THE NEW YORK OPEN CENTER PRESENTS

AN ESOTERIC QUEST IN BULGARIA

AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE MYSTERIES

In Plovdiv, Bulgaria, the Oldest Living City in Europe
August 22-27, 2019

POST-CONFERENCE JOURNEYS:

From the Cave of Orpheus to the Black Sea in Bulgaria
August 27-September 1, 2019

The Heart of Medieval, Folkloric, Romania: Transylvania, Maramures, Bucovina
August 27-September 2, 2019

ESOTERICQUEST.ORG
An Esoteric Quest in Bulgaria

Join us as we return to our Esoteric Quest roots in Eastern Europe and explore Bulgaria, a land filled with spiritual and esoteric history from the most ancient times to the present.

Our conference will take place in Plovdiv, Europe's oldest living city, having been inhabited for over 6,000 years. Known as the Pearl of the Balkans, Plovdiv has been named the European Capital of Culture for 2019. Few cities have such an entrancing atmosphere, with vestiges from antiquity of the worship of Orpheus and Dionysus, remnants of the Thracian kings, and an enormous Roman stadium and theater. Reaching back deeper still, Plovdiv’s archaeological museums are filled with the region's most ancient artifacts, including Great Mother figurines from 35,000 years ago and the earliest traces of writing on bone and stone.

A visitor can move in minutes from a Turkish coffee house to the transcendent icons of a beautiful, medieval Bulgarian Orthodox church, to the intricately adorned 19th century Revival houses that sit in the heart of Plovdiv's Old City. Wherever the eye turns, it falls on something unexpected, fantastical, and deeply absorbing.

In the early Middle Ages, the followers of the Holy Religion of Light, precursors of the Gnostic Cathars in Southern France and Italy, were brought to Plovdiv and its environs in great numbers where they perpetuated the ‘Hidden Tradition in Europe’ developed by the Bogomil communities in the Balkans and especially in Bosnia. Eastern Orthodox Christianity created and sustained a profound influence with its preservation of the mystical and Platonic traditions within the Church. And then 500 years of domination by the Ottoman Turks brought to Bulgaria yet another level of culture and spirituality with the legacy of the most influential Sufi Orders such as the Mevlevi Dervishes and their places of worship.

Bulgaria continues to have a vibrant, living folk tradition: masked dances, fire dances, and the magic of Bulgarian choral song with its polyphonic tones and trance-like effects. It is a land of rose valleys, Thracian temples stretching throughout the mysterious Rhodope Mountains (in the caves of which Orpheus is said to have descended into the Underworld in search of Eurydice), and a history of fine wine-making that began in antiquity.

We invite you to join us on our 15th Esoteric Quest, the Open Center’s highly regarded and longest-running program, as we explore this fascinating city and country where so many mystery traditions have crossed paths over the centuries. In returning to the elusive world of Eastern European esotericism for the first time in a dozen years, we are delighted to offer travelers, students and researchers a fresh and inexhaustible vein of spiritual history to mine.

For more information, please contact Andrea Lomanto at 212.219.2527 x101, or write quest@opencenter.org. Please see our website at esotericquest.org for additional conference details and program updates.
Orphic Mysteries and Archaeology in Ancient Thrace
Diana Gergova, Ph.D.

Herodotus tells us that the Thracians were the most numerous people after the Indians. He also explains that Orpheus the Thracian was the first to introduce the mysteries, which is why they were called *threskeia*. The legendary figures of Orpheus in the South of Thrace, and Zalmoxis in the North, emerge from the mists of the turbulent times of the great migrations in the second half of the second millennium BC. Recent archaeological discoveries in Bulgaria reveal unique monuments from the apogee of the Thracian civilization. These tombs, sanctuaries and towns illustrate not only the extremely high level of their culture, but also allow us to understand how strongly this civilization was influenced by the belief in immortality, and the mysteries and rituals connected with it.

The Image of Orpheus
Joselynn Godwin, Ph.D.

From the Renaissance onward, the story of Orpheus has inspired poets, musicians and visual artists. We will look at some paintings, prints and sculptures from that period, through Romanticism and the Symbolists, up to modern times. How did the artist choose what element of the Orpheus myth to represent, and how does this choice affect the viewer? The object is to appreciate how myth, timeless by nature, adapts to historical fashions and philosophies, in each case revealing a different facet of its inherent wisdom. It also suggests reflections on the historical trajectory of Western civilization.

The Underworld Journey as Quest and Transformation
Marjorie Roth, Ph.D.

