

Call for Articles:

Aries special issue on

Esotericism and the Cognitive Science of Religion

Edited by

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The cognitive science of religion (CSR) and the academic study of Western esotericism have both made a significant impact on religious studies over the past two decades. The study of esotericism continues to deepen our understanding of the historical complexities of religion in the West, and has identified a number of blind-spots related to heterodox religion, radically experiential practices, and overlaps between “religion”, “magic”, and “science”. Meanwhile, CSR is rapidly changing the way scholars think about and approach key processes of religious practice, adding important new experimental and analytic tools to the scholar’s toolbox. This special issue of *Aries* aims to explore the potential of bringing these two fruitful fields together. What happens when we apply CSR approaches to the empirical material studied by esotericism scholars? How can key areas of interest in the study of esotericism, such as the notion of (experiential) gnosis, correspondences, imagination, higher knowledge, rejected knowledge, magical thinking, secrecy, and initiation contribute to the development of new approaches in CSR? How can we think about ritual practices such as theurgy, divination, healing, and ceremonial magic in terms of CSR approaches to ritual? Moreover, how can we use CSR approaches to these issues to integrate the study of esotericism more firmly in the broader comparative study of religion?

We are looking to curate research articles that deal with these and related questions. We take an inclusive view of CSR, and are happy to consider approaches from e.g. personality- and social psychology. We are especially interested in hands-on approaches that demonstrate the use of CSR inspired methodology to esoteric subject matters. We look in particular for articles based on contemporary ethnographies, interview or experimental data, but are also open for articles that bring CSR to bear on historical sources. The important thing is that studies should be able to integrate cognitive and psychological perspectives with existing state-of-the-art scholarship on esotericism.

If you want to take part in this special issue, please send us an abstract of your proposed topic by **June 15 2015**. Please specify as far as possible the empirical scope of your proposed article, as well as the CSR approaches you plan to work with. Include a short bibliography of the key literature you intend to draw on. On the basis of received abstracts, we will invite authors to submit their completed articles for peer review. The deadline for receiving finished manuscripts will be **February 1 2016**.

Relevant subject matter includes but is not limited to:

- New Age movement
- Ritual magic
- Channeling
- Healing/holistic health
- Correspondence thinking
- Kabbalah / esoteric hermeneutics
- Sex magic
- Spiritualism
- Neoshamanism
- Contemporary paganism
- Astrology
- Alchemy
- Western initiatory societies

Relevant CSR approaches include but are not limited to:

- Epidemiological approaches to the spread of esoteric representations
- Cognitive optimality theory (e.g., agency detection, promiscuous teleology, minimal counterintuitiveness, theological correctness)
- Cognitive ritual theory (e.g., ritual form hypothesis, two modes theory, cognitive resource depletion theory)
- Embodied cognition
- Neurocognitive, experimental, and psychological approaches to experiential practices
- Personality and individual difference correlates for esoteric practitioners (e.g. positive schizotypy, absorption, hypnotizability)
- Conceptual blending theory

Please email your proposed abstract to Egil Asprem (easprem@gmail.com) and Markus Altena Davidsen (m.davidsen@hum.leidenuniv.nl). If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact us.