CLOSED PANELS

Panel Titles & Panel Abstracts

CLOSED PANEL I

Religion and Literature: Exploring the Potentials of the Intersections of Literature and Religion (I)

The research field "Religion and Literature" has, especially in German speaking academia, mostly been worked on by scholars from literary studies and/or theology. But religious studies, with its own specific questions, perspectives and aesthetics, could add valuable insight to the field and at the same time has a lot to gain from dealing with literature in at least three ways: first as an important source for the history and present of religion which requires its own methods and theories; second as another way of knowing and thinking that arguably has similarities to religious thought and language; and third as a type of knowledge production that differs in significant ways from standard scholarly knowledge production and might help researchers of religion, as we would argue, to find new ways of dealing with the challenges of their object of study. The papers are each from the perspective of the panelists' fields focusing on the different aspects of the questions: Why literature? What might be the use and function of literature within the study of religions?

CLOSED PANEL II

Islamic Prophetic Relics in Transformation

This panel will present research on Islamic prophetic relics through various case studies. Throughout Islamic history, prophetic relics, such as the Prophet's mantle, hair, sandals, and footprints, and they have functioned as powerful sources of blessing and legitimacy, while also provoking sustained theological controversy. Debates over relic veneration reflect deeper struggles over religious authenticity, proper practice, and the nature of prophetic authority. Moreover, another area concerns the history of specific relics, their circulation, and their function as objects people turn to for blessing. Research has also been conducted on relics kept and displayed in museum collections and exhibitions. Moreover, throughout history, relics have been utilized by political authorities to gain religio-political status and legitimacy. This panel will address these areas of research as well. In the study of Islamic relics, new methodological approaches are being developed and also cross-disciplinary studies, which contribute to expand the field and give new insights into the use and meaning ascribed to relics. One example of this is a project financed by the Swedish Research Council (VR), which examines how Islamic theological discourse on prophetic relics, objects associated with the Prophet Muhammad, has developed from the formative period of Islam to the present. Combining genealogical discourse analysis with AI-augmented methods, the project employs Large Language Models (LLMs) to analyze vast multilingual corpora, establishing reproducible protocols for large-scale historical research. This methodology will be presented as one case discussing the merits of LLM in relic studies compared to earlier research methodologies, and present how AI-augmented approaches can be productively integrated with traditional humanistic analysis. The panel will also present case studies that are based on text material drawn from the mentioned project, but also include secondary relics. One such case study will focus the fragments of the cover of the Ka'ba and the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in Madinah at the Civic Museums

of the City of Turin in Italy, in collaboration with textile curators. Another case study will focus on the so-called Sahabi tree in Jordan, under which Muhammad is said to have sat. This secondary relic is analyzed in a contemporary political context, showing the importance of relics to give religio-political legitimacy and status of political rulers.

CLOSED PANEL III

The Light and Shadow of Artificial Intelligence: Soka Gakkai's Buddhist Perspective

This session explores how Soka Gakkai's Buddhist humanism offers a distinctive lens for evaluating the promises and perils of artificial intelligence. The first contribution draws on the founder of Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburō Makiguchi's, seminal distinction between "intuition" and "thought." Daisaku Ikeda later applied this framework directly to AI, noting that machine intelligence operates almost entirely at the apperceptive level of thought. While AI excels at pattern recognition and linear analysis, it lacks the intuitive, creative, and value-generating capacities that define human life. The second paper examines the growing use of chatbots to answer existential and moral questions, including systems trained on religious or philosophical traditions. From a Buddhist perspective, such tools can be helpful when well-designed and critically used, yet they also risk misleading users or encouraging intellectual passivity. The third paper analyzes Soka Gakkai's third President, Daisaku Ikeda's, dialogues with Victor Sadovnichiy (2002–2011), the mathematician and longtime rector of Moscow State University, shaped by the late-Soviet scientific milieu. Their conversations probed the "light and shadow" of technological progress, warning that digital environments lack the existential depth necessary for character formation. Their insights, applied to contemporary AI, underscore the need to preserve a human scale in science. The fourth paper examines the contemporary topic of using artificial intelligence to enhance military advancement and the moral implications of employing Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (a.k.a. LAWS) in ongoing warfronts. The paper focuses on Soka Gakkai's oppositional narrative against AI-assisted lethal weaponry, rooted in Buddhist Humanistic values, and its social initiatives, such as "Stop Killer Robots," which raise awareness of the dehumanizing nature of autonomous wars and the emotional devolution that reduces human casualties to building blocks for an ever-evolving algorithm. Together, these papers present a coherent Buddhist humanist assessment of AI. They affirm that technology must remain a tool guided by human wisdom, not a force that reshapes humanity in its own image.

CLOSED PANEL IV

Charisma Re-examined: Paradoxes of Plagiarism, Prestige, and Proximity

The panel draws on current research on Islamic, Buddhist, and yogic traditions as well as new religious movements to re-examine charisma as a central concept in the study of religions.

CLOSED PANEL V

Governing Orthodoxy in Times of War: Authority, Discourse, and State Power in the Baltic States

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally transformed the position of Orthodox Christianity across the Baltic region, shifting ecclesiastical affiliation from a primarily theological

concern into a matter of governance, legitimacy, and national security. This panel brings together three empirically grounded studies that examine how Orthodox authority is negotiated, contested, and regulated under conditions of geopolitical crisis. Moving across levels of analysis—from discursive transformations within church-affiliated media, to lived negotiations of legitimacy among clergy and laity, to state-led legal and political interventions—the panel explores how Orthodoxy becomes a site through which broader struggles over sovereignty, identity, and democratic governance unfold. The first paper traces discursive continuity and rupture within Lithuanian Orthodox media between 2014 and 2022, demonstrating how narratives of war and ecclesiastical authority shifted from apparent unity to open ideological fragmentation following Russia's full-scale invasion. The second contribution examines how Orthodox actors in Lithuania affiliated with both the Moscow and Ecumenical Patriarchates navigate intensified securitization, articulating claims to belonging, autonomy, and recognition in a political environment where religious identity is increasingly read through the lens of geopolitical loyalty. Expanding the perspective comparatively, the third paper analyzes Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as "nationalizing states," showing how wartime securitization has produced convergent yet distinct strategies for governing Moscow-affiliated Orthodoxy through legal reforms, institutional restructuring, and symbolic alignment with alternative ecclesiastical centers. Conceptually, the panel engages securitization theory, constructivist approaches to nationalism, and scholarship on religion–state relations in post-Soviet and post-secular Europe. Taken together, the papers argue that the Baltic states represent a critical laboratory for understanding how democratic societies attempt to govern religion during wartime without collapsing the distinction between security and religious freedom. By foregrounding authority, discourse, and state power, the panel contributes to broader debates on the governance of religion under conditions of conflict and the reconfiguration of sacred institutions in a rapidly shifting geopolitical landscape.

