133. Reprinted in Gladigow, *Religionswissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, 62–72.

—— "'Wir gläubigen Physiker': Zur Religionsgeschichte physikalischer Entwicklungen im 20. Jahrhundert," in: Hartmut Zinser (ed.), *Der Untergang von Religionen*, Berlin: Reimer 1986, 158–168.

—— "Europäische Religionsgeschichte," in: Hans G. Kippenberg & Brigitte Luchesi (eds.), *Lokale Religionsgeschichte*, Marburg: Diagonal 1995, 21–42. Reprinted in Gladigow, *Religionswissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, 289–301.

—— "Von der 'Lesbarkeit der Religion' zum *iconic turn*," in: Günter Thomas (ed.), *Religiöse Funktionen des Fernsehens?*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag 2000, 107–124. Reprinted in Gladigow, *Religionswissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, 274–288.

—— "Anachronismus und Religion," in: Brigitte Luchesi & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Religion im kulturellen Diskurs: Festschrift für Hans G. Kippenberg zu seinem 65. Geburtstag / Religion in Cultural Discourse: Essays in Honor of Hans G. Kippenberg on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2004, 3–15.

—— *Religionswissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. by Christoph Auffarth & Jörg Rüpke, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer 2005.

—— "Meaning/Signification," in: Kocku von Stuckrad (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, 4 vols., Leiden & Boston: Brill 2006, 1180–1186.

—— "Natural Science," in: Kocku von Stuckrad (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, 4 vols., Leiden & Boston: Brill 2006, 1303–1306.

—— "Europäische Religionsgeschichte seit der Renaissance," *zeitenblicke* 5 (2006), Nr. 1, http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2006/1/Gladigow/index_html; URN: urn:nbn:de:0009-9-2866 (accessed 28 July 2008).

Godet, Alain, *"Nun was ist die Imagination anderst als ein Sonn im Menschen": Studie zu einem Zentralbegriff des magischen Denkens*. Dissertation University of Zurich, only partly published (Zurich: A.D.A.G. Administration und Druck 1982).

Godwin, Joscelyn, *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance*, London: Thames & Hudson 2002.

Goffman, Daniel, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002.

Goldish, Matt, *The Sabbatean Prophets*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2004.

Gombrich, Ernst H., *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, London: Phaidon 1972.

—— "The Renaissance—Period or Movement?," in: Arthur G. Dickens (ed.), *Background to the English Renaissance: Introductory Lectures*, London: Gray-Mills 1974, 9–30.

Gräf, Holger Thomas, *Konfession und internationales System: Die Außenpolitik Hessen-Kassels im konfessionellen Zeitalter*, Marburg etc.: Hessische Historische Kommission 1993.

Grafton, Anthony, *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800*, Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press 1991.

—— *Cardano's Cosmos: The Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer*, Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press 1999.

—— *Bring Out Your Dead: The Past as Revelation*, Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press 2001.

Grant, Edward, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional, and Intellectual Contexts*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1996.

Grant, Edward (ed.), *A Source Book of Medieval Science*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1974.

Greeley, Andrew, *Religion as Poetry*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers 1995.

Green, Arthur, "Introduction," in: *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, Translation and Commentary by Daniel C. Matt, vol. 1, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004, XXXI–LXXXI.

Grell, Ole Peter (ed.), *Paracelsus: The Man and His Reputation, His Ideas and Their Transformation*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 1998.

Grendler, Paul F., "The Italian Renaissance in the Past Seventy Years. Humanism, Social History, and Early Modern in Anglo-American and Italian Scholarship," in: Allen J. Grieco, Michael Rocke & Fiorella Gioffredi Superbi (eds.), *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century: Acts of an International Conference Florence, Villa I Tatti, June 9–11, 1999*, Florence: L.S. Olschki, 3–23.

Grözinger, Karl E., "Reuchlin und die Kabbala," in: Herzig & Schoeps (eds.), *Reuchlin und die Juden*, 175–187.

Gruber, Bettina, "Mystik, Esoterik, Okkultismus: Überlegungen zu einer Begriffsdiskussion," in: Baßler & Châtellier (eds.), *Mystique, mysticisme et modernité en Allemagne autour de 1900 / Mystik, Mystizismus und Moderne in Deutschland um 1900*, Strasburg: Presses universitaire de Strasbourg 1998, 27–39.

Gruber, Bettina (ed.), *Erfahrung und System: Mystik und Esoterik in der Literatur der Moderne*, Opladen: Westdeutsche Verlagsanstalt 1997.

Gruenwald, Ithamar, *Apoclyptic and Merkava Mysticism*, Leiden: Brill 1980.

—— *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism*, Frankfurt/M. etc.: P. Lang 1988.

Gundel, Wilhem & Hans Georg Gundel, *Astrologumena: Die astrologische Literatur in der Antike und ihre Geschichte*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner 1966.

Håkansson, Håkan, *Seeing the Word: John Dee and Renaissance Occultism*, Lund: Ugglan 2001.

Hakl, Hans Thomas, *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos: Unbekannte Begegnungen von Wissenschaft und Esoterik. Eine alternative Geistesgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Bretten: Scientia Nova 2001.

Halman, Loek, Ruud Luijkx & Marga van Zundert (eds.), *Atlas of European Values*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2005.

Hames, H., "Elijah Delmedigo: An Archetype of the Halakhic Man?," in: Ruderman & Veltri (eds.), *Cultural Intermediaries*, 39–54.

Hamilton, Alastair, *The Family of Love*, Cambridge: James Clarke 1981.

Hammer, Olav, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2001.

Hammer, Olav & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Western Esotericism and Polemics: Esoteric Discourse and Its Others*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2007.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J., "Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 7 (1995), 99–129.

—— *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 1996.

—— "Beyond the Yates Paradigm: The Study of Western Esotericism between Counterculture and New Complexity," *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 1 (2001), 5–37.

—— "The Dreams of Theology and the Realities of Christianity," in: J. Haers & P. de Mey (eds.), *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*, Leuven: Peeters 2003, 709–733.

—— "How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World," *Religion* 33 (2003), 357–380.

—— "Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Academic Research," *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 5/2 (2005), 225–254.

—— "Introduction," in: Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, viii–xiii.

—— "Esotericism," in: Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 336–340.

—— "Occult/Occultism," in: Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 884–889.

—— "Tradition," in: Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 1125–1135.

—— "Gnosticism," in: Kocku von Stuckrad (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, 4 vols., Leiden & Boston: Brill 2006, 790–798.

—— "The Trouble with Images: Anti-Image Polemics and Western Esotericism," in: Hammer & von Stuckrad (eds.), *Polemical Encounters*, 107–136.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. & Ruud M. Bouthoorn, *Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447–1500): The Hermetic Writings and Related Documents*, Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies 2005.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J., in collaboration with Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek & Jean-Pierre Brach (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 2 vols., Leiden & Boston: Brill 2005.

Hankins, James, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols., Leiden & Boston: Brill 1990.

