

## Transformations and Troubled Times

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Welcome to issue 8.1 of *Correspondences*. This issue sees the light of day amidst the ongoing crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. This year's unique public health challenges have affected nearly every dimension of academia, and the lasting repercussions of the present crisis are yet to be grasped. During this tempestuous time, we are proud to present our readers with a fresh issue representing the latest in esotericism scholarship. As we are currently in the midst of the crisis, it is difficult to predict how our subject matter will be affected by the pandemic and its aftermath. However, scholars of (Western) esotericism and related fields are, arguably, uniquely situated to theorise and shed light on urgent issues such as the (continued) prevalence of conspiracism in present-day discourse, and it is likely that future issues of the journal will bear the mark of the ongoing turbulence in one way or another.

As (relatively) recently appointed Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Correspondences*, having assumed this position in late 2019, issue 8.1 is the first which I have had the pleasure of working with from beginning until completion. As our field continues to grow, and is perhaps more relevant than ever, I am honoured to have been invited to play a role in the continued development of *Correspondences* as a free, interdisciplinary, open-access forum for established and emerging scholars in esoteric studies and adjacent fields. Over the coming years, we are planning to increase the interdisciplinary reach and impact of our journal through a number of exciting collaborations, which we look forward to unveiling in due course.

Recent years have witnessed a deepening and expansion of the temporal, geographical, and conceptual range of the study of esotericism, as epitomised

by, for instance, the establishment of the Occult South Asia Network (OSAN), the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE), the Esotericism, Gender, and Sexuality Network (ESOGEN), and (less recently) the Network for the Study of Esotericism in Antiquity (NSEA). In light of our developing field, the Editorial Board of *Correspondences* has been expanded this year, and we are delighted to welcome new board members Margarita Simon Guillory (Boston University), Jay Johnston (University of Sydney), Liana Saif (University of London), Chiara O. Tommasi (Università di Pisa), Gauri Viswanathan (Columbia University), and Shin'ichi Yoshinaga (Maizuru National College of Technology). We also take the opportunity to extend our sincere gratitude to our existing Editorial Board members Egil Asprem (Stockholm University), Henrik Bogdan (University of Gothenburg), Juan Pablo Bubello (Universidad de Buenos Aires), Peter Forshaw (Universiteit van Amsterdam), Christian Giudice (London), Kenneth Granholm (Stockholm), Amy Hale (Helix Education), Boaz Huss (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev), and Birgit Menzel (Universität Mainz), for their ongoing hard work and commitment to upholding the scholarly integrity and quality of *Correspondences*.

As usual, the articles in this issue represent a mix of perspectives and approaches to the study of (Western) esotericism. While the present issue offers particularly rich reading for those with a special interest in esotericism in modernity, the contributions herein also indicate how sometimes vastly anterior sources inform and are reworked in modern esoteric worldviews and practices. In “A Microcosm of the Esoteric Revival: The Histories of the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram”, Graham John Wheeler conducts a close reading of the sources for one of the most popular rituals to have emerged from *fin-de-siècle* occultism: the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (LBRP), formulated in the late-Victorian era in the context of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Wheeler contends that the LBRP is based on a diverse mix of sources, some of which are very old, and that the ritual epitomises the eclectic approach of the Golden Dawn founders, bridging the divide between Christian and pagan interests among the initiates of the order.

In their article “‘The Light is Burning Pretty Low’: The 1948 Correspondence between Samuel Lewis and Gershom Scholem”, Boaz Huss and Jonatan Meir analyse the 1948 correspondence between the esteemed Kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem and harbinger of the Jewish New Age, Samuel Lewis (alias Sufi Sam). Their correspondence, which followed the second-edition publication of Scholem’s *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, sheds new light on the reception of esoteric Kabbalah in the United States, as well as the interchanges between academic scholarship and modern occultism in the twentieth century.

Finally, in “The Tetractys and the Hebdomad: Blavatsky’s Sacred Geometry”, Malin Fitger examines the Western reception of Sanskrit terminology and its impact on occult conceptions of subtle anatomy, with a focus on H.P. Blavatsky’s works. Fitger indicates a significant doctrinal change occurring between Blavatsky’s major works *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), analysing how and why a notion of three human principles (body, soul, and spirit) was replaced by a seven-part model. Fitger also proposes a hypothesis to explain the centrality of the number seven in Blavatsky’s cosmology, situating Blavatsky’s ideas about numerology, mathematics, and geometry among contemporary authors.

As usual, the present issue also contains a number of book reviews, curated by our Review Editor, Justine Bakker. Susannah Crockford reviews Anthony d’Andrea’s *Reflexive Religion: The New Age in Brazil and Beyond*; Andrea Franchetto reviews Dan Attrell and David Porreca’s English translation of the *Picatrix*; Amy Hale reviews Shai Feraro and Ethan Doyle White’s edited volume *Magic and Witchery in the Modern West*, which celebrates the twentieth anniversary of Ronald Hutton’s *The Triumph of the Moon* (1999); Liana Saif reviews Alireza Doostdar’s *The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny*; and Kurosh Amoui reviews Michael Muhammad Knight’s *Magic in Islam*. We extend our gratitude to those who have contributed articles and reviews to this issue, as well as to our peer-reviewers for their hard work in ensuring the quality of our journal.