CLOSED PANEL VI

Classical Philology, Mythology and History of Religions

From the 1870s onward, the academic study of religion became institutionalized in various European national contexts, often under the heading History of Religions. While recent scholarship has extensively examined the discipline's emergence from—and enduring entanglements with—(liberal) theology, philosophy, and especially Oriental studies, far less attention has been paid to the formative role of nineteenth-century classical philology in shaping the nascent scientific study of religion. The panel aims to foreground the pioneering role played by a number of leading figures of classical scholarship in this context, such as Karl Ottfried Müller (1797-1840) and Franz Cumont (1868–1947). Contributions to the panel will explore how these scholars sought to complement and reshape the methodological and conceptual tools of classical philology in order to open new analytical avenues for the study of myth and religion. Despite significant differences in their thematic interests and scholarly agendas, these figures moved beyond a narrow concentration on classical mythology toward broader comparative frameworks. These included, in different ways, the study of ritual, art, and material culture, and extended their inquiries well beyond the conventional chronological and geographical boundaries of the classical world. Engaging with contemporary debates concerning the role of theory in the study of Greek and Roman religions— or the perceived absence of theory in that context—this panel also seeks to encourage historiographical self-reflexivity by examining how some of the founding figures of the discipline articulated their analyses of ancient sources in relation to broader theoretical questions. To what extent did these scholars critically reflect on the conceptual tools and epistemological frameworks through which

they approached the past? How aware were they of their indebtedness to ancient—and often ideological—modes of thinking about myth and ritual? Did they explicitly seek to articulate new theories of religion? Finally, what methodological strategies did they develop in their efforts to establish a scientific study of ancient myth and religion, grounded in philological analysis yet oriented toward comparative inquiry?

CLOSED PANEL VII

Contemporary Muslim Materialities

The call to attend to the materialities of religious practice, or even to look at religion as material practice, has been increasingly articulated within the study of religion over the past decades. However, within the study of Islam specifically, attention to material and aesthetic practice and expressions remains somewhat marginal, and words and texts often remain the center of attention. This panel highlights the relevance of studying contemporary material Islam and pious practices to deepen our understanding of the manifestations of contemporary Islamic cultures and ideologies. The panel presents four empirical cases from diverse national contexts that each examine how Islam happens in and through material practice and how objects, aesthetics, space, and technologies shape Muslim relations, configurations, and values. These cases cover ritual performances, consumer markets, production facilities, and exhibition scenes and range across private, semi-private and public spheres of articulating Islam. Through in-depth analyses, the case studies show the diverse ways in which semiotic resources and aesthetic qualities of bodily, sensory, and spatial engagements are taking material form, and how, in turn, these forms are expressing and shaping piety, theology, ethics, and communities.

CLOSED PANEL VIII

Saint Cyprian in Context

Saint Cyprian of Antioch is an ambiguous character who transverses the entire history of Christianity. Tracing his history, the first records of such a character appear in three 4th century Christian polemical texts of distinct authorship: the Conversion of Cyprian, the Confession of Cyprian and the Martyrdom of Cyprian, collectively referred to as the Acts of Saint Cyprian of Antioch. In their entirety, the Acts tell the tale of Cyprian, a powerful Antiochian magician for hire, trained and initiated into several antient mystery cults and dedicated to the Devil himself. Living a sinful life, Cyprian's trajectory eventually takes a radical turn when he is hired to tempt a Christian maiden named Justa, or Justina, who reveals his diabolical sorceries as powerless before the sign of the cross. This results in Cyprian's conversion to Christianity and, together with Justa, martyrdom by order of Emperor Diocletian. The Acts of Cyprian, besides their interest as early-Christian polemical texts, containing identifiable anti-Neoplatonic preoccupations and multiple classic literary influences, such as from the Life of Apollonius or Philopseudes, also establish one of the first diabolical conversion narratives: the basic framework for all other Christian tales of fall and redemption and the very notion of the diabolical pact. In essence, Cyprian represents one of the very first proto-Fausts. Cyprian's hagiographic narrative also establishes him as the par-excellence, patron saint against magic and sorcery, with his fame being disseminated both in Europe and beyond through various other texts, sermons and works, such as Jacobus Voragine's Legenda Aurea. However, as early as the 11th century, Cyprian's name can also be found not so much as a protector against magic, but as an intermediary capable of aiding practicing magicians in their workings. This

eventually establishes him as one of the major Judeo-Christian magical heroes, on par with the Biblical King Solomon. In this quality, from the medieval, across the early modern and the contemporary period, Cyprian's name can be recurrently found associated with both folk and learned magic practices throughout Europe, Africa and eventually America. While the non-historicity of Saint Cyprian has caused him to be removed from the Catholic list of approved saints in 1969, references to 'Cyprianic magic', or magic books attributed to Saint Cyprian, can still be found in regions such as Iberia and South America, as well as in traditionally Protestant spaces, such as Scandinavia. In these environments, one finds a constantly transforming textual tradition of books attributed to Saint Cyprian, traveling from manuscript to print and evident not only in ethnographic records and archives, but also openly on sale in mundane bookstores and esoteric shops. Side-by-side with these texts, Saint Cyprian is also found at the center of local forms of vernacular religion and magico-religious devotional practices, giving form and justifying several expressions of lived religion independent of ecclesiastical norms. Not only are such practices visible in Europe but, contemporarily, in counties like Brazil and Mexico, the name of Cyprian and the texts attributed to this enmesh themselves into local folk-Catholicism and African-diasporic religions. Furthermore, in the Orthodox Church, Saint Cyprian remains a canonized and liturgically venerated saint who, still in line with his hagiography, represents the victory of faith over demonic power, with ample devotional literature dedicated to him and several pilgrimage sites, such as the Zlătari Church in Bucharest. This panel aims to present a series of locally contextual views on the traditions and texts surrounding Saint Cyprian of Antioch in the regions and linguistic and cultural settings where these are mostly visible; from Iberia to Scandinavia, from Europe to America, from magic books to folk traditions and spanning the early modern and contemporary periods. More than a simple enumeration of local magic traditions, magic book titles or obscure fragmented texts, what is aimed is an exposition of different cultural-specific receptions and understandings of Saint Cyprian as a character and the magic traditions associated with his name, be these from theological authorities, magic practitioners, publishers, readers, ethnographers, anthropologists or religious scholars.