The theme of *katabasis* belongs to the myth and religion of human cultures worldwide. A hero visits an Underworld landscape in pursuit of some object, loved one, or knowledge that is of particular value to himself or his community. Such a quest invites risk, daring, love, loss, weakness, courage, and, ultimately, transformation. Taking the demigod Orpheus as our guide, we will explore various operatic manifestations of his Underworld experience. By focusing on the moment of his confrontation with the Chthonic deities, we will see how Orpheus’s own special power—the power of music—can both reflect and critique the values of his or her time and place.

The Survival of Hermetic and Gnostic Wisdom in the Medieval Byzantine-Balkan World
Yuri Stoyanov, Ph.D.

Following the institution of the orthodoxies of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, trends, schools and individuals professing esoteric, Gnostic and Hermetic teachings were suppressed, driven underground or marginalized. Based on the latest manuscript discoveries and the speaker’s field work in the Middle East, Asia Minor and the Balkans, this talk will chart the main underground channels of survival and transmission of such esoteric, Gnostic and Hermetic doctrines and ritual procedures in traditions which were considered “heretical” and “forbidden” before their re-emergence in the Hermetic revival of the Renaissance that transformed European spirituality and culture.
Amulets and Talismans in the Bulgarian Written Tradition
Boriana Hristova, Ph.D.
Amulets and talismans were disseminated in the Bulgarian lands from the 14th to the 18th centuries. Whether through the magical use of language and prayers as protective amulets, or as talisman seals and protective sashes wrapped around one’s waist, such practices were used for protection from evil forces — from meetings with fairies and hags and unexpected death — and also for success in all affairs, including easy childbirth, help in the case of illness, guidance for travelers, and many more eventualities of everyday life. We’ll have an opportunity to use copies of written amulets and talismans from the 14th and 15th centuries as objects of meditation and visualization.

The Secret Code of the Bulgarian Icon Painters
Mariyana Shabarkova-Petrova
Bulgarian icon painters are known for their originality and rich symbolism. The Wheel of Life, symbolizing the vanity of human existence, is a frequent image in frescoes, in addition to the depiction of such classic themes as the Nativity and the Baptism of Christ. We will explore the diverse interpretations of this Wheel and consider its analogues in Himalayan models of the Wheel of Life and in Ethiopian images inspired by the medieval novel *Barlaam and Joasaph*, allowing the secret code of the icon painters to emerge.

The Bulgarian Pythia and Her Sisters
Balkan Female Seers
Galia Valtchinova
A remarkable tradition of Balkan female seers exists, and we will explore several of these religious visionaries of the 20th century. Most notable is the famous Vanga (1913–1996), who was known as ‘the Bulgarian Pythia’. We will examine examples of their extraordinary performances, and the common characteristics of their visionary practices, which include speaking to and speaking for supernatural entities, mostly identified with Orthodox saints, and communicating with the dead. These seeresses partook in a peculiar religious culture where visions and dreams were taken as avenues either to Divine Will or to extra-lucid knowledge.

From the Depths of Bulgarian Spirituality
The Master Peter Deunov and the Teachings of the White Brotherhood
Svetoslava Toncheva, Ph.D.
Peter Deunov, the founder of the White Brotherhood spiritual community, is considered by his followers to be a universal teacher of humanity. His life and teachings are devoted to the transformation of the human being to a higher state of consciousness, and preparation for the new era that the Earth, it is believed, will undergo in the future — the era of “Love” or the epoch of the sixth human race. The practices he created, such as Paneurhythm and living in harmony with nature, are today signature cultural phenomena for many Bulgarians.

Dervish dancer in Varna, Bulgaria
WORKSHOPS

Gods, Grain and Gold:
Mysteria and Theourgia in Thrace and Beyond
Leonard George, Ph.D.

The word “mystery” derives from an old Greek word meaning “closed” or “secret.” The ancient Mysteria were private gatherings for encountering the sacred, leading to self-transformation. Several divine beings with links to Thrace were featured in the Mysteries that spread through the ancient world — Dionysus, Orpheus, Hekate, Sabazios, and others. According to legend, the Thracian Eumolpos founded the Eleusinian Mysteries, most famous of them all. In Late Antiquity, a teaching called Theourgia (“divine action”), said to have been given by Hekate, revealed a self-transformative path that could be trodden by practitioners anywhere.

What Makes Music Orphic?
Joscelyn Godwin, Ph.D.