Hanson, Sharon, "The Secularisation Thesis: Talking at Cross Purposes," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 12/2 (1997), 159–179.

Harding, S., "The Afterlife of Stories: Genesis of a Man of God," in: George C. Rosenwald & Richard L. Ochberg (eds.), *Storied Lives: The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press 1992, 60–75.

Harkness, Deborah E., *John Dee's Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999.

Haskins, Charles H., *Studies in the History of Medieval Science*, New York: Ungar 1960 (first published in 1924).

Heinrich, Klaus, "Der Untergang von Religion in Kunst und Wissenschaft," in: *idem*, *Das Floß der Medusa: Drei Studien zur Faszinationsgeschichte mit mehreren Beilagen und einem Anhang*, Basel & Frankfurt/M.: Stroemfeld 1995, 75–110.

—— "Götter und Halbgötter der Renaissance. Eine Betrachtung am Beispiel der Galatea," in: *idem*, *Das Floß der Medusa: Drei Studien zur Faszinationsgeschichte mit mehreren Beilagen und einem Anhang*, Basle & Frankfurt/M.: Stroemfeld 1995, 111–154.

Herbert, David, *Religion and Civil Society: Rethinking Public Religion in the Contemporary World*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2003.

Herzig, Arno & Julius H. Schoeps, in collaboration with Saskia Rohde (eds.), *Reuchlin und die Juden*, Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke 1993.

Herzog, Reinhart & Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewußtsein*, Munich: Fink 1987.

Hettema, Theo L. & Arie van der Kooij (eds.), *Religious Polemics in Context: Papers presented to the Second International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR) held at Leiden, 27–28 April 2000*, Assen: Van Gorcum 2004.

Heywood, Ian & Barry Sandywell (eds.), *Interpreting Visual Culture: Explorations in the Hermeneutics of the Visual*, London & New York: Routledge 1999.

Himmelfarb, Martha, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993.

Hobsbawm, Eric J. & Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press 1983.

Hoffmann, Konrad, "Panofskys Renaissance," in: Bruno Reudenbach (ed.), *Erwin Panofsky: Beiträge des Symposions Hamburg 1992*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1993, 141–144.

Holz, Hans Heinz, *Wider die Philosophie der Gegenreformation: Johann Heinrich Alsted und die Anfänge der Enzyklopädistik*, Groningen: Faculteit der Wijsbegeerte, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen 1995.

Hotson, Howard, *Johann Heinrich Alsted, 1588–1638: Between Renaissance, Reformation, and Universal Reform*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 2000.

—— *Paradise Postponed: Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenari-anism*, Dordrecht: Kluwer 2000.

Howell, Kenneth J., *God's Two Books: Copernican Cosmology and Biblical Interpreta-tion in Early Modern Science*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 2002.

Howells, Richard, *Visual Culture: An Introduction*, Oxford: Polity 2003.

Hubbeling, Hubertus G. & Hans G. Kippenberg (eds.), *On Symbolic Representation of Religion: Groningen Contributions to Theories of Symbols / Zur symbolischen Repräsentation von Religion: Groninger Abhandlungen zu verschiedenen Symboltheo-rien*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1986.

Hübner, Wolfgang, *Zodiacus Christianus: Jüdisch-christliche Adaptationen des Tier-kreises von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Königstein: Hain 1983.

Hughes, Aaron W., *The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2004.

Hunzai, Faquīr Muḥammad, "The Concept of Knowledge According to al-Kirmānī," in: Lawson (ed.), *Reason and Inspiration in Islam*, 127–141.

Hutchison, Keith, "What Happened to Occult Qualities in the Scientific Revolution?," *Isis* 73 (1982), 233–253.

Hutton, Patrick H., "The Art of Memory Reconceived: From Rhetoric to Psychoanaly-sis," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48/3 (1987), 371ff.

Idel, Moshe, "The Concept of the Torah in Heikhalot Literature and Its Metamorpho-ses in Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981), 23–84 (Hebrew).

—— *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press 1988.

—— *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, Albany: State Univer-sity of New York Press 1989.

—— "The Anthropology of Yohanan Alemanno: Sources and Influences," *Annali dei Storia dell'Esegesi* 7 (1990), 93–112.

—— *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Tradition on the Artificial Anthropoid*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1990.

—— "Jewish Mystical Thought in the Florence of Lorenzo il Magnifico," in: D.L. Bemporad & I. Zatelli (eds.), *La cultura ebraica all'epoca di Lorenzo il Magnifico. Celebrazioni del V centenario della morte di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Florence: Leo S. Olschki 1998, 17–42.

—— *Messianic Mystics*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press 1998.

—— "Transmission in Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," in: Elman & Gershoni (eds.), *Transmitting Jewish Traditions*, 139–165.

—— "Prisca Theologia in Marsilio Ficino and in Some Jewish Treatments," in: Allen & Rees (eds.), *Marsilio Ficino*, 137–158.

—— *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press 2002.

—— "Jewish Thinkers versus Christian Kabbalah," in: Schmidt-Biggemann (ed.), *Christliche Kabbalah*, 49–65.

—— "Italy in Safed, Safed in Italy: Toward an Interactive History of Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah," in: Ruderman & Veltri (eds.), *Cultural Intermediaries*, 239–269.

Irvine, Martin, *The Making of Textual Culture: "Grammatica" and Literary Theory, 350–1100*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994.

Irwin, Terence H., *Aristotle's First Principles*, Oxford: Clarendon 1988.

James, William, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, New York: Collier 1961 (first ed. 1902).

Jammer, Max, *Einstein and Religion*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999.

Jaspers, Karl, *Vom Europäischen Geist. Vortrag*, Munich: Piper 1947.

Jenkins, Richard, *Pierre Bourdieu*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge 2002.

Jenks, Christ (ed.), *Visual Culture*, London & New York: Routledge 1995.

Kamerick, Kathleen, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350–1500*, New York: Palgrave 2002.

Katz, Steven T., "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in: *idem* (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, 22–74.

Katz, Steven T. (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, New York: Oxford University Press 1978.

—— *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, New York: Oxford University Press 1983.

Kennedy, E., "The Sassanian Astronomical Handbook Zij-I Shah and the Astrological Doctrine of 'Transit' (Mamarr)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 78 (1958), 246–262.

Kennedy, E. & B.L. van der Waerden, "The World-Year of the Persians," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83 (1963), 315–327.

Khalaf, Samir, "The Radicalization of Communal Loyalties," in: Thomas Scheffler (ed.), *Religion between Violence and Reconciliation*, Beirut & Würzburg: Ergon 2002, 283–299.

Kieckhefer, Richard, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989.

Kieszkowski, Bohdan, "Les rapports entre Elie del Medigo et Pic de la Mirandole," *Rinascimento* 4 (1964), 58–61.

Kilcher, Andreas B., *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als ästhetisches Paradigma: die Konstruktion einer ästhetischen Kabbala seit der Frühen Neuzeit*, Stuttgart & Weimar: J.B. Metzler 1998.