CLOSED PANEL IX

Experiencing Transcendence through the Arts.
A Comparative Study on Mysticism and the Arts in Contemporary Islam, Buddhism, and Bāul

In this panel we will discuss the first findings of the research project "Experiencing Transcendence through the Arts A Comparative Study on Mysticism and the Arts in Contemporary Islam, Buddhism, and Bāul (EXTRA)" financed by PRISM Templeton Foundation and carried out at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. This project aims to examine the relationship between mysticism and the arts in contemporary contexts of Islam (Senegal, Morocco, and Egypt), Hinduism/Islam (Bāul traditions in India and Bangladesh), and Buddhism (Taipei, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Bangkok), with a focus on contemporary artistic expressions (visual arts, dance, and music). It adopts a socio-anthropological and material approach, investigating how artists and their media engage with religion. Generally, anthropologists focused on how artistic forms in religious community can be instruments for living religion – mediation; while sociologists focused on how religion is commodified and banalized in contemporary art – mediatization. This project will consider these two processes – mediation and mediatization – of mystical experiences. Regarding the conceptualization of mysticism, we follow the definition offered by the PRISM project: a polythetic, fuzzy cluster-concept, embedded in social and cultural contexts. Mysticism possesses three

homeomorphic elements: the connection with transcendence, union (dissolving subject-object distinctions), and a transformation of consciousness.

CLOSED PANEL X

Political Theology and Political Mythology: Historical and Contemporary Intersections between Religion and Politics

Political theology represents a growing subfield in the study of religion that brings together historians, anthropologists, political theorists, theologians, and philosophers to reflect on the numerous interconnections between religion and politics both within and beyond biblical traditions. The four papers on this panel showcase the diversity of this subfield. Two of the presentations extend the category of political theology backward to the ancient world, to the classical Greek and Hebrew biblical traditions, interrogating the line that ostensibly separates myth from philosophy, and religion from politics. Two further presentations address more recent developments in European traditions, including Romanian and Italian fascism, where religion—and the study of religion—have intersected with politics. Collectively, these themes exemplify the continuing relevance of political theology for the study of religion.

CLOSED PANEL XI

Occult Tibet: Euro-American Esoteric Readings

Few regions have occupied the European imagination as persistently and ambivalently as Tibet. Alternately construed as a forbidden kingdom, a repository of ancient wisdom, a utopian sanctuary, or a theatre of occult power, Tibet came to signify far more than a geographical entity. The "Tibet" that circulated in travel writings, popular literature, and various treatises frequently bore only limited resemblance to the lived realities of the Tibetan plateau. Rather, it functioned as what Peter Bishop has described as an "empty vessel" (The Myth of Shangri-La, 1989, 240–252), readily filled with a wide range of projections and ideological investments. The emergence of the modern European myth of Tibet is inseparable from the rise of occult and esoteric movements in the late nineteenth century. Central figures such as Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–1891), co-foundress of the Theosophical Society, played a formative role in generating interpretative frameworks that were subsequently reworked and disseminated across diverse intellectual and cultural contexts. This panel brings together a series of focused studies examining this specific history of reception, tracing its development from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century and even further. Organised chronologically, the individual contributions collectively map a trajectory that illuminates the shifting meanings attributed to Tibet within European esoteric discourse.

CLOSED PANEL XII

Esotericism, Politics, and Social Imaginaries

Alternative and marginal forms of religion, and their intersections with politics, are receiving increasing scholarly attention. Scholars are researching how religious ideas and practices outside of institutionalised traditions can nonetheless exert significant influence on political realities. This expanding area of inquiry spans multiple subfields within the study of religions, including pagan studies, the study of new religious movements, and, with growing relevance, the study of

esotericism. Recent scholarship within this subfield has highlighted the expanding visibility of esoteric ideas within contemporary political discourse. This is evident in the heightened visibility of esotericism in conspiracy theories during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the appropriation of esoteric thinkers in fringe movements on both the far right and far left of the political spectrum. One can think of the widely discussed influence of Traditionalism on contemporary politics, but also of less well-known entanglements such as the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit and its legacies in present times, or the presence of esotericism in contemporary anarchist circles. These developments raise pressing questions about the political dimensions of esotericism and its role in shaping social imaginaries today. This panel, organised by the Contemporary Esotericism Research Network (ContERN), a thematic network of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), brings together scholars working on the intersections of contemporary esotericism and politics, broadly understood. Through four case studies that focus on contemporary contexts across different regions, the panel explores how esoteric ideas are mobilised within political projects, and how they can inform competing visions of social order, historical change, and collective possibility.

CLOSED PANEL XIII

Competing Orthodoxies:
Struggles for Authority, Recognition, and Legitimacy in Eastern European Orthodoxy

In her chapter about identity and religious belief in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, Catriona Kelly (Bassin & Kelly 2012) examines the phenomenon of competing "orthodoxies", which she understands as multiple ways of making sense of and practicing religion within Soviet society (be it official, unofficial, private etc.), and not necessarily as a competition between formal Orthodox Christianity and soviet secular ideology. In essence, Kelly's study shows how religious belief was negotiated by believers and the state alike, and how these negotiations shaped personal identity and broader narratives about nationhood. By demonstrating that religious belief under Soviet and post-Soviet conditions was formed through ongoing negotiations between believers and political authority, Kelly destabilizes the notion of a singular Orthodoxy. If orthodoxy is produced through negotiation, the question that first arises is: where are its boundaries drawn and by whom? This question is directly addressed by James Kapaló (Kapaló 2017) through the concept of "liminal orthodoxies", by which he understands movements that occupy the threshold between institutional recognition and marginal dissent, revealing, thus, the processes through which orthodoxy itself is constituted. Together, Kapaló and Kelly imply that there is no single "orthodoxy", only shifting, negotiated claims to orthodoxy. This panel aims to further explore these notions, while extending the analytical lens to an additional level, namely the conflicts between local Orthodox Churches and the emergence of parallel jurisdictions as competing claims to orthodoxy in their own right. In doing so, it examines the multifaceted dynamics of competition within contemporary Eastern European Orthodoxy, focusing on historic and shifting configurations of religious authority, social recognition, and political legitimacy. In the context of late modernity, accelerated processes of European integration, and the ongoing repercussions of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine — which have further exposed and intensified pre-existing intra-Orthodox divisions — Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe is best understood as a differentiated religious field marked by heightened struggles unfolding both within and between ecclesial structures. Drawing on frameworks from the sociology

of religion, history, and political science, the panel examines how authority, recognition, and legitimacy are constructed, contested, and institutionalised across different levels of the Orthodox field. The contributions analyse macro-level jurisdictional contestation, where struggles over recognition, ecclesial authority, and institutional status intersect with geopolitical alignments and European legal and regulatory frameworks shaping different contexts. They also address the micro-level dynamics of alternative Orthodox actors and parallel ecclesial formations, including, among others, Old Calendarist movements, traditionalist networks, and locally organised communities operating beyond established ecclesial structures. Such actors articulate alternative claims to authenticity and tradition, frequently mobilising transnational networks outside formal inter-church channels. By examining competing regimes of legitimacy, the panel seeks to illuminate how religious actors navigate tensions between state-aligned national projects and the pluralistic regulatory environment within the evolving European legal framework. It argues that internal Orthodox struggles over recognition extend beyond theological disagreement and are embedded in broader socio-political transformations, including processes of politicisation and instrumentalization of religious and national identities, the securitisation of belonging, and the reconfiguration of religious boundaries across national contexts.