Tradition has it that the rocks, trees, and beasts charmed by Orpheus’s music were allegories of the human body and soul, and that the purpose of music is to have a beneficial effect on these. We will test the theory by listening, in relaxed conditions, to a variety of music. Combined with exercises of the imagination, and by placing awareness in the different centers of the body, we will then open the field to a free discussion of our experiences. The ideas and techniques that are sampled here may have a lasting effect on one’s relationship to music.

The Silk Road of Esotericism
From the Far East to the Balkans
Yuri Stoyanov, Ph.D.

The transcontinental routes linking the Mediterranean and East Asia known as the Silk Road gave birth to a succession of religiously and spiritually pluralist cultures. Heavily suppressed in early medieval Mediterranean Europe and the Near East, the “Religion of Light”, Manichaeism, expanded into Central Asia and China and interacted with Daoism and Buddhism, especially with their esoteric currents. Mounting evidence of the depth and range of this interaction, also extending to the ascetic and magical practices of secret Daoist and Buddhist sects, indicates that such esoteric traditions were transmitted into Eastern European and the Balkans. This workshop will present the recoverable patterns and traces of this transmission, as revealed by often enigmatic and intriguing pieces of evidence which have been uncovered only recently.

Traditional Bulgarian Folk Dance
Dilyana Kurdova

Traditional folklore dance is an important, living, and most enjoyable part of Bulgarian culture. This workshop, open to all, will give a general overview of these dances and offer specific instructions in how to perform them. Participants will learn by dancing and feeling how the different steps, figures and rhythms — regular and irregular — interact with their bodies. The circle is the basic form of the Bulgarian horo-dance, so we will dance mainly hand-in-hand, usually counterclockwise but sometimes clockwise, according to the purpose of the dance within the ritual tradition of the region from which it comes.

Bulgarian Sacred Music and Chant
Tanja Doganova-Hristova

Christianity spread gradually amongst the population of Bulgaria and became the official state religion in 866 AD during the reign of King Boris I. When this occurred, the founders of the Bulgarian alphabet, together with their disciples, translated liturgical books into the Bulgarian language and rearranged ancient ecclesiastical melodies to comply with Bulgarian tonality. According to the ancient canons, church services were to be only vocal as the human voice was considered the most perfect instrument for the glorification of God. Until the present day, the entire Orthodox world knows only the vocal sonority of sacred music.

Traditional Bulgarian Choir

At the Crossroads of the Mysteries

Caravan on the Silk Road, 1380

Traditional Bulgarian Folk Dance

The Silk Road of Esotericism

Bulgarian Sacred Music and Chant

Traditional Bulgarian Choir
The Thracian Mysteries and Early Christianity
Diana Gergova, Ph.D.

The relationship of pagan mystery centers to early Christianity is a fascinating subject. In this workshop, we will explore Orphic ideas about the soul, and consider the relationship of Orpheus to early Christianity. In Bulgaria, we see the uninterrupted continuity of sacred places from the Thracian mystery centers to early Christian holy sites, and the continuation of the main Orphic burial practices in Christian rites. Elements of Thracian tomb architecture, originally part of the mystery rites of immortalization, were incorporated into early Christian buildings, and we can also see the evolution of the image of the main Thracian god — the horseman of the Roman period — into the figure of St. George.

The Golden Mean and the Esoteric Quest
Scott Olsen, Ph.D.

The Western Esoteric Tradition has always harbored an underlying mathematical key to the operation of nature and the cosmos. Bulgaria, at the Crossroads of the Mysteries, may hold a valuable part of the secret. Ancient gold measuring devices excavated at Varna, together with Neolithic petrospheres from Scotland, now suggest that this knowledge may be at least 2,000 years older than the pyramids of Egypt. This golden mean numbering system, endlessly employed in constructing tombs, temples, pyramids and cathedrals, is now unlocking deep secrets in physics, astronomy and biology. This workshop will address Bulgaria’s central role in this tradition, and the extraordinary architectural and scientific results of the golden mathematical key.

The Raven King and His Library
Malcolm Kennard, Ph.D.

The reign of Matthias Corvinus, the ‘Raven King’ of Hungary (1443–1490), was regarded as a ‘Golden Age,’ and he was considered one of the greatest of European monarchs. He was friends with Marsilio Ficino and Lorenzo de Medici, embraced Renaissance thought, and united wisdom and strength by emulating Plato’s ideas of the philosopher-king. His great accomplishment, the Bibliotheca Corviniana, held between 1500 and 2000 manuscripts on philosophy, history, science, and literature. Sadly, the library was destroyed by the Turks and has become the ‘Lost Library’ of legend. We will delve into his legendary library and what became of it.

Tarot as a Visual Compendium of Eastern and Western Esoteric Philosophy
Ellen Goldberg, M.A.