—— "Synopse zu Knorr von Rosenroths Kabbala denudata," *Morgen-Glantz: Zeitschrift der Christian Knorr von Rosenroth-Gesellschaft* 10 (2000), 201–220.

—— Mathesis *und* poiesis: *Die Enzyklopädik der Literatur 1600 bis 2000*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink 2003.

Kilcher, Andreas B. (ed., in collaboration with Philipp Theisohn), *Die Kabbala Denudata: Text und Kontext. Akten der 15. Tagung der Christian Knorr von Rosenroth-Gesellschaft* (= *Morgen-Glantz: Zeitschrift der Christian Knorr von Rosenroth-Gesellschaft* 16 [2006]), Bern etc.: Peter Lang 2006.

Kippenberg, Hans G., "Introduction," *Visible Religion: Annual for Religious Iconography* VII (1990), vii–xix.

—— *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*, Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press 2002.

—— "Response: 'The Wrong Way through the Telescope': Observing Historians of Religions at Work," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71 (2003), 913–922.

—— "Europe: Arena of Pluralization and Diversification of Religions," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 1/2 (2008), 133–155.

Kippenberg, Hans G. & Gunnar Folke Schuppert (eds.), *Die verrechtlichte Religion: Der Öffentlichkeitsstatus von Religionsgemeinschaften*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2005.

Kippenberg, Hans G. & Kocku von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft: Gegenstände und Begriffe*, Munich: C.H. Beck 2003.

—— "Religionswissenschaftliche Überlegungen zum religiösen Pluralismus in Deutschland: Eine Öffnung der Perspektiven," in: Hartmut Lehmann (ed.), *Multireligiosität im vereinten Europa: Historische und juristische Aspekte*, Göttingen: Wallstein 2003, 145–162.

Kippenberg, Hans G. & Guy G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 1995.

Kippenberg, Hans G., Jörg Rüpke & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds), *Europäische Religionsgeschichte—ein mehrfacher Pluralismus*, 2 vols., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht/UTB 2009.

Klaassen, Frank, "Medieval Ritual Magic in the Renaissance," *Aries: Journal for the Studey of Western Esotericism* 3/2 (2003), 166–199.

Klaassen, Walter, *Living at the End of the Ages: Apocalyptic Expectation in the Radical Reformation*, Lanham: University Press of America 1992.

Klein, J. & J. Kramer (eds.), *J.H. Alsted, Herborns calvinistische Theologie und Wissenschaft im Spiegel der englischen Kulturreform des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu englisch-deutschen Geistesbeziehungen der frühen Neuzeit*, Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang 1988.

Klein, Wolf Peter, "Christliche Kabbala und Linguistik orientalischer Sprachen: Das Beispiel von Guillaume Postel (1510–1581)," *Sprachtheorie und germanistische Linguistik* 11/1 (2001), 1–26.

Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim (ed.), *Götterbild in Kunst und Schrift*, Bonn: Bouvier 1984.

Klutstein, Ilana, *Marsilio Ficino et la théologie ancienne: Oracles chaldaïques, Hymnes orphiques, Hymnes de Proclus*, Florence: Olschki 1987.

Knieper, Thomas & Marion G. Müller (eds.), *Kommunikation visuell. Das Bild als Forschungsgegenstand: Grundlagen und Perspektiven*, Cologne: Halem 2001.

Knoespel, Kenneth J., "The Narrative Matter of Mathematics: John Dee's Preface to the *Elements* of Euclid of Megara (1570)," *Philological Quarterly* 66 (1987), 26–46.

Kohl, Karl-Heinz, *Die Macht der Dinge: Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte*, Munich: C.H. Beck 2003.

Koselleck, Reinhart, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik historischer Zeiten*, 3rd ed., Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1995. English as *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, New York: Columbia University Press 2004.

Kotjatko, Jens, "Geschichte der hebräischen Grammatik vom 10. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert," in: Giuseppe Veltri & Gerold Necker (eds.), *Gottes Sprache in der philologischen Werkstatt: Hebraistik vom 15. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2004, 215–232.

Krüger, Klaus & Alessandro Nova (eds.), *Imagination und Wirklichkeit: Zum Verhältnis von mentalen und realen Bildern in der frühen Neuzeit*, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern 2000.

Kühne, Hartmut, *Ostensio reliquiarum: Untersuchungen über Entstehung, Ausbreitung, Gestalt und Funktion der Heiltumsweisungen im römisch-deutschen Regnum*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2000.

Kuntz, Marion-L., "Hebrew and the 'Other Sister' Arabic: The Language of Adam as a Paradigm for the *restitutio omnium* in the Thought of Guillaume Postel," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 15 (1997), 21–44.

Lamberton, Robert, "The ΑΠΟΡΡΗΤΟΣ ΘΕΟΠΙΑ and the Roles of Secrecy in the History of Platonism," in: Kippenberg & Stroumsa (eds.), *Secrecy and Concealment*, 139–152.

Lanczkowski, Günter, *Religionsgeschichte Europas*, Freiburg: Herder 1971.

Langerman, Y. Tz., "On the Beginnings of Hebrew Scientific Literature and on the Studying History Through 'Maqbilot' (Parallels)," *Aleph* 2 (2002), 169–189.

Lanwerd, Susanne, *Religionsästhetik: Studien zum Verhältnis von Symbol und Sinnlichkeit*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2002.

Laslett, Peter, "The Wrong Way through the Telescope: A Note on Literary Evidence in Sociology and in Historical Sociology," *British Journal of Sociology* 27 (1976), 319–342.

Latour, Bruno, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1993.

Lavie, Smadar & Swedenburg, Ted (eds.), *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*, Durham etc.: Duke University Press 1996.

Lawee, Eric, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2001.

Lawson, Todd (ed.), *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought. Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt*, London & New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies London 2005.

Lehmann, Hartmut, "Probleme einer Europäischen Religionsgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit: Anmerkungen zur Verortung des Hermetismus zwischen Renaissance und Aufklärung," in: Trepp & Lehmann (eds.), *Antike Weisheit und kulturelle Praxis*, 235–242.

—— *Säkularisierung: Der europäische Sonderweg in Sachen Religion*, Göttingen: Wallstein 2004.

—— "Secularization, Transformation of Religion, or the Return of Religion: Three Competing Concepts for Explaining the Role of Religion in the Modern World," in: Brigitte Luchesi & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Religion im kulturellen Diskurs: Festschrift für Hans G. Kippenberg zu seinem 65. Geburtstag / Religion in Cultural Discourse: Essays in Honor of Hans G. Kippenberg on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2004, 327–335.

Lehrich, Christopher I., *The Language of Demons and Angels: Cornelius Agrippa's Occult Philosophy*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2003.

Leinkauf, Thomas, *Mundus combinatus: Studien zur Struktur der barocken Universalwissenschaft am Beispiel Athanasius Kirchers SJ (1602–1680)*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1993.