CLOSED PANEL XIV

Gurdjieff Studies:
New Research Papers and a Critical Assessment of the Field

This panel presents two new papers on the interface between the Greek-Armenian magus/guru, G. I. Gurdjieff (1877-1949), and proponents of Literary Modernism in England, Mexico and Scotland. Research on Gurdjieff has typically been located within the study of new religious movements and/or western esotericism, including analyses of the content and structure of Gurdjieff's teaching and a sociology of its emergence within a transnational 'guru field'. Recent research – often led by scholars of literature - has explored Gurdjieff's ideas in relation to C20th Literary Modernism. The papers by Cusack and Sutcliffe respectively respond to this perspective through studies of Gurdjieff's impact on work by the English-Mexican surrealist painter, Leonora Carrington (1917-2011), and the contemporary Scottish novelist, Andrew Crumey (b. 1961); and by a doyen of the C20th 'Scottish literary renaissance', Neil Gunn (1891-1973). The panel concludes with a co-presented critical overview of themes and debates in 'Gurdjieff Studies' since the 1980s with reference to specific themes in the study of new religions and to general theoretical themes in the Study of Religions. The aim of the panel is to present new research on the Gurdjieff movement within the development of Gurdjieff Studies in relation to the Study of Religion/s.

CLOSED PANEL XV

Social Ontology and Beyond

Since the 1990s, Social Ontology has emerged as a significant field of inquiry across philosophy and the social sciences. Building on the analysis of collective intentionality as the capacity of minds to be jointly directed toward states of affairs in the world, it has offered new ways of understanding how social reality is constituted and maintained. More recently, Social Ontology has been discussed as a relevant approach for the study of religion. To further assess its potential for the discipline, this

panel seeks to move beyond Social Ontology as a self-contained theoretical framework and to explore its productive intersections with other approaches in the study of religion. In particular, it will examine how social-ontological insights can be combined with (1) relational approaches, (2) cognitive approaches, (3) neurosociology, as well as other perspectives. By bringing together scholars working at these intersections, the panel aims to assess both the explanatory strengths and the limitations of Social Ontology in contemporary religious studies.

CLOSED PANEL XVI

The war in Ukraine as a catalyst for global religious transformations: a 360° shift in religion

Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine since 2022 has become not only a military and political challenge, but also a civilisational one, exposing the profound transformations of contemporary religiosity. In global discourse, the war in Ukraine is increasingly seen as an event that tests classical theories of secularisation, privatisation of faith, and separation of religion from politics. Unlike local conflicts of the past, the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine is taking place in the heart of the European secular space; it is actively broadcast in the global information field; it has a clear religious dimension - both in the form of the religiousisation of aggression and in the form of moral resistance. This allows us to talk about the war in Ukraine as a catalyst for global religious transformations. The thesis of a '360° turn in religion' does not mean a simple return to the starting point. It refers to a complete cycle of transformation, as a result of which religion: 1) changes its form from dogmatic to existential; from institutional to practical; from ethno-confessional to solidarity-based and ethical; 2) changes its function from 'serving believers' to mobilising the community; from legitimising power to being a critical moral voice; from symbolic presence to real social action; 3) changes its geopolitical role. Religion becomes an instrument of hybrid warfare (in the case of the Russian Federation), a language of international solidarity (in the case of Ukraine), and the subject of new global ethical debates. The Ukrainian experience shows that in times of war, religion can either become an instrument of violence or a resource of humanity. It is this choice that determines its global transformation.

CLOSED PANEL XVII

Negotiations of Religious Authority and Authenticity on Social Media Platforms

This panel discusses contemporary research in digital religion by focusing on the practice of individual religious actors on social media platforms. Social media platforms have become tools and spaces for religious meaning-making and exploration in the context of everyday religion. Religious expressions and explorations are shaped by platform-specific dynamics, algorithmic structures, and platform-specific affordances. At the same time, social media platforms and their cultures have obtained their own public imaginary. Characterisation of social media as shallow, disingenuous or even dangerous contributes to the already contested status of "proper" and "authentic" forms of religious expression. How do religious actors navigate the cultural logics, technological structures, and public imaginaries of social media platforms? The individual papers tackle these questions within English- and German-speaking contexts with case studies from Christianity and Islam. Each contributor engages with questions of religious authority and authenticity, while approaching digital religion through different entry points, such as the recipients' experiences, the materiality of the platform, and the production process of social media content.

CLOSED PANEL XIX

Religious Transformations and Pluralism reflected in the Religion Class: the Romanian Case

The panelists will examine how religious education in Romanian schools reflects societal religious shifts, with particular emphasis on the shift towards a more pluralistic society. In Romania, religious education is a common core discipline, structured as confessional instruction. Recent and recurring social controversies have highlighted the cultural aspect of religious education in schools, indicating scopes beyond the reinforcement of confessional identity: peaceful cohabitation in pluralistic societies, respect for others, and meaningful connections. The exploration of religious history is increasingly sought after by substantial segments of Romanian society. Consequently, we will examine the extent to which the confessional religion class can serve as an appropriate forum for addressing these issues. Moreover, the rising interactions with diverse religions, driven by globalization, migration, and enhanced cultural exchange, necessitate an understanding of contemporary religious pluralism. The panel is based on a research project aimed at identifying contemporary developments within this spectrum in Romanian culture and examining their impact on children, while seeking optimal methods for conveying information about different religions in the religion class. In this regard, numerous models have been established in European nations. However, the contextual peculiarities necessitate distinct techniques. The panel will delve into these differences, present the various positions, and highlight the challenges. Thus, the panel enhances comprehension of what religious literacy means, reflects upon the influence of unique historical-cultural contexts on its manifestations, and seeks the contextually most effective methods for engaging students with religious diversity in alignment with the requirements of transforming societies.

CLOSED PANEL XX

Religion, Myth, and Occultism in Nazi Germany

This panel examines the religious field under National Socialism. Moving beyond simplified narratives of either uniform repression or "Nazi occultism," the contributions analyse how religious and esoteric actors interpreted, aligned with, were instrumentalised by, or were persecuted by an authoritarian regime. Four case studies structure the discussion: Martin Buber's mythological counter-reading of National Socialism; the völkisch religious group Nordische Glaubensgemeinschaft and its entanglements with early völkisch networks; the recognition and strategic use of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in the Third Reich and the Austrian corporative state; and the surveillance and repression of occultists categorised as "Masonic-like organisations." Drawing on newly discovered archival materials and new readings of established sources, the panel highlights the heterogeneity of religious responses under dictatorship. Taken together, the papers propose a differentiated account of religion and esotericism as sites of interpretation, negotiation, collaboration, and conflict within totalitarian politics.

CLOSED PANEL XXI

Pedagogy, Technique, and Transmission in Esoteric Currents: An Esotericism and Didactics (EsoDid) Network Panel

This panel examines how esoteric knowledge and technique become teachable and learnable across historical and contemporary contexts. It focuses on the pedagogical forms, social relations, and material supports through which practitioners acquire embodied and perceptual competences oriented toward transformation. The panel is organized as a collaboration between the research networks EsoDid (Esotericism & Didactics) and the Scandinavian Network for the Academic Study of Western Esotericism.