The Tarot is a living river into which many spiritual streams have flowed, and is primarily concerned with liberation and enlightenment. The archetypal images of the 22 Major Arcana can be considered sacred symbols that awaken ideas and states of being, previously unknown but latent within the viewer. We will examine and experience some of the Tarot’s universal themes including identification with the Anima Mundi, and the knowledge and conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel.
AFTERNOON ACTIVITIES

Visit to the Bachkovo Monastery
We will travel to the nearby tranquil and ancient Bachkovo Monastery, known for its unique combination of Byzantine, Georgian and Bulgarian architecture. Founded in the 11th century, the monastery is known for its Church of the Archangels and its panoramic mural, the biggest scenic mural in the Balkans.

Walking Tour of Plovdiv
As the oldest living city in Europe and home to the largest coliseum outside Rome, Plovdiv is endlessly fascinating. The center of the city exudes history with its remnants of Thracian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, Bulgarian Revival (and, yes, communist) cultures. Our focus will be on the maze of lanes that constitutes the bohemian quarter of Kapana and the Old City, with their multiple layers of civilization.

EVENING EVENTS

Monteverdi’s Orpheus in the Roman Theatre
We are fortunate that, during our time in Plovdiv, we will be able to attend a performance of Monteverdi’s opera *Orpheus* in the city’s well preserved ancient Roman Theatre. *Orpheus* is the most famous Thracian figure from antiquity, and a semi-divinity of music. What better way to experience his journey than through a famous opera? The production features Teatro Regio di Parma, is directed by leading Italian director Stefano Poda, and is part of the European Capital of Culture Festival, taking place in Plovdiv in 2019.

Svetoglas Bulgarian Polyphonic A Cappella Song
This evening we will be joined by Svetoglas, a male a cappella vocal quartet whose polyphonic singing offers a deep depiction of both ancient Bulgarian folklore and Orthodox sacred music. They will also introduce ancient hymns that have only recently become known and are masterpieces of Bulgarian monophonic music, and its varying forms of expression over the centuries. The performance will take place in the Balabanova House, one of Plovdiv’s most beautiful Revival buildings.

Bulgarian Folk Dance with the Horo Ensemble
The Horo Ensemble has taken part in festivals throughout the Balkans and Eastern Europe and has won many national and international prizes. They perform dances from all regions of Bulgaria in traditional costume. Our evening begins with an opportunity for participants to learn simple dances, and continues with a performance from this celebrated ensemble.
Bulgaria: From the Cave of Orpheus to the Black Sea

August 27–September 1, 2019

Our Post-Conference Journey into Bulgaria begins with our traveling deep into the mystical Rhodope Mountains to the majestic Trigrad Gorge. Here we enter a great cavern, said to be the route by which Orpheus descended into the Underworld in search of his wife, Eurydice, which is filled with the resounding echoes of the highest underground waterfall in the Balkans. We spend the night in the nearby spa town of Devin, famous since ancient times for the healing benefits of its mineral springs, and drive the following day to the Thracian sanctuary of Tatul, where figures of the Sun God have been found. We continue on to Perperikon, the largest megalithic archaeological site in the Balkans, where a temple of Dionysus stood, and near to which crucial prophecies for Alexander the Great are said to have been uttered.

After spending the night in the peaceful village of Glavatarsi, we drive towards the Black Sea to visit the megalithic site of Beglic Tas, used by Thracian tribes in the Iron Age. Our next stop is the ancient and elegant city of Nessebar, a UNESCO World Heritage site and former Greek colony. Situated on a promontory jutting into the sea, its cobbled streets are filled with Byzantine-era ruins and baths. After a free morning enjoying its delights, we visit the Aladzha cave monastery, where we hope to hear a choir perform the sacred music sung there for centuries.

Finally, we arrive at Varna, established in the 6th century BC. This lively seaside town is home to a fascinating archaeological museum filled with antiquities from its Greek, Roman and Ottoman past — including the famous Varna Gold — and the exquisite Roman baths where we will spend our final morning. However, no exploration of Bulgaria’s coastline would be complete without time enjoying its beautiful golden sand beaches, the Black Sea so vast it seems to stretch forever along the horizon.

Price: $1115 per person in double accommodations; $1250 in single accommodations.

Includes five nights’ accommodations, most meals through breakfast on the 1st, guided tour, all entrance fees and all ground transport through the 31st of August.
**Pre-Conference Experience**

**Sofia and “The Valley of the Thracian Kings”**

With Yuri Stoyanou, Ph.D. and Diana Gergoua, Ph.D.