—— "*Systema mnemonicum* und *circulus encyclopaediae*: Johann Heinrich Alsteds Versuch einer Fundierung des universalen Wissens in der *ars memorativa*," in: J.J. Berns & W. Neuber (eds.), *Seelenmaschinen: Gattungstraditionen, Funktionen und Leistungsgrenzen der Mnemotechniken vom späten Mittelalter bis zum Beginn der Moderne*, Vienna: Böhlau 2000, 279–307.

Leinkauf, Thomas (ed.), *Dilthey und Cassirer: Die Deutung der Neuzeit als Muster von Geistes- und Kulturgeschichte*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 2003.

Lelli, Fabrizio, *Yohanan Alemanno: Hay ha-'Olamim (L'Immortale)*, Florence: Leo S. Olschki 1995.

—— "Yohanan Alemanno, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e la cultura ebraica italiana del XV secolo," in: G.C. Garfagnini (ed.), *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte (1494–1994)*, Florence: Leo S. Olschki 1997, 303–325.

—— "Biography and Autobiography in Yoḥanan Alemanno's Literary Perception," in: Ruderman & Veltri (eds.), *Cultural Intermediaries*, 25–38.

—— "Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni," in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 949–954.

Lemay, Richard, *Abu Ma'shar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century: The Recovery of Aristotle's Natural Philosophy through Arabic Astrology*, Beirut: American University of Beirut Press 1962.

Lentes, Thomas, "Auf der Suche nach dem Ort des Gedächtnisses," in: Krüger & Nova (eds.), *Imagination und Wirklichkeit*, 21–46.

—— "Inneres Auge, äußerer Blick und heilige Schau. Ein Diskussionsbeitrag zur visuellen Praxis in Frömmigkeit und Moraldidaxe des späten Mittelalters," in: Schreiner (ed.), *Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter*, 179–220.

Leustean, Lucian N., "Challenges to Church-State Relations in Contemporary Europe: Introduction," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 1/3 (2008), 247–250.

Lewy, Hans, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, new ed., Paris: Études Augustiniennes 1978.

Liebes, Yehuda, *Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetzira* (Hebr.), Tel Aviv: Schocken Books 2000.

Lindgren, Uta, *Gerbert von Aurillac und das Quadrivium: Untersuchungen zur Bildung im Zeitalter der Ottonen*, Wiesbaden: Steiner 1976.

Lobel, Diana, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Juda Ha-Levi's Kuzari*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2000.

Long, Anthony A., *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, second edition, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press 1986.

Löhr, Gebhard, "Religionswissenschaftliche Theorien und Theorieelemente bei berühmten Physikern des 20. Jahrhunderts," in: Dieter Zeller (ed.), *Religion im Wandel der Kosmologien*, Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang 1999, 69–103.

Lübbe, Hermann, *Säkularisierung: Geschichte eines ideenpolitischen Begriffs*, third ed., Freiburg: Alber 2003 (first ed. 1965).

Machlup, Fritz, *Knowledge and Knowledge Production* (Knowledge: its Creation, Distribution, and Economic Significance, vol. 1), Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980.

Magee, Glenn Alexander, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Magid, Shaul, *From Metaphysics to Midrash: Myth, History, and the Interpretation of Scripture in Lurianic Kabbalah*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2008.

Mahé, Jean-Pierre, "A Reading of the *Discourse on the Ogdoad and the Ennead* (Nag Hammadi Codex VI.6)," in: van den Broek & Hanegraaff (eds.), *Gnosis and Hermeticism*, 79–85.

—— "Mental Faculties and Cosmic Levels in *The Eighth and the Ninth* (NH VI,6) and Related Hermetic Writings," in: Giverson et al. (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Texts in the History of Religions*, 73–83.

Maier, Johann, "Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise und 'Gnosis'," *Kairos* 6 (1963), 18–40.

Majercik, Ruth, *The Chaldean Oracles*, text, trans. and commentary, Leiden: Brill 1989.

Marcotte, Roxanne D., "Reason (*ʿaql*) and Direct Intuition (*mushāhada*) in the Works of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191)," in: Lawson (ed.), *Reason and Inspiration in Islam*, 221–234.

Marsh, Christoper, *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550–1630*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993.

Marshall, Peter, *The Magic Circle of Rudolf II: Alchemy and Astrology in Renaissance Prague*, New York: Walker & Company 2006.

Mayer, Hans Eberhard (ed.), *Die Kreuzfahrerstaaten als multikulturelle Gesellschaft: Einwanderer und Minderheiten im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert*, Munich: Oldenbourg 1997.

McCalla, Arthur, "Antoine Faivre and the Study of Esotericism," *Religion* 31 (2001), 435–450.

McCutcheon, Russell T., *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997.

McLeod, Hugh & Werner Ustorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003.

Menk, Gerhard, "Landgraf Wilhelm IV. von Hessen-Kassel und der niederländische Aufstand bis zum Tod Wilhelms von Oranien," *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hessische Geschichte und Landeskunde* 88 (1980/81), 55–82.

—— *Die Hohe Schule Herborn in ihrer Frühzeit (1584–1660): Ein Beitrag zum Hochschulwesen des deutschen Kalvinismus im Zeitalter der Gegenreformation*, Wiesbaden: Selbstverlag der Historischen Kommission für Nassau 1981.

—— "'Qui trop embrasse, peu estreind': Politik und Persönlichkeit Johannes VI. von Nassau-Dillenburg 1580–1606," *Jahrbuch für westdeutsche Landesgeschichte* 7 (1981), 119–157.

—— "Die 'Zweite Reformation' in Hessen-Kassel," in: Schilling (ed.), *Die reformierte Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland*, 154–183.

—— "Absolutistisches Wollen und verfremdete Wirklichkeit—der calvinistische Sonderweg Hessen-Kassels," in: Meinrad Schaab (ed.), *Territorialstaat und Calvinismus*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1993, 164–238.

Mertin, Andreas, "Der allgemeine und der besondere Ikonoklasmus. Bilderstreit als Paradigma christlicher Kunsterfahrung," *Magazin für Theologie und Ästhetik* 9 (2001), see http://www.theomag.de/09/am1.htm (accessed 28 July 2008).

Merton, Robert, *Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth-Century England*, New York: Harper & Row 1970 (first published in *Osiris* 4, part 2, 1938).

Meyerson, Mark D. & Edward D. English (eds.), *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Change*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 2000.

Michel, Walter, "Der Herborner Philosoph Johann Heinrich Alsted und die Tradition," PhD dissertation, University of Frankfurt/M. 1969.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas (ed.), *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, London: Routledge 2000.

Mitchell, W.J. Thomas, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1986.

—— "Was ist ein Bild?," in: Volker Bohn (ed.), *Bildlichkeit: Internationale Beiträge zur Poetik*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1990, 17–68.

—— *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1994.

Mörth, Ingo, *Die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit von Religion*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1978.

Monfasani, John, "Marsilio Ficino and the Plato-Aristotle Controversy," in: Allen et al. (eds.), *Marsilio Ficino*, 179–202.

Moran, Bruce T., *The Alchemical World of the German Court: Occult Philosophy and Chemical Medicine in the Circle of Moritz of Hessen (1572–1632)*, Stuttgart: Steiner 1991.

