

Sezione monografica / Theme Section

*Conflicts, Tensions, and Mythmaking at Eranos
Before and After World War II*

Conflicts, Tensions, and Mythmaking at Eranos The Study of Religions Before and After World War II

The 1893 World Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago, hosted the first meeting of the Parliament of the World Religions. The encounters between representatives of various religions set out the premises for the first organized interfaith dialogues in the modern era. Their ambitious goals included the achievement of international concord through identifying and promoting the most advanced common features of the world religions. Often, these features included mysticism, the psychological aspects of religious experience, and the non-dogmatic study of religions and their history. Through the comparative studies of Western and Eastern mysticism and, especially, through his key notion of the “numinous”, German scholar Rudolf Otto represented the lynchpin of the trajectory that united the 1893 meetings of the Parliament of the World Religions and the Eranos meetings annually held in Ascona, under the supervision of Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn and the theoretical guidance of Carl G. Jung¹.

Yet there was a great difference in the Eranos discussions on religion from the initial American settings of the first Parliament of the World Religions. The intellectual manufacturing of social harmony through interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural phenomenological studies of mysticism, as the new conversation between religions was envisaged immediately after 1893, had to be accommodated to more menacing realities in interwar Europe,

¹ For further historical details, see discussions in M. Ferrara - E. Iricinski, *Introduction: Spiritual Scholarship and History of Religions as Self-Improvement at Ascona*, in «Asdiwal» 16 (2021 [2022]), pp. 59-61; H.T. Hakl, *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos. Unbekannte Begegnungen von Wissenschaft und Esoterik: eine alternative Geistesgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Scientia Nova, Bretten 2001; Eng. tr. Id., *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, tr. by Ch. McIntosh, Equinox Pub., Sheffield - Bristol 2013; for a shorter excellent presentation of the Eranos meetings see B. von Reibnitz, *Der Eranos-Kreis. Religionswissenschaft und Weltanschauung oder der Gelehrte als Laien-Priester*, in R. Faber - Ch. Holste (eds.), *Kreise – Gruppen – Bünde. Zur Soziologie moderner Intellektuellenassoziation*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2000, pp. 425-440. For an earlier critique of the Eranos meetings, see H. Heinz Holz, *ERANOS – eine moderne Pseudo-Gnosis*, in J. Taubes (ed.), *Religionstheorie und Politische Theologie*, Band 2: *Gnosis und Politik*, Wilhelm Fink and Ferdinand Schöning, Munich 1984, esp. Pp. 248-263, and its critical evaluation in H.T. Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History*, cit., pp. 257-264. See also T. Schabert (ed.), *The Eranos Movement*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2016; R. Bernardini, *Jung a Eranos: Il Progetto della psicologia complessa*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2011; G.P. Quaglino - A. Romano - R. Bernardini (eds.), *Carl Gustav Jung a Eranos: 1933-1952*, Antigone Edizioni, Turin 2007; and, for a psychoanalytic perspective, W. Scatigni - F. Livorsi (ed.), *Il mistero di Eranos tra passato e presente: Civiltà e spiritualità tra Oriente e Occidente dal punto di vista della Psicologia Analitica (e dintorni)*, Falsopiano, Alessandria 2011.

greatly reshaped by the first world conflict. As a result, the scholars invited at the Eranos meetings in the interwar period, as well as during the first years after the WWII, encoded historical and theoretical references to conflict, tensions, and antagonisms in their approaches to the study of the history and phenomenology of religions.