**August 20–22, 2019**

Bulgaria is a land amazingly rich in history and our Pre-Conference experience will offer a graceful introduction into its fascinating culture. We will meet in the capital city of Sofia, and spend our first evening at a traditional Bulgarian restaurant, one imbued with the folkloric vitality so evident in the country’s music, dance, and cuisine. The following morning we will visit the moving and beautiful Neo-Byzantine Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in the heart of the city, as well as Sofia’s stunning archaeological museum, housed in a former mosque, revealing the multiplicity of peoples that have shaped this region. After lunch, we will head southeast popularly known as the Valley of the Thracian Kings, to stay in a spa outside the town of Starosel. The spa, with its mineral pools, steam baths and saunas — a traditional part of Bulgarian culture — is also a working vineyard, continuing the age-old practices of Thracian wine production. Here, we’ll enjoy a tour and tasting of excellent local wines, as not only Orpheus, the semi-divine originator of song, but also Dionysus, the god of ecstasy, were worshipped here for many centuries. We devote the next day to exploring the Thracian mystery centers, accompanied by experts who will give us our first glimpse of this sophisticated but not widely-known ancient world. We will visit the local archaeology museum in Hisarya, enjoy lunch at a lovely traditional restaurant in Kazanlak and tour the nearby Thracian Tombs before traveling on to Plovdiv, where our Main Conference begins.

**Post-Conference Journeys**

**The Heart of Medieval, Folkloric Romania: Transylvania, Maramures and Bucovina**

**August 27–September 2, 2019**

Northern Romania is a place of timeless beauty, and one of the last medieval landscapes in Europe — castles perched on rocky hilltops, pine-forested valleys and villages where centuries-old folk traditions remain strong.

Our journey into its heart begins with an evening flight to Bucharest, where we spend the night. The following morning we travel by coach to the town of Sinaia to visit Peles Castle, with its Klimt frescoes and stained glass windows, before journeying further into Transylvania, a region of towering fortresses in the wild Carpathian Mountains. Our afternoon is spent in the 13th century city of Brasov, walking through its cobblestoned streets and visiting the neo-Gothic synagogue that remains home to its Jewish community. We drive on to the unspoiled Saxon village of Viscri, a UNESCO World Heritage site renowned for its beauty and serenity. After a night here, we travel on to Sighisoara, the evocative, colorful town famed as the birthplace of Vlad Tepes, inspiration for Bram Stoker’s Dracula. Our evening will be spent in Cluj, capital of Transylvania, with its medieval towers, baroque buildings and Gothic cathedrals, to tour the old city and enjoy the bohemian nightlife.

The next morning we drive to Maramures, a fairy tale world of horse-drawn carriages and haycarts — Romania’s most traditional region. We spend two nights in the village of Breb, enjoying home-cooked cuisine and a taste of the local folk music. We visit Barsana Monastery — an enchanting complex of iconic wooden churches — the unique Merry Cemetery, which celebrates life as much as death, and the Sighet Memorial, dedicated to those who died fighting communism. Our final full day is in the bucolic idyll of Bucovina, with its pasturelands, beech groves and Byzantine-frescoed monasteries, and then Suceava, at the crossroads of Central and Eastern Europe, where we spend our last night in this entrancing and complex country.

**Price:** $1599 per person in double accommodations; $1695 in single accommodations.

Includes one-way airfare between Sofia and Bucharest, six nights’ accommodations, all meals through breakfast on the 2nd, fully-guided tour, all entrance fees, all ground transport and coach transfer to Suceava Airport in the early morning of the 2nd of September.
Biographies

Tanya Doganova-Hristova is founder and director of the Yoan Kukuzel Chamber Ensemble. They have been the first to perform, both at home and abroad, the old Bulgarian chants so that they might take their well-deserved place in the world treasury of musical culture. Tanya is also musical editor of Radio Sofia and a producer of documentary films.

Leonard George, Ph.D., is a Canadian psychologist, educator, writer and broadcaster, and a lifelong student of Western esotericism. He is the Chair of the School of Social Sciences at Capilano University, British Columbia. The author of two books and dozens of articles, he has been an advisor and presenter for the Esoteric Quest conferences for many years.

Diana Gergova, Ph.D., is one of Bulgaria’s leading archaeologists and was Professor at the National Archaeological Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences until 2016. She is the author of seven books and over 200 articles on Thracian culture, religion and cultural heritage. Her many honors include the 2017 Eagle of the Danube Award for the preservation of cultural heritage.

Joselyn Godwin, Ph.D., is a leading scholar and writer