—— *Chemical Pharmacy Enters the University: Johannes Hartmann and the Didactic Care of Chymiatria in the Early Seventeenth Century*, Madison: American Institute of the History of Pharmacy 1991.

Morlok, Elke, "Text und Textur bei Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla und in der *Kabbala Denudata*. Die Rekonstruktion der Struktur der Gottesnamen aus *Sha'are Ora* in der Lexikographie der *Kabbala Denudata*," *Morgen-Glantz: Zeitschrift der Christian Knorr von Rosenroth-Gesellschaft* 16 (2006), 161–179.

Moss, Jean Dietz, *"Godded with God": Hendrik Niclaes and His Family of Love*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 71, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society 1981.

Müller, Klaus E. & Jörn Rüsen (eds.), *Historische Sinnbildung: Problemstellungen, Zeitkonzepte, Wahrnehmungshorizonte, Darstellungsstrategien*, Reinbek: Rowohlt 1997.

Mulsow, Martin, "Seelenwagen und Ähnlichkeitsmaschine: Zur Reichweite der praktischen Geometrie in der *Ars cyclognomica* von Cornelius Gemma," in: Jörg Jochen Berns & Wolfgang Neuber (eds.), *Seelenmaschinen: Gattungstraditionen, Funktionen und Leistungsgrenzen der Mnemotechniken vom späten Mittelalter bis zum Beginn der Moderne*, Vienna: Böhlau 2000, 249–277.

Mulsow, Martin (ed.), *Das Ende des Hermetismus: Historische Kritik und neue Naturphilosophie in der Spätrenaissance. Dokumentation und Analyse der Debatte um die Datierung der hermetischen Schriften von Genebrard bis Casaubon (1567–1614)*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2002.

Murray, Alexander, "Piety and Impiety in Thirteenth-Century Italy," *Studies in Church History* 8 (1972), 83–106.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna—Suhrawardī—Ibn 'Arabī*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1964.

Netanyahu, Benzion, *Don Isaac Abravanel: Statesman and Philosopher*, fifth ed., Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press 1998 (first ed. 1953).

Neugebauer-Wölk, Monika, "Esoterik und Christentum vor 1800: Prolegomena zu einer Bestimmung ihrer Differenz," *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 3 (2003), 127–165.

Neugebauer-Wölk, Monika (ed., in collaboration with Holger Zaunstöck), *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1999.

Neugebauer-Wölk, Monika (ed., in collaboration with Andre Rudolph), *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Rezeption—Integration—Konfrontation*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer 2008.

Newman, William R., *Atoms and Alchemy: Chymistry and the Experimental Origins of the Scientific Revolution*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press 2006.

Newman, William R. & Anthony Grafton, "Introduction: The Problematic Status of Astrology and Alchemy in Premodern Europe," in: Newman & Grafton (eds.), *Secrets of Nature*, 1–37.

Newman, William R. & Anthony Grafton (eds.), *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2001.

Newman, William R. & Lawrence M. Principe, "Alchemy vs. Chemistry: The Etymological Origin of a Historiographic Mistake," *Early Science and Medicine* 3 (1998), 32–65.

—— *Alchemy Tried in the Fire: Starkey, Boyle, and the Fate of Helmontian Chymistry*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press 2002.

Nirenberg, David, "Islam and the West: Two Dialectical Fantasies," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 1/1 (2008), 3–33.

North, John, *The Fontana History of Astronomy and Cosmology*, London: Fontana Press 1994.

Nova, Alessandro, "Beobachten und beobachtet werden. Die Metamorphose des Betrachters und des Betrachteten bei Correggio und Parmigianino," in: Krüger & Nova (eds.), *Imagination und Wirklichkeit*, 81–98.

Novak, B.C., "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Jochanan Alemanno," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 45 (1982), 125–147.

Oestmann, Günther, H. Darrel Rutkin & Kocku von Stuckrad, "Introduction: Horoscopes and History," in: Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2005, 1–9.

Oexle, Otto Gerhard, "Max Weber—Geschichte als Problemgeschichte," in: *idem* (ed.), *Das Problem der Problemgeschichte 1880–1932*, Göttingen: Wallstein 2001, 1–37.

Ohly, Friedrich, "Die Welt als Text in der 'Gemma Magica' des Ps.-Abraham von Franckenberg," in: *idem*, *Ausgewählte und neue Schriften zur Literaturgeschichte und zur Bedeutungsforschung*, ed. by Uwe Ruberg & Dietmar Peil, Stuttgart & Leipzig: S. Hirzel 1995, 713–725.

Ong, Walter J., *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1958.

—— *Ramus and Talon Inventory*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1958.

Pagden, Anthony (ed.), *The Idea of Europe from Antiquity to the European Union*, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000.

Page, Sophie, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts*, London: The British Library 2002.

Panofsky, Erwin, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell 1960.

Patzig, Günther, *Aristotle's Theory of Syllogism: A Logico-philological Study of Book A of the Prior Analytics*, Dordrecht: Reidel 1968.

Pauen, Michael, *Dithyrambiker des Untergangs: Gnostizismus in Ästhetik und Philosophie der Moderne*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1994.

Perkins, Mary Anne, *Christendom and European Identity: The Legacy of a Grand Narrative since 1789*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2004.

Pine, Martin L., *Pietro Pomponazzi: Radical Philosopher of the Renaissance*, Padua: Editrice Antenore 1986.

Pingree, David, "Astronomy and Astrology in India and Iran," *Isis* 54 (1963), 229–246.

—— *The Thousands of Abū Ma'shar*, London: The Warburg Institute 1968.

Popkin, Richard H. (ed.), *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought, 1650–1800*, Leiden: Brill 1988.

Pratt, Mary Louise, "Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen," in: Henry Louis Gates Jr. (ed.), *"Race", Writing, and Difference*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1985, 135–162.

Press, Volker, "Hessen im Zeitalter der Landesteilung," in: Walter Heinemeyer (ed.), *Das Werden Hessens*, Marburg: Elwert 1986, 267–331.

Principe, Lawrence M., *The Aspiring Adept: Robert Boyle and His Alchemical Quest*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998.

Principe, Lawrence M. & William R. Newman, "Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy," in: Newman & Grafton (eds.), *Secrets of Nature*, 385–431.

Pumphrey, Stephen, "The Spagyric Art; or, the Impossible Work of Separating Pure from Impure Paracelsianism: A Historiographical Analysis," in: Grell (ed.), *Paracelsus*, 21–51.

Quack, Joachim Friedrich, "Perspektiven zur Theologie im Alten Ägypten: Antwort auf Jan Assmann," in: Mandfred Oeming, K. Schmid & Andreas Schüle (eds.), *Theologie in Israel und in den Nachbarkulturen*, Münster: Lit 2004, 63–74.

Rappe, Sara, *Reading Neoplatonism,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2000.

Razavi, Mehdi Amin, *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination*, Richmond: Curzon Press 1997.

Reill, Peter Hanns, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press 2005.