CLOSED PANEL XXII

Quantitative Methods Inquires within Religion

Cameron (1963) stated that "not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted" and, indeed, that is simple holds true especially when it is about a phenomenon like religion. Even if the versatility of the quantitative methods makes such instruments almost omnipresent in nowadays science, when is about religion, such approaches are not so often. In this panel, we explore in three ways inter-connections between religion and (i) fertility, (ii) Baccalaureate outcomes; (iii) traditional marriages scheduling. Herteliu et al. (2015) prove that religious rules have an effect on the process of baby 'production'. A small extension of that endeavour adding as potential factors education and ethnicity will be presented. In the second inquire, the main tested hypothesis assumes that the given name(s) of the pupils should not count in regards to the exams' outcomes. The third attempt aims to find if gold price impacts the gap between legal and religious marriages in various Romanian communities. All these attempts rely on data about Romania.

CLOSED PANEL XXIII

Esotericism, Science, and Knowledge Claims in the Twenty-first Century

This panel examines the relationship between contemporary esotericism and scientific discourse in the twenty-first century. Across diverse contexts, esoteric ideas, practices, and communities have become increasingly engaged in debates over science, expertise, and the authority to define what counts as legitimate knowledge. These developments occur amid rapid scientific and technological advancement and rising public skepticism toward institutional authority, often theorized as an epistemic crisis or "post-truth" condition. Contemporary esoteric actors engage with science in ways that are both complex and deeply ambivalent. In some cases, they enter into dialogue with established scientific paradigms, appropriating scientific language, concepts, and aesthetics to strengthen the reputational legitimacy of their religious claims. In other cases, they articulate alternative epistemologies grounded in intuition, personal experience, or revealed knowledge, framing these as necessary correctives to the perceived limitations of scientific rationality. These approaches, however, are not mutually exclusive; rather, such engagements frequently generate hybrid vocabularies in which distinctions between science and spirituality are eroded, and scientific concepts are re-negotiated within esoteric frameworks. These interactions raise critical questions

about how knowledge claims are constructed in contexts where different epistemic authorities compete for credibility. What counts as evidence, expertise, or valid experience? How is scientific authority invoked, negotiated, or rejected? And how do these processes reshape the boundaries between what is considered legitimate and illegitimate knowledge? Contributors to this panel examine these dynamics through a range of case studies, examining topics such as "normativity" in the study of esotericism, "faithful scholarship" within Mormonism, strategies of legitimation in UAP research, and the historical foundations of online discourses on seminal panic. Together, they illustrate how scientific authority, evidence, and legitimacy are actively negotiated in contemporary esoteric contexts, where distinct epistemic frameworks frequently intersect and coexist. Organized by the Contemporary Esotericism Research Network (ContERN), a thematic network of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), this session brings together scholars investigating how claims to knowledge are constructed and contested within contemporary esotericism.

CLOSED PANEL XXIV

The Legacy of Hermes:

This panel explores the enduring and multifaceted legacy of Hermetic thought across a wide chronological and cultural spectrum, from Late Antiquity to the twentieth century. It will bring together four case studies that span Late Antique, Renaissance, and modern European contexts, aiming to illuminate how Hermetic ideas have been transmitted, reinterpreted, and, at times, profoundly misunderstood. The first paper (Christian Bull, University of Bergen) examines the reception and transformation of Hermetic motifs in Late Antiquity, with particular attention to Coptic literature and the Anthology of Stobaeus. It considers how Hermetic materials were excerpted, reframed, and integrated into broader intellectual and religious discourses, highlighting both continuity and adaptation in a context marked by linguistic and cultural plurality. The second contribution (Claudio Moreschini, former professor at the University of Pisa) turns to Renaissance Hermeticism, focusing on the figure of Foix Candale. It investigates how Hermetic texts were appropriated within the context of the French Wars of Religion, where they were actively mobilised in the ideological struggles between Catholics and Protestants. Candale advances a distinctly Catholic interpretation of the Hermetic corpus, yet one that diverges in significant ways from the earlier Florentine tradition associated with Ficino and Italian Hermeticism more broadly. Indeed, his engagement is marked by a polemical stance towards these precedents, as he reinterprets Hermetic authority in light of contemporary confessional concerns. The paper thus highlights how Hermetic materials could serve not only as vehicles of philosophical speculation but also as instruments of religious argumentation, reshaped to meet the urgent demands of a fractured Christian landscape. French culture is likewise the object of the third contribution, by Piero Latino (Salento University), who is going to explore and show the presence of Hermes Trismegistus in some authors, most of all Charles Baudelaire: addressing his readers by the words "Sur l'oreiller du mal c'est Satan Trismegiste", Baudelaire explained to the reader how the demonic principle acts and influences human beings, and likewise an Hermès inconnu is evoked in Alchimie de la douleur. Investigating the 'myth' of Hermes in literature is a way to highlight that literature is a key way of affirming, exploring and passing on the values, beliefs, massages and myth of a religious nature: literature becomes religion, whilst religion is expressed through literary texts. The fourth paper (Chiara O. Tommasi, University of Pisa) addresses the afterlife of Hermetic ideas in modern literature through the works of Thomas Mann, with particular focus on Der Zauberberg and Felix Krull. In the latter, special attention is given to the final section set in Lisbon, where alchemical

motifs and Hermetic symbolism come to the fore, opening a space in which questions of transformation, identity, and illusion are playfully yet suggestively explored. In Der Zauberberg, by contrast, Hermetic themes are refracted through irony and scepticism, most notably in the figure of Settembrini. His rationalist stance is accompanied by a series of Witze that explicitly or implicitly target Hermetic and esoteric modes of thought, casting them as objects of Enlightenment critique while at the same time revealing a more ambivalent engagement with the boundaries between knowledge, mystification, and interpretation. Taken together, these texts illustrate how Mann reworks Hermetic topoi within a modern literary framework, oscillating between fascination and irony, and thereby contributing to a curious reconfiguration of the Hermetic tradition in twentieth-century culture. The final contribution (Wouter Hanegraaff, University of Amsterdam) places the question of translation at the centre of Hermetic studies. Building on research presented in Hermetic Spirituality and the Historical Imagination (2022), it offers a critical reassessment of the modern reception of the so-called "spiritual" Hermetica. Through a comparative analysis of major modern translations (notably in English, French, German, and Dutch) and a re-examination of influential scholarship since Reitzenstein's Poimandres (1904), it identifies recurring patterns of misunderstanding and ideological distortion in the rendering of key Hermetic concepts. Particular attention is given to the work of authoritative figures such as André-Jean Festugière and Walter Scott, whose translations, despite their philological sophistication, frequently fail to capture the semantic and conceptual specificity of the original texts. To account for this paradox—wherein highly competent classicists produce what may be termed mistranslations—the paper argues for the central importance of core Hermetic vocabulary. Two semantic fields are especially crucial: first, terms relating to what is (or appears to be) real; and second, those concerning human perception and cognition of reality. The analysis suggests that Platonic-Hermetic assumptions about reality and knowledge are so fundamentally at odds with modern epistemological frameworks that even expert readers have often been unable to recognise what they were encountering. As a result, translation becomes not merely a technical exercise but a site of interpretative negotiation shaped by deeply embedded conceptual presuppositions.