The first Eranos meeting took place in 1933. The contributors to the present dossier explored the ways in which the scholars, analysts, and artists who attended the Ascona meetings during their first three decades of existence engaged – or did not – with the after-effects of the two world wars. Conflict has never been far from the minds of their contemporaries. The Eranos texts written during the 1930s showed a strange elation at reconstruction after the war and at the new times to come². The texts from 1936 to 1946, no doubt influenced by Jung's own explorations and interests, indicate an inward turn to intellectual integrations of the history of religions, mythology, and folklore, on the one hand, and the research outcome of analytical psychology, on the other hand, as it was freshly shaped by Carl G. Jung. Topics such as mysticism, redemption, rebirth, the mysteries, and the spirit took central stage at the Ascona meetings during the decade that witnessed the rise of National Socialism in Germany. Horst Junginger's reconstitution of the dialogue between Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, a German Indologist and manifest Hitler supporter, and Carl G. Jung, during the first years of the 1930s, dwells on their common search for an alternative "new spirituality on the basis of a scientific understanding of both religion and psyche"³. Noam Zadoff defined the Eranos meetings as the attempt to prolong the European interwar spirit of the annual summer hideaway, in which their participants traded the industrialized urban environment of the decades immediately before and after WWII for the grander intellectual and natural ecosystem of the mountain retreat⁴. Theirs was also a retreat from modernity, current events, conflicts, and war. Moshe Idel considered the absence, from the postwar Eranos meetings, of any "session or meeting [...] dedicated to the horrors of the Holocaust"⁵. Between 1946 and 1962, the focus of the Eranos meetings shifted from an open investigation of symbols and themes pertaining to the history of religion and mythology to that of the "human being" (*Der Mensch*). The phenomenological approach in the

² O. Fröbe-Kapteyn, *Vorwort*, in «Eranos Jahrbuch» 4 (1936), [*Gestaltung der Erlösungsidee in Ost und West*], pp. 5-9.

³ H. Junginger, *Harmless or Dangerous? The Eranos Conferences in the 1930s from the Perspective of National Socialist Germany*, in «Archaeus» 14 (2010), pp. 41-55, esp. p. 54; see Id. (ed.), *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, Brill, Leiden 2008, and M. Ferrara, *Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn's Ashram: The Great Mother and the Personal History of Eastern Religions*, in «Asdiwal» 16 (2021), pp. 79-94: pp. 63-77.

⁴ N. Zadoff, *Gershom Scholem: From Berlin to Jerusalem and Back*, tr. by J. Green (The Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry), Brandeis University Press, Brandeis 2018; see ch. 7, pp. 157-188; see also M. Idel's contribution to the present «SMSR» dossier.

⁵ M. Idel, *Prisca Theologia and Retrograde Phenomenology at Eranos: Corbin, Eliade, not Scholem*, in «Asdiwal» 16 (2021), pp. 110-124, esp. p. 111.

study of religion did not diminish at all; if anything, it was enhanced with the arrival of Mircea Eliade and Henry Corbin.

The present collection of articles represents the second installment of our research on the influence of the Eranos meetings on the formation of the history of religions as a discipline in Europe and North America. We recommend our readers to refer to the first installment, published in 2021 in the journal «Asdiwal», which laid the groundwork for reconstructing the role of Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn in the organization of the *Tagungen*. It presented the way classical studies shifted focus to the identification of the features in the religions of the Greeks and Romans. It also discussed the triad of Eranos luminaries of Henry Corbin, Mircea Eliade, and Gershom Scholem, made famous by Steven Wasserstrom's groundbreaking 1999 work on religion at the Eranos meetings⁶.

In the second installment of our project, we adopted the term “mythmaking” from Jonathan Z. Smith's theoretical articles and Burton L. Mack's work on the redescription of ancient Christianity, to denote common discursive formations whose purpose is to make sense of the world by establishing social practices, codifying cultural interests, and sharing systems of symbols, edifying narratives, and identity-building processes⁷. As such, for the purpose of this Dossier, we regard the “Eranos mythmaking” as the collections of cultural, analytical, and academic strategies the Ascona speakers embraced to cope with the social, intellectual, and political upheaval between 1933 and 1950.

The articles gathered in this dossier take the first, surveying *Asdiwal* outlook further deep into the territory of historical reassessments. The contributions you are about to read are abundant in historical detail and commanding in their methodological and critical reconsiderations. Scholars of ancient religions took cosmology to be the most important element of any literary form of mythmaking. Taking us back to the pre-Ascona years, John Tresch's *Drawing the World Picture before Eranos: Jung and Einstein in 1917* illustrates the ways in which the intersections between scientific and psychoanalytic conceptions about cosmology in the 1910s contributed to creating the Eranos milieu and reserved a place at the *Tagungen* for physics.