Rey, Terry, *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy*, London: Equinox 2007.

Riffard, Pierre, *L'ésotérisme: Qu'est que l'ésotérisme? Anthologie de l'ésotérisme occidental*, Paris: Robert Laffont 1990.

Rodrígues-Arribas, Josefina, "Historical Horoscopes of Israel: Abraham bar Hiyya, Abraham ibn Ezra, and Yosef ben Eliezer," in: Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2005, 145–164.

Marquès-Rivière, Jean, *Amulettes, talismans et pentacles dans les traditions orientales et occidentals*, Paris: Payot 1938.

Roling, Bernd, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," in: Jan N. Bremmer & Jan R. Veenstra (eds.), *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, Leuven: Peeters 2002, 231–266.

Rorty, Richard, "Solidarity or Objectivity?," in: John Rajchman & Cornel West (eds.), *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, New York: Columbia University Press 1985, 3–19.

—— *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989.

Rossi, Paolo, "Hermeticism, Rationality and the Scientific Revolution," in: M.L. Righini Bonelli & William R. Shea (eds.), *Reason, Experiment, and Mysticism in the Scientific Revolution*, New York: Macmillan 1975, 247–273.

Ruderman, David B., *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1988.

Ruderman, David B. & Giuseppe Veltri (eds.), *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2004.

Rudersdorf, Manfred, "Lutherische Erneuerung und Zweite Reformation? Die Beispiele Württemberg und Hessen," in: Schilling, *Die reformierte Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland*, 130–153.

—— *Ludwig IV. Landgraf von Hessen-Marburg, 1537–1604: Landesteilung und Luthertum in Hessen*, Mainz: von Zabern 1991.

Rudolph, Conrad, *The "Things of Greater Importance": Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude toward Art*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1990.

Rüsen, Jörn, "Was heißt: Sinn der Geschichte? (Mit einem Ausblick auf Vernunft und Widersinn)," in: Klaus E. Müller & Jörn Rüsen (eds.), *Historische Sinnbildung: Problemstellungen, Zeitkonzepte, Wahrnehmungshorizonte, Darstellungsstrategien*, Reinbek: Rowohlt 1997, 17–47.

Rummel, Erika, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1995.

Rusterholz, Sibylle, "Zum Verhältnis von *Liber Naturae* und *Liber Scripturae* bei Jacob Böhme." In: Jan Garewicz & Alois Maria Haas (eds.), *Gott, Natur und Mensch in der Sicht Jacob Böhmes und seiner Rezeption*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1994, 129–146.

Rutkin, H. Darrel, "Astrology, Natural Philosophy and the History of Science, ca. 1250–1700: Studies toward an Interpretation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*," PhD thesis, Indiana University, Bloomington 2002.

Sachsenmaier, Dominic & Jens Riedel, with Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (eds.), *Reflections on Multiple Modernities: European, Chinese and Other Interpretations*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2002.

Saliba, George, *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories During the Golden Age of Islam*, New York: New York University Press 1994.

—— *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2007.

Samsó, Julio, *Islamic Astronomy and Medieval Spain*, Aldershot: Variorum 1994.

Sarton, George & Frances Siegel, "Seventy-Sixth Critical Bibliography of the History and Philosophy of Science and of the History of Civilization (To May 1950)," 3. Babylonia and Assyria; Drowser, Mrs Ethel Stefana (E.S. Stevens), The Book of the Zodiac (Sfar Malwasia), *Isis* 41 (1950), 374.

Saxl, Fritz, "Pagan Sacrifice in the Italian Renaissance," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2 (1939), 346–367.

Schäfer, Peter, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1992.

—— *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah*, Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press 2002.

—— "Geschichte und Gedächtnisgeschichte: Jan Assmanns 'Mosaische Unterscheidung,'" in: Birgit E. Klein & Christiane E. Müller (eds.), *Memoria—Wege jüdischen Erinnerns. Festschrift Michael Brocke*, Berlin: Metropol 2005, 19–39.

Schanze, Helmut (ed.), *Handbuch der Mediengeschichte*, Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner 2001.

Scheid, John & Jesper Svenbro, *The Craft of Zeus: Myths of Weaving and Fabric*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1996.

Schilling, Heinz, "Das konfessionelle Europa," in: Hans G. Kippenberg, Jörg Rüpke & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Europäische Religionsgeschichte: Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht/UTB 2009, 289–338.

Schilling, Heinz (ed.), *Die reformierte Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland—Das Problem der 'Zweiten Reformation'*, Gütersloh: Mohn 1986.

Schlögl, Rudolf, "Hermetismus als Sprache der 'unsichtbaren Kirche': Luther, Paracelsus und die Neutralisten in der Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie Gottfried Arnolds," in: Trepp & Lehmann (eds.), *Antike Weisheit und kulturelle Praxis*, 165–188.

Schlosser, H., "Johann Heinrich Alsted," in: Rudolf Vaupel et al. (eds.), *Nassauische Lebensbilder* (6 vols., Wiesbaden 1940–1961), vol. 2 (1943), 28–39.

Schmidt-Biggemann, Wilhelm, "Johannes Reuchlin und die Anfänge der christlichen Kabbala," in: *idem* (ed.), *Christliche Kabbalah*, 9–48.

Schmidt-Biggemann, Wilhelm (ed.), *Christliche Kabbalah*, Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke 2003.

Schmitt, Charles, "Perennial Philosophy from Agostino Steuco to Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966), 505–532.

Schnitzler, Norbert, "Illusion, Täuschung und schöner Schein. Probleme der Bildverehrung im späten Mittelalter," in: Schreiner (ed.), *Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter*, 221–242.

Schreckenberg, Heinz, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (11.–13. Jh.). Mit einer Ikonographie des Judenthemas bis zum 4. Laterankonzil*, Frankfurt/M. etc.: Peter Lang 1991.

Schreiner, Klaus (ed.), *Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter: Politisch-soziale Kontexte, visuelle Praxis, körperliche Ausdrucksformen*, Munich: Fink 2002.

Schrödinger, Erwin, *What is Life? The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell. Based on Lectures delivered under the auspices of the Institute at Trinity College, Dublin, in February 1943*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1944.

Schwartz, Dov, "La magie astrale dans la pensée juive rationaliste en Provence au XIVe siècle," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 69 (1994), 31–55.

—— *Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2005.

Secret, François, "Du 'De Occulta Philosophia' à l'occultisme du XIXème siècle." *Charis: Archives de l'Unicorne* 1 (1988), 5–30 (orig. 1973).

Sela, Shlomo, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2003.

Sezgin, Fuat, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums VII: Astrologie—Meteorologie und Verwandtes bis ca. 430 H*, Leiden & Cologne: Brill 1979.

Sharf, Robert H., "Experience," in: Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1998, 94–116.

Shaw, Gregory, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press 1995.

Sherman, William H., *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the Renaissance*, Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press 1995.

Shulman, David, "Is There an Indian Connection to *Sefer Yesirah*?" *Aleph* 2 (2002), 191–199.