CLOSED PANEL XXV

Cultural Apocalypse and the Reordering of Mourning: (New) Religious and Social Practices

This panel examines how death, mourning, and moral value are reconfigured in moments of cultural apocalypse, understood, following Ernesto de Martino, as a breakdown of symbolic, normative, and moral orders that threatens the human capacity to 'be there' in the world (La fine del mondo, 1977). Such moments involve not merely physical or social crises, but the collapse of values and meaning, challenging fundamental distinctions such as victim and martyr, private and public death, innocence and sacrifice, and religious versus secular justice. Drawing on anthropology, religious studies, sociology, and related fields, this panel adopts a Religion 360° perspective to explore how religious imaginaries, practices, and moral grammars participate in the reordering of mourning and commemoration when conventional mediations—such as religious institutions, the state, or legal frameworks—are disrupted, bypassed, or contested. The panel asks whose deaths become publicly grievable and morally significant during cultural and moral breakdowns, and through which normative frameworks. Concepts such as martyrdom, victimhood, dignity, injustice, sacrifice, and innocence are explored as competing moral languages through which hierarchies of value among the dead are produced, negotiated, or contested. By connecting empirical observation with broader conceptual inquiry, the panel highlights religion as a dynamic and multidimensional

site of moral and symbolic reordering, showing how social and religious actors actively shape new moral worlds when existing ones become unthinkable, across overlapping social, political, and moral dimensions.

CLOSED PANEL XXVI

Notes to Religion The Interdisciplinary Significance of Occasional Recordings, with Japanese Pure Land Buddhism as an Example

Scriptures that have been written largely on an ad hoc basis, without a strictly preconceived agenda or narrative, share at least three common characteristics. Firstly, they were not intended to be lengthy works. Secondly, they were not meant to be read by a broad, undefined audience. Thirdly, they lack an overarching narrative to link the disparate ideas within the text. Nevertheless, despite the challenges posed by these circumstances, 'occasional recordings' play a significant role in the study of religions from multiple perspectives. This panel aims to explore their historical significance in the formation of a distinct religious sect and their meaning in relation to gender, doctrine, and material religion. As a case study, the panel will focus on the Japanese sect Jōdo Shinshū (also 'Shin Buddhism'), which is the largest Buddhist sect in contemporary Japan. Within the canonical texts (shōgyō 聖教 or seiten 聖典), 'occasional recordings' have a distinctly crucial role, particularly in texts such as 'letters' from eminent figures like abbots (shōsoku 消息) and 'verbatim records' (kikigaki 聞書). Another type of text is diaries (nikki 日記) that, although not included in the main canonical collections, are highly regarded in the more extensive collections of key texts from the history of Shin Buddhism. Following a brief introduction to the topic and an attempt to contextualise the relevant texts within the existing primary sources, this panel will address the following aspects of the topic.

CLOSED PANEL XXVII

Twenty Years in the Study of Esotericism 360°

At the 2006 EASR conference in Bucharest a large panel was devoted to the study of esoteric currents. It was titled "Hermetic Traditions and Esotericism" and it included specialists in the field such as Antoine Faivre (who was also a keynote speaker at the conference), as well as Jean-Pierre Laurant, Jean-Pierre Brach, and Marco Pasi. While IAHR congresses had already accepted panels for the study of esotericism in 1995 (Mexico City), 2000 (Durban), and 2005 (Tokyo), this was the first time that the field was represented at an EASR conference. The panel inaugurated a presence that has been a constant feature ever since, contributing to the diversity and innovation of EASR meetings. This year the EASR returns to Bucharest, twenty years after that first experiment. The field has grown considerably since then, becoming more established and visible, yet also facing new challenges. Its presence in the larger landscape of religious studies is no longer perceived as unexpected or surprising. This panel will reflect on what has happened to the field in these past twenty years, how it has grown, and how it has dealt with changing cultural, social, and political climates both externally and internally. It will address and critically assess both old and new trends, consider paths that were taken or not taken, and express wishes for future developments that can keep the field as vibrant and forward-looking as it was at the time of that first panel.

CLOSED PANEL XXVIII

Are there limits to religious freedom when it comes to national security interests: international norms and local cases

Since 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, international law has developed toward expanding the rights and freedoms of individuals and communities in the religious sphere. Over time, the scope of religious freedom has broadened and deepened through clarifications, additions, and interpretations. At the same time, the range of permissible restrictions has narrowed. International norms have consistently specified when, under what conditions, and to what extent limitations may be applied. Thus, international law has largely functioned as a permissive rather than restrictive system, reflecting the democratic understanding of law as a framework that guarantees rights and freedoms while limiting them only in exceptional cases. Nevertheless, several key international documents define circumstances under which religious freedom may be restricted. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966, Article 18(3)) allows limitations prescribed by law and necessary to protect public safety, order, health, morals, or the rights of others. Similarly, the European Convention on Human Rights (1950, Article 9) permits restrictions that are lawful and necessary in a democratic society for public safety, order, health, morals, or the protection of others' rights. The OSCE Copenhagen Document (1990) also affirms that any restrictions must comply with international human rights standards. These frameworks emerged from historical experiences of persecution based on religion or belief and served as safeguards against totalitarianism. However, in recent decades, growing radicalization in social and political life has prompted concerns that unrestricted freedom of conscience and religion may pose risks to democratic stability. As a result, discussions have intensified regarding the need for reasonable limitations in the religious sphere, accompanied by concrete policy decisions restricting certain organizations. Examples of such measures include France's policy against "cults" under the About–Picard Law (2001), aimed at groups considered harmful to human rights and freedoms; Germany's ban in 2021 on Ansaar International for financing extremism, as well as earlier restrictions on networks linked to Hizb ut-Tahrir; and Ukraine's 2022–2023 initiatives to limit religious organizations affiliated with centers of influence in the Russian Federation, particularly those connected to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Germany has also maintained long-standing surveillance of the Church of Scientology due to concerns about its practices. In the United Kingdom, multiple Islamist organizations have been banned under terrorism legislation, while in Belgium the court in Antwerp designated Sharia4Belgium a terrorist organization in 2015. In 2025, Sweden implemented measures against a Russian Orthodox parish in Västerås, including withdrawal of funding and steps toward expropriation. In response to growing tensions between security and religious freedom, the OSCE issued the 2019 policy document Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance. This document emphasizes that freedom of religion or belief is a universal human right and should not automatically be subordinated to security concerns. Instead, security and religious freedom should be understood as complementary rather than conflicting values. It also notes that excessive restrictions may weaken rather than strengthen security. At the same time, the document acknowledges that limitations may be necessary in exceptional cases. Such measures must respect human dignity and human rights, be prescribed by law, and account for their impact on vulnerable groups. Importantly, restrictions should target specific unlawful actions rather than beliefs themselves, avoid collective punishment of religious communities, and be applied only as a last resort. However, the Ukrainian experience highlights the limitations of these principles under conditions of war. A framework designed for peacetime has proven insufficient in the context of military aggression, occupation, and other

