ASCENSION ON HIGH:

Occult Theories and Practice from Antiquity to the Renaissance

MA seminar for MedS, History, and Religious Studies

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2017 Winter Term, Tuesdays, 11:00-12:40.

CEU credits: 2; ECTS credits: 3.

Office hours: before and after class or by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The title of this course is borrowed from Moshe Idel's book published by CEU Press (2005) which treats magical ideas and practices in Jewish mysticism aiming at the deification of man, similar to Elijah's ascension or Enoch's translation in the Bible. The ambition to follow their example or to achieve something similar has been deeply embedded in human psyche and culture, naturally also outside the Jewish tradition.

We are going to start our survey with Plato and some neoplatonic texts (Plotinus, Iamblichus), then we proceed to the Middle Ages and examine medieval magical texts as well as Jewish kabbalistic literature, such as the *Sefer Jetzirah*, the *Picatrix*, etc. The course proceeds with Renaissance enthusiasts (Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola), who often imagined themselves the reincarnation of Enoch (Lodovico Lazzarelli, Guillaume Postel, John Dee). In conclusion we shall examine two literary works, Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (in connection with black magic i.e. negativ deification) and an episode in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* which offers an interesting example for a poetical revelatory image suitable for mandalaic meditation and enlightenment.

The **goal of the course** is to make students aware of an intellectual tradition which reached from Antiquity through the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and has been one of the stimulating forces behind the so called "Western ideology". This tradition has not died out, it is still active in modern Western Esotericism and New Age ideology, except that since the 17th century it has become rather a counterculture than a dominating intellectual and cultural trend.

The **learning outcome** should consist of 1) an accumulation of historical knowledge in a specific and relevant field of intellectual/cultural history; 2) an awareness about the interconnectedness of premodern ideas and recent intellectual/ideological developments; 3/ the enhancement of methodological equipment by the help of which students can handle and interpret intellectual and cultural history with ample expertise.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

1. January 10

Ascension on High: definitions and cultural history in Greek Antiquity.

Reader: Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), "The Language of Mysteries," 1-16.

1. January 17

Plato. *Symposium / Phaedrus* (excerpts).

Reader: Phaedrus 244-257c; Symposium 201d-212c. Pres: Plato' dualist-idealist wordview. . . .

1. January 24

Neoplatonism: Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus. (excerpts)

Reader: Corpus hermeticum IV, XIII; Iamblichus, De mysteriis, II.10-11, III.6-7, V.15; Proclus, *On the Signs of Divine Possession* (Psellus's transcription). Ref: Szőnyi, *John Dee*, Chapter 3. Pres: On the Corpus Hermeticum. . . . .

1. January 31

Pseudo-Dionysius: *The Mystical Theology*. (excerpts)

Reader: *The Divine Names* (Chapter 4, Rorem ed., 71-96); *The Mystical Theology* (Rorem ed., 135-41); *The Celestial Hierarchy* (Chapters 1-2, Rorem ed. 145-53). Pres: On Dionysius. . . . .

1. February 7

Jewish Mysticism. *The Book(s) of Enoch*.

Reader: 1Enoch + Introduction; 3Enoch (excerpts) + Introduction (from Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*). Pres: Summary of the introductions. . . . .

1. Febrary 14

Jewish Mysticism. *Sefer Jetzirach*; Eleazer of Worms, *Commentary on the Book of Formation* (Making a Golem)

Reader: *Sefer Jetzirah – The Short Version* as printed in Mantua in 1562. Ed. Aryeh Kaplan, 261-67; Eleazer of Worms, *Making a Golem* in Copenhaver, *The Book of Magic*, 279-81. Pres: What is Kabbalah?. . . . .

1. February 21

Medieval Magic into the Renaissance: *Picatrix*, Ficino, Pico

Reader: *Picatrix* 1.1-2, 2.6, 3.7; Pico, *Oration*. Pres: On Pico. . . . .

1. February 28

Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (excerpts)

Reader: Agrippa, *Three Books* (English translation, 1653, modern edition ). Pres: On Agrippa. . . . .

1. March 7

Hermes and Enoch from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Lazzarelli, Postel, Dee.

Reader: Lodovico Lazzarelli (ed. Hanegraaff), *Crater Hermetis* 19.5-30.6; John Dee (excerpts). Pres: On Postel and Dee. . . . .

1. March 14

The development of the Faust legend in the Renaissance. Christopher Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus*.

Reader: *Doctor Faustus* [e-text]. Pres: On the origins of the Faust legend. . . . .

1. March 21

Ascension in Poetry: Alma's House in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.

Reader: Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, II.ix. Cf. Szönyi, John Dee, Chapter 9. Pres: On the *Faerie Queene*. . . . . .

1. March 28

Round up; Q&A

ASSIGNEMENTS

–Participation and presentation in classes (30%)

–Take home test published by March 21, due by March 30 (30%)

–Essay (40% – 8-10 pages, min. 8 items of reference, 30% contents, 10% format/language). Due by April 7, 10am.

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