Shumaker, Wayne, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1972.

Silberstein, Laurence J., "Others Within and Others Without: Rethinking Jewish Identity and Culture," in: Laurence J. Silberstein & Robert L. Cohn (eds.), *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, New York & London: New York University Press 1994, 1–34.

Simmel, Georg, "The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies," *American Journal of Sociology* 11/4 (1906), 441–498.

Slaughter, Mary M., *Universal Languages and Scientific Taxonomy in the Seventeenth Century*, Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press 1982.

Smith, Jonathan Z., *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1982.

—— *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1990.

—— "Religion, Religions, Religious," in: *idem*, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, Chicago & London: Chicago University Press 2004, 179–196.

Smith, Mark, *Religion in Industrial Society: Oldham and Saddleworth, 1740–1865*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996.

Smoller, Laura Ackerman, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350–1420*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994.

Sonntag, Michael, *"Das Verborgene des Herzens": Zur Geschichte der Individualität*, Reinbek: Rowohlt 1999.

Spengler, Oswald, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, Munich: dtv 1972 (first ed. 1923).

Stark, Rodney & Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2000.

Stausberg, Michael, *Faszination Zarathushtra: Zoroaster und die europäische Religionsgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit*, 2 vols., Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 1998.

—— "Kohärenz und Kontinuität—Überlegungen zur Repräsentation und Reproduktion von Religionen," in: *idem* (ed.), *Kontinuitäten und Brüche in der Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2001, 596–619.

—— "Renaissancen: Vermittlungsformen des Paganen," in: Hans G. Kippenberg, Jörg Rüpke & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Europäische Religionsgeschichte: Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht/UTB 2009, 695–721.

Stierle, Karlheinz, "Renaissance. Die Entstehung eines Epochenbegriffs aus dem Geist des 19. Jahrhunderts," in: Herzog & Koselleck (eds.), *Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewußtsein*, 453–492.

Stierlin, Henri, *L'astrologie et le pouvoir de Platon à Newton*, Paris: Payot 1986.

Stillman, Robert E., *The New Philosophy and Universal Languages in Seventeenth-Century England: Bacon, Hobbes, and Wilkins*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press / London: Associated University Presses 1995.

Strickland, Debra Higgs, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art*, Princeton & London: Princeton University Press 2003.

Sturken, Marta & Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001.

Szőnyi, György E., "Ficino's Talismanic Magic and John Dee's Hieroglyphic Monad," *Cauda Pavonis* 20/1 (2001), 1–11.

—— *John Dee's Occultism: Magica Exaltation through Powerful Signs*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2004.

Talvacchia, Bette, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999.

Tambrun, Brigitte, "Marsile Ficin et le *Commentaire* de Pléthon sur les *Oracles chaldaïques*," *Accademia: Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin* 1 (1999), 9–48.

Taussig, Michael, "Viscerality, Faith, and Skepticism: Another Theory of Magic," in: Birgit Meyer & Peter Pels (eds.), *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2003, 272–306.

Tenbruck, Friedrich H., "Wissenschaft und Religion," in: Jacobus Wössner (ed.), *Religion im Umbruch: Soziologische Beiträge zur Situation von Religion und Kirche in der gegenwärtigen Gesellschaft*, Stuttgart: Enke 1972, 217–244.

—— "Religion im Maelstrom der Reflexion," in: Jörg Bergmann, Alois Hahn & Thomas Luckmann (eds.), *Religion und Kultur*: Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, Sonderheft 33 (1993), 31–67.

Tester, Jim, *A History of Western Astrology*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press 1987.

Thomas, Keith, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1971.

—— *The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfilment in Early Modern England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009.

Thorndike, Lynn, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols., New York: Columbia University Press 1923–1958.

—— "The True Place of Astrology in the History of Science," *Isis* 46/3 (1955), 273–278.

Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava, "Philosophy and Kabbalah: 1200–1600," in: Daniel H. Frank & Oliver Leaman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press 2003, 218–257.

Tollebeek, Jo, "'Renaissance' and 'Fossilization': Michelet, Burckhardt, and Huizinga," *Renaissance Studies: Journal of the Society for Renaissance Studies* 15 (2001), 354–366.

Toussaint, Stéphane, "Ficino's Orphic Magic or Jewish Astrology and Oriental Philosophy? A Note on *spiritus*, the Three Books on Life, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Zarza," *Accademia* 2 (2000), 19–33.

—— "Ficin, Pic de Mirandole, Reuchlin et le pouvoir des noms: à propos de Néoplatonisme et de Cabale chrétienne," in: Schmidt-Biggemann (ed.), *Christliche Kabbala*, 67–76.

Traeger, Jörg, *Renaissance und Religion: Die Kunst des Glaubens im Zeitalter Raphaels*, Munich: C.H. Beck 1997.

Travaglia, Pinella, *Magic, Causality and Intentionality: The Doctrine of Rays in al-Kindī*, Florence: Sismel, Edizioni del Galluzzo 1999.

Trepp, Anne-Charlott, "Hermetismus oder zur Pluralisierung von Religiositäts- und Wissensformen in der Frühen Neuzeit: Einleitende Bemerkungen," in: Trepp & Lehmann (eds.), *Antike Weisheit und kulturelle Praxis*, 3–15.

—— "Im 'Buch der Natur' lesen: Natur und Religion im Zeitalter der Konfessionalisierung und des Dreißigjährigen Krieges," in: Trepp & Lehmann (eds.), *Antike Weisheit und kulturelle Praxis*, 103–143.

Trepp, Anne-Charlott & Hartmut Lehmann (eds.), *Antike Weisheit und kulturelle Praxis: Hermetismus in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2001.

Trinkaus, Charles, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols., Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press 1970.

Turner, Victor & Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell 1978.

Ullmann, Manfred, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam*. Handbuch der Orientalistik, Ergänzungsband VI, 2, Leiden & Cologne: Brill 1972.

Urbach, Ephraim E., *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, 2 vols., Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1979.

Urban, Hugh B., "The Torment of Secrecy: Ethical and Epistemological Problems in the Study of Esoteric Traditions," *History of Religions* 37 (1998), 209–248.

—— "Sacred Capital: Pierre Bourdieu and the Study of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 15/4 (2003), 354–389.

—— "Religion and Secrecy in the Bush Administration: The Gentleman, the Prince, and the Simulacrum," *Esoterica* vol. 7 (2005), 1–38 (online available at http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeVII/Secrecy.htm; retrieved 25 April 2008).

—— *The Secrets of the Kingdom: Religion and Concealment in the Bush Administration*, Lanham etc.: Rowman and Littlefield 2007.

van Belzen, J.A., "Beyond a Classic? Hjalmar Sundén's Role Theory and Contemporary Narrative Psychology," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 6/3 (1996), 181–199.

van Berkel, Klaas and Arjo Vanderjagt (eds.). *The Book of Nature in Early Modern and Modern History*, Leuven: Peeters 2006.

vanden Broecke, Steven, *The Limits of Influence: Pico, Louvain, and the Crisis of Renaissance Astrology*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2003.

van den Broek, Roelof & Wouter J. Hanegraaff (eds.), *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1998.

van den Broek, Roelof & Cis van Heertum (eds.), *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan 2000.

van den Doel, Marieke J.E., "Ficino en het voorstellingsvermogen: *phantasia* en *imaginatio* in kunst en theorie van de Renaissance," PhD dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2008.

van den Doel, Marieke J.E. & Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Imagination," in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 606–616.