extraordinary circumstances. This raises fundamental questions about whether existing international standards adequately address situations where national survival is at stake. Ukraine's case suggests the need to reconsider the relationship between religious freedom and national security and to develop new approaches for balancing these priorities. In extreme conditions, certain forms of religious activity may become entangled with geopolitical influence, disinformation, or security threats, challenging the assumption that religious freedom can remain entirely insulated from broader societal risks. At the same time, similar concerns are increasingly evident in Europe. There is growing recognition that unrestricted religious freedom may, in some contexts, create tensions with societal cohesion and cultural identity. This shift is reflected, for example, in the European Parliament's 2026 resolution on human rights and democracy, which for the first time explicitly acknowledged the concept of "Christianophobia" and condemned the global persecution of Christians. According this background, Ukraine may offer a unique perspective for rethinking the balance between individual rights and collective security. Its ongoing experience of war forces the development of practical solutions that attempt to preserve democratic principles while addressing existential threats. Such a model could contribute to broader European and international debates. Ukraine has the opportunity to propose a new model to Europe, one that is being systematically developed under wartime conditions and is relevant as a viable approach to balancing human rights and national security. This panel aims to explore several key questions. First, is it legitimate to limit individual, including religious, rights in the interest of society as a whole, particularly when the survival of the state is at risk? Second, can the universal right to freedom of religion or belief be adapted to specific security contexts, especially when norms developed in peacetime prove ineffective in wartime conditions? Third, should international standards become more flexible and responsive to changing circumstances, reflecting evolving societal demands? Ultimately, the discussion raises a broader issue: whether the time has come to develop new international approaches to defining the limits of religious freedom. Ukraine's experience, shaped by the need to balance individual rights with collective challenges, may provide important insights for this process.

CLOSED PANEL XXIX

"I Have Chosen My Religion":
Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Issues of Religious Conversion

A key concept in the social sciences of religion since the late nineteenth century, conversion is a transdisciplinary and polysemous object of study. As such, it is a dynamic concept, continually redefined through scholarly debate. Initially confined to religious studies, conversion has since been widely mobilized in sociology and anthropology to understand individual and collective transformations. Today, it is frequently used to describe shifts in societal, political, moral, or even dietary behaviors. Yet, at a time when religion itself calls for renewed scholarly attention, this panel proposes to return to the specifically religious meaning of conversion by examining its effects on both individuals and societies. How, then, can we study together the diverse situations encompassed by the notion of conversion? Can the abduction and forced conversion of Protestants children in seventeenth-century France be meaningfully compared with those of non-Muslim girls in contemporary Pakistan? Can state-led conversion programs be examined alongside individual conversions, such as those associated with neo-pagan movements? This panel seeks to explore conversion from a comparative, transreligious (monotheisms, institutionalized religions, contemporary spiritual movements), and transperiod perspective, drawing on a wide range of fieldwork and sources (archives, ethnographic research, life narratives, institutional records, political

discourse, and ritual materiality). We aim to shed light on several dimensions of conversion by focusing in particular on its different temporalities:

- Pre-conversion: the motivations leading individuals to convert, whether through the exercise of free will or as the outcome of familial, social, or religious pressures.
- The moment of conversion: the ritual act of conversion, the efforts undertaken by the individual, or conversely, those deployed by others to convert them.
- Post-conversion: the success or failure of conversion (deconversion, abandonment, or outright rejection), and its consequences for the individual (lifestyle, friendships, family relationships) as well as for the collective (social uniformity, marginalization, or exclusion).

While maintaining a strong focus on the religious dimension of conversion, the discussion will also consider it as a total social fact, involving symbolic, social, and economic transactions. We will examine what is gained or lost through conversion; the forms of capital (economic, social, political, symbolic) mobilized or acquired; and the logics of social reintegration, boundary control, reinsertion, or domination, particularly in contexts of colonization, evangelization, or the governance of bodies and souls.

CLOSED PANEL XXX

Queen Marie of Romania and the Bahá'í Faith:
A Message of Love and Faith (1926-2026)

An old book published a photo of Her Majesty Queen Marie of Romania dedicated "To Shogi Effendi with a message of love and faith. Marie". Shogi Efendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith is the successor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, son of the Prophet Bahá'u'lláh. She had been sailed Mediterranean to meet him, but politics interfered and, although she reached Haifa, was forced to go back to her ship and sail away. What an encounter would have that been! But it was not meant to be and instead we are grateful for the few letters, articles and notes in Her Majesty diaries. Multiple women in one queen, Marie Alexandra Victoria de Saxa-Coburgh and Gotha, Princess of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (born into the British Royal Family, granddaughter to Queen Victoria and the Tzar Alexander II of Russia) shines at the crossroads of monarchy, charismatic gender authority, dynastic power, transnational politics and World Religion. As a highly cherished princess, courted by de future King George V or Churchill, Marie de Edinburgh had chosen Crown Prince Ferdinand to be her husband and Romania to be her country. This happenstance rewarded her by making her Romanian's only crowned queen, a symbolic figure for the First World War she had a crucial role in the making of Greater Romania, later on pinpointing it on the map of the world. Among the controversies of Queen Marie's life and activity is her admiration and promotion of the Bahá'í Faith, a global religious movement, founded by Bahá'u'lláh the XIX century Prophet. Queen's encounter with the World Religion by the hand of Martha Root in January of 2026 opened an endless debate if Queen Marie of Romania embraced or not the Bahá'í Faith. The interest Her Majesty had in the Bahá'í Teachings and its spiritual leaders yielded inexhaustible controversy. The absence of a formal acceptance of the faith (which for a Bahá'í is not compulsory) has led to antithetical elucidations of the nature of Queen's adherence. Our panel reasons that the confessional models and rituals of religious belonging and affiliation are not fully applicable to the Bahá'í Religion. Dissimilar sacramental practices, the Bahá'í religion does not state a dogmatic moment of initiation, the embracement of the faith has not a declarative component, but rather a conscious and personal act of commitment. As a consequence the non-appearance of an explicit, signed declaration shouldn't