⁶ M. Ferrara, *Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn's Ashram*, cit.; F. Graf, *Eranos and the Religions of the Greeks and Romans*, in «Asdiwal» 16 (2021), pp. 95-108; M. Idel, *Prisca Theologia*, cit.; E. Iricin-schi, *Mircea Eliade's Perennial Conceptual Placeholders: An Eranos Intellectual Itinerary*, *ibi*, pp. 110-125; S.M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1999.

⁷ Jonathan Z. Smith and Burton L. Mack adopted “mythmaking” from twentieth-century European and North American anthropological literature and adapted it to the study of ancient and modern religions. See J.Z. Smith, *Re: Corinthians*, in Id., *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago - London 2004, pp. 340-361; see also B.L. Mack's academic revisions of the Christian origins, stretching from his outstanding *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1988) to his provocative *Rise and Fall of the Christian Myth: Restoring Our Democratic Ideals* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 2007), and to his final lucid analysis of mythmaking in the contemporary United States, *Critical Times for America: The Politics of Cultural Amnesia* (Cascade Books, Eugene, OR 2019).

The next contribution returns us to the first Eranos years. Andrea Maria Nencini's *The Buddhist 'Active Will' in Caroline A. Foley Rhys Davids' Eranos Lectures* brings to the fore a less-known participant to the Ascona meetings. It advances a sensitive and well-balanced depiction of the English Buddhist scholar Caroline A. Foley Rhys Davids while also providing meticulous summaries of her Eranos talks. In her text, Nencini rescues C.A.F. Rhys Davids' contribution to the debates on psychology and the philosophy of the mind in the 1930s, and, in doing so, brings to life the atmosphere of the first Eranos meetings, from 1933 to 1936. The novelty of Nencini's contribution resides in its fresh assessment of C.A.F. Rhys Davids' personal theology in terms of social activism and progressive humanism through the attentive historical contextualization of her Eranos lectures.

The next two articles take into consideration the two world wars that marked the formation and development of the Ascona meetings. Marianna Ferrara's *War, Salvation, and Rebirth at «Casa Eranos»*, addresses the role of war in the theoretical and substantial direction that Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn, as founder of the Ascona conferences, gave each year to the event, including the choice of the topic and of the people to invite. Through the intersection between psychological theories, anthropological studies, and the study of religion in the 1920s-1930s, this paper traces the role of Eranos as a platform between Europe, Asia, and the USA, and highlights the importance of interdisciplinarity in reshaping the study of religion, particularly in relation to biocentric approaches to nature. Eduard Iricinschi's *Gnosis at Ascona: Modern Visions and Ancient Heresies in Times of War* identifies the role the notions of "gnosis", "Gnosticism", and "heresy" played in the development of ideas at the Eranos *Tagungen*. He traces Jung's references to Gnosticism and heresiology and highlights the ways in which these notions both informed the modern understanding of *gnosis* at the Ascona meetings and enabled scholars to articulate their own experiences of War World II.

With the following two articles, readers enter the cultural territory of "religion after religion", that is, the full expression of history of religions as a therapeutic key at the Eranos *Tagungen*. Moshe Idel's *The Eranos Myth of Integration: Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn, Mircea Eliade, and Gershom Scholem* revisits the topic of his «Asdiwal» contribution, namely a more nuanced comparative appraisal of the three scholars Steven M. Wasserstrom singled out as the most important historians of religions who took part in the Eranos meetings. Idel regards Fröbe-Kapteyn's interpretation of the power of integration active in the Eranos spirit as the Eranos "myth of integration". Furthermore, Idel considers that academic friendship and the mutual respect between Gershom Scholem and Mircea Eliade bring further nuances to this relationship, especially after Israeli historians informed the former that the latter had been active in the Romanian fascist organization of the Iron Guard⁸. Florent Serina's *Louis Massignon, the 'Free Agent' of Eranos?*

⁸ In addition to Moshe Idel's present article, see also B. Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequenc-*

expands a chapter from his French monograph dedicated to the reception of Carl G. Jung in France and introduces the reader to another, often overlooked, participant at the Ascona meetings⁹. Based on research in the Archives of the Eranos Foundation and on the Louis Massignon unpublished papers, Serina's piece is the first to situate the French orientalist within the ideological context of the Eranos *Tagungen* beginning with 1937. The author establishes that Fröbe-Kapteyn invited Massignon at Jung's expressed wish to add a specialist in Islam during the first Eranos years. Particularly innovative is Serina's careful reexamination of Massignon's supposed "exile" from the *Tagungen* after the French scholar made a clear intervention of support for Algerian independence in 1955.

The last two contributions take us out of Europe and explore the reverberations of the Eranos meetings on the North American continent. Silvia Fogliazza's *The 'Goddess Theory' and the Eranos Mythology: Crafting an Archaeological Outlook for the Neolithic 'Religion'* sketches the grand trajectory of the Jungian theories on the Great Mother. It documents the work of academic mythmaking resulting from the further elaborations of Carl G. Jung's archetype of the Great Mother at the Ascona conferences between 1933 and 1948. The hermeneutic astuteness of this essay resides in the commanding presentation and alignment of the main cultural characters and their theories. In a scholarly tour de force, Fogliazza introduces her readers to Jung's archetype of the Great Mother, to Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn's collection of images on the same subject, and to the book Erich Neumann dedicated to this very topic. It counters the above scholarly narratives with Joseph Campbell's popularization of Neumann's ideas, and with the further mythmaking involved in Marija Gimbutas' "Goddess theory"¹⁰. Finally, Sergio Botta, in *A Trickster at Eranos: A Note on the Use of the "Primitive" in Paul Radin's Work*, revisits the American anthropologist's involvement with the Ascona milieu. Botta identifies Radin's ambiguity about most of Jung's analytical concepts and provides a thick description of early twentieth-century debates about "primitive religions", the "primitive man" and "primitive mentality". He considers the way these made their way in Jung's and Radin's writings. Botta's detailed analysis of the essays Paul Radin, Karl Kerényi, and Carl G. Jung dedicated to the North-American mythological figure of the Trickster is matched by his own careful contextual reconstruction of Radin's Winnebago informants and their own narratives. *A Trickster at Eranos* equally redeems the image of Radin as a "maverick anthropologist" – with a term Botta borrows from Arpad Szakolczai and Bjørn Thomassen's recent collab-

es: *A Great Scholar's Hidden Past and His Protégé's Unsolved Murder*, Oxford University Press, New York 2024.

⁹ F. Serina, *C.G. Jung en France: rencontres, passions et controverses*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2021.

¹⁰ E. Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1955.

orative book – and the complex figure and biography of Sam Blowsnake, his Winnebago informant¹¹.

We conclude with a word of explanation about the title of this «SMSR» Theme Section. The most important input of the above collection of essays resides in the critical evaluation of the secondary mythmaking of the Eranos theoretical outlook. Through meticulous historical examinations of the twentieth-century disciplines of the history of religions, anthropology, and history of science, the contributors identified and addressed the creation and circulation of twentieth-century scholarly myths, such as the “Trickster”, “the East-West continuum in the study of religions” “the Goddess theory”, “the myth of integration”, “gnosis and visualization”, and “the myth of active will”. The essays also explore the ways in which the participants at the Eranos meetings dealt with the two world conflagrations that bookended the first two stages of the *Tagungen*. Their intellectual and emotional reactions – or the lack thereof – to war, conflicts, and fragile peace projects shaped the study of religion in the 1950s and 1960s. The Ascona conferences fashioned the postwar history of religions as a salvific, but no less salient, personal intellectual enterprise. The articles you are about to read shed light on this transformation.

¹¹ A. Szakolczai - B. Thomassen, *From Anthropology to Social Theory: Rethinking the Social Sciences*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019, esp. ch. 5, “Paul Radin. The Trickster”, pp. 124-149.