Vanderjagt, Arjo & Klaas van Berkel (eds.), *The Book of Nature in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Leuven: Peeters 2005.

van Dorsten, Jan A., *The Radical Arts: First Decade of an Elizabethan Renaissance*, London: Oxford University Press 1970.

van Liefferinge, Carine, *La Théurgie: des Oracles Chaldaïques à Proclus*, Liège: Centre International d'Étude de la Religion Grecque Antique 1999.

Veltri, Giuseppe & Gerold Necker (eds.), *Gottes Sprache in der philologischen Werkstatt: Hebraistik vom 15. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2004.

Vickers, Brian, "On the Function of Analogy in the Occult," in: Allen G. Debus & Ingrid Merkels (eds.), *Hermeticism in the Renaissance*, Washington: Folger Books 1988, 265–292.

Vickers, Brian (ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984.

von Stuckrad, Kocku, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie: Jüdische und christliche Beiträge zum antiken Zeitverständnis*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 2000.

—— "Discursive Study of Religion: From States of the Mind to Communication and Action," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 15 (2003), 255–271.

—— *Schamanismus und Esoterik: Kultur- und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, Leuven: Peeters 2003.

—— "Relative, Contingent, Determined: The Category 'History' and Its Methodological Dilemma," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71/4 (2003), 905–912.

—— "Review Joscelyn Godwin, 'The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance'," *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 4 (2004), 228–231.

—— *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, London: Equinox 2005.

—— "Encyclopedias," in: Lindsay Jones (ed. in chief), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, second ed., Detroit: Thomson Gale 2005, vol. 4, 2782–2785.

—— *Geschichte der Astrologie: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich: C.H. Beck 2007. Revised English version: *History of Astrology from Earliest Times to the Present*, London: Equinox 2010.

—— "Christian Kabbalah and Anti-Jewish Polemics: Pico in Context," in: Hammer & von Stuckrad (eds.), *Western Esotericism and Polemics*, 3–23.

Wacquant, Loïc J.D., "Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu," *Sociological Theory* 7/1 (1989), 26–63.

Walbridge, John, *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardī and the Heritage of the Greeks*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2000.

—— *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardī and Platonic Orientalism*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2001.

—— "Al-Suhrawardī on Body as Extension: An Alternative to Hylomorphism from Plato to Leibniz," in: Lawson (ed.), *Reason and Interpretation in Islam*, 235–247.

Walker, Daniel P., *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1972.

Walker, John A., *Visual Culture: An Introduction*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1997.

Wappmann, Volker, *Durchbruch zur Toleranz: Die Religionspolitik des Pfalzgrafen Christian August von Sulzbach, 1622–1708*, 2nd ed., Neustadt a. d. Aisch: Degener & Co. 1998.

Warburg, Aby, "Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoja zu Ferrara," in: *Gesammelte Schriften. Studienausgabe*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1998, vol. 1.2, 459–481.

—— "Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten" (1920), in: *Gesammelte Schriften. Studienausgabe*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1998, 199–303.

—— *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999 (German original Leipzig: Teubner 1932).

Warnke, Martin, *Geschichte der deutschen Kunst. Band 2: Spätmittelalter und Frühe Neuzeit, 1400–1750*, Munich: C.H. Beck 1999.

Wasserstrom, Steven M., "Sefer Yeṣira and Early Islam: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993), 1–30.

—— *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995.

—— *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade and Henry Corbin at Eranos*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999.

—— "Jewish-Muslim Relations in the Context of Andalusian Emigration," in: Meyerson & Edward (eds.), *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, 69–87.

—— "Jewish Sectarianism in the Near East: a Muslim's Account," in: Fine (ed.), *Judaism in Practice*, 229–236.

Weber, Max, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, 5th ed., Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1982.

—— *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* I, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1988 (first ed. 1920).

Weill-Parot, Nicholas, *Les "images astrologiques" au moyen âge et à la renaissance: spéculations intellectuelles et pratiques magiques (XIIᵉ–XVᵉ siècle)*, Paris: Champion 2002.

Wewers, Gerd A., *Geheimnis und Geheimhaltung im rabbinischen Judentum*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 1975.

Whimster, Sam (ed.), *The Essential Weber: A Reader*, London & New York: Routledge 2004.

Whitby, Christopher, *John Dee's Actions with Spirits: 22 December 1581 to 23 May 1583*, 2 vols., New York: Garland 1988.

White, Andrew Dickson, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology*, 2 vols., New York: MacMillan 1896.

White, Hayden, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1973.

—— *The Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1978.

Wilke, Annette, "Mysticism," in: Kocku von Stuckrad (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, 4 vols., Leiden & Boston: Brill 2006, 1279–1258.

Williams, Michael A., *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996.

Willis, Roy & Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon*, Oxford & New York: Berg 2004.

Wilson, Andrew N., *God's Funeral: The Decline of Faith in Western Civilization*, London: Murray 1999.

Wilson, Peter Lamborn, "Oneiriconographia: Entering Poliphilo's Utopian Dreamscape—A Review Essay," *Alexandria* 5 (2000), 399–449.

Wolfson, Elliot R., "By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 14 (1989), 103–178.

—— *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994.

—— "Occultation of the Feminine and the Body of Secrecy in Medieval Kabbalah," in: Wolfson (ed.), *Rending the Veil*, 113–154.

—— *Abraham Abulafia—Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy, and Theurgy*, Los Angeles: Cherub Press 2000.

—— "Beyond the Spoken Word: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Medieval Jewish Mysticism," in: Elman & Gershoni (eds.), *Transmitting Jewish Traditions*, 166–224.

—— *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination*, New York: Fordham University Press 2005.

—— "Kabbalah," in: Kocku von Stuckrad (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, 4 vols., Leiden & Boston: Brill 2006, 1052–1057.

—— *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press 2006.

Wolfson, Elliot R. (ed.), *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, New York: Seven Bridges Press 1999.

Woodhouse, Christopher M., *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1986.

Yamane, David, "Narrative and Religious Experience," *Sociology of Religion* 61/2 (2000), 171–190.

Yates, Frances, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1964.

York, Michael, *Pagan Theology: Paganism as a World Religion*, New York: New York University Press 2003.

Ziai, Hossein, *Knowledge and Illumination: A Study of Suhrawardī's Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1990.

Zika, Charles, *Reuchlin und die okkulte Tradition der Renaissance*, Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke 1998; rev. Engl. version in *idem*, *Exorcising Our Demons*, 21–68.

—— *Exorcising Our Demons: Magic, Witchcraft, and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden & Boston: Brill 2003.

INDEX