be similar to a non-affiliation, as one of the characteristics of the interiorised models of belonging to this modern global religion is precisely the inherent spiritual self-improvement. Celebrating the centenary of the spiritual encounter with the Bahá'í Faith, the panel is a space where one can easily move from biography to history, from British and Romanian royal family to the Bahá'í values, or epistemic religion of the progressive revelation in an European monarchical context. The concept of progressive revelation enables us a comparative endeavour rather than a theological dogmatic presentation, articulating a theory of unity, pluralism and universality of religions. As a lived religion and the spiritual mediation the present panel scrutinise how the Queen promoted the sacred Bahá'í principles and values, especially the oneness of humankind, by a close in-depth examination of Queen's correspondence, notes and diaries. Her Majesty's voice, sculpted by her own context: a Protestant queen of an Orthodox-majority country, married to a Catholic king, and mother of Orthodox heirs. Such a confessional contrastive plurality found in the Bahá'í Faith the perfect solution for the spiritual antagonism within her own family, as each and every Christian religion of her home pretended to hold the absolute truth at odds with the other ones ("Lately great hope has come to me from one 'Abdu'l-Bahá ... Reading, I have found ... all my yearnings for real religion satisfied"). Furthermore the Faith seemed to be a perfect remedy to a world that was rapidly escalating toward another crisis, as Her Majesty expressed first time she met Martha Root, an American Bahá'í who gifted the queen the impressive book Bahá'u'lláh' and the New Era (Dr. J. E. Esselmont): "I believe these teachings are the solution for the world's problems today!" And this still holds truth today. What we do know is that for the Bahá'í community, Queen Marie of Romania is "The first Queen of the world to study and to promote Bahá'u'lláh's great Teachings has been Her Majesty Queen Marie of Rumania, one of the queens of the twentieth century who stands highest in the intellect, in vision, in clear understanding of the new universal epoch now opening." (Martha L. Root, Queen Marie of Romania in "The Bahá'í World", 1938-1940, pp. 278). This panel foregrounds a queen of a small country who had a key role in doubling its size after WWI dedicated herself to the pursuit of promoting the Bahá'í system of values and principles. A transcultural and transnational circulation of the ideas that invites everyone rethink monarchy, authority, gender and spirituality. We will also host presentations of the Bahá'í fundaments in a balanced critical-descriptive register, including a retrospective of the presence of the Bahá'í World Religion in Romania, from the early pioneers to present day articulated community.

CLOSED PANEL XXXI

Materialities of Religion in the Classroom:
Tools, Methods, Perspectives

In contemporary scholarship, engagement with cultural and religious materialities—long an inherent part of the study of religion—appears more important than ever. Materialities are more than a crucial part of individuals' lives: they form extensions of the experiencing body and constitute key means through which social and cultural environments are perceived. Teaching and studying religion within the broader framework of social and cultural studies therefore entails training in the critical assessment of materialities. Moving beyond the question of why we teach materialities of religion, this panel aims to create a space for discussing the practicalities of such teaching: teaching methods and tools, whether in the form of a course syllabus or teaching plan, specific guidelines for fieldwork, or concrete exemplary approaches to teaching particular materialities. Moreover, the panel seeks to open up a broader discussion on perspectives: on what to teach in the classroom. What should the conceptual pillars of teaching the materialities of religion be? What are the key ideas students should take away with them? What do we want them to take away, and what do they need

to take away, in order to develop a critical religious studies perspective both inside and outside the classroom? The panel is conceived as a space for the exchange of ideas among those who teach, or wish to teach, the materialities of religion. Contributions that address tools, methods, and perspectives on teaching materialities of religion are welcome.

CLOSED PANEL XXXII

Pagan Studies:
(Re)Enchanting the Old Ways

Contemporary Paganism serves as a sophisticated analytical prism through which the reconstruction, negotiation, and legitimation of religious traditions can be scrutinized under the specific pressures of late modernity. Positioned at the complex crossroads of heritage production, spiritual experimentation, and the assertion of ancestral or indigenous continuity, Pagan movements inherently challenge the conventional taxonomies within the study of religion. Consequently, Pagan Studies functions as more than a mere empirical sub-field; it constitutes a critical lens through which broader inquiries into the nature of tradition, modernity, and religious identity are actively re-evaluated. Arising from a robust dialogue between folklore, anthropology, sociology, and political science, Pagan Studies has evolved into a resolutely interdisciplinary domain defined by methodological pluralism and theoretical reflexivity. This panel, convened under the Interdisciplinary Network of Pagan Studies (INOPS), aims to further calibrate the field as one defined not by a static object of inquiry, but by a shared set of analytical preoccupations. We place particular emphasis on the ways in which Pagan identities intersect with discourses of ethnicity, gender, ecology, and indigeneity, alongside their deep-seated genealogical entanglements with Western esotericism and broader indigenous traditions. Rather than soliciting purely descriptive accounts, the panel foregrounds the critical interrogation of methodological frameworks specific to the comparative study of contemporary Paganisms as well as more theoretical discussions. The contributions navigate the challenges of interdisciplinary research and engage with the conceptual boundaries between Paganism, esotericism, and indigenous religions. By synthesizing empirically grounded research with rigorous theoretical insight, this panel seeks to cultivate a sustained dialogue within the INOPS network and to consolidate Pagan Studies as a vital, comparative, and critical discipline within the contemporary study of religion.

CLOSED PANEL XXXIII

Imagining India:
Young Scholars on European Understandings of Indian Religions

In the last two hundred years, Europe has built a large body of knowledge about Indian culture. Within this body, a prominent place is allocated to the conceptualisation of many Indian cultural and social aspects as religions. One of the goals of the research programme Europe's Representations of India: Texts, Images, and Encounters (COST Action CA23144 ESIND) is to map and analyse the development of European conceptualisation of Indian religions and its impact on encounters between the two regions. What are the options, limits, and constraints of European discourse on Indian religions? What conceptual tools were used to build such a discourse? And what do these descriptions tell us about the culture of the describers? The panel brings together young researchers who will provide fresh – if not provocative – theories and methods which will lead to answering the

above–mentioned questions. Thus, the panel aims at a better understanding not only of images of India in European culture, but also of the knowledge of European culture itself.

CLOSED PANEL XXXIV

Myth, materiality, and power

Like religion itself, myth is material and takes form in words, movement, maps, objects, practices, and proclamations. The four papers in this panel analyse the social and ideological functions of myths' materiality across different religious contexts, cultures, and continents: wounded oracle bodies and sacrificial animals in Kerala, Christian crusader tattoos and martial display, a renamed pond and banned prayer flags in Sikkim, and spiritual mapping and caves, snakes, and thrones of gold in the Philippines. Myths reflect, express, and reshape older stories and new concerns about authority, authenticity, and access, origin, protection, purity, and danger. Physical properties and bodily practices shape thought, feeling, and conduct, and their repetition naturalises them. Myths mark territory, naturalise claims to land, descent, memory, and rank, construe and challenge authority and community boundaries, regulate passage, and turn crossings into privilege or transgression. In each case, materiality is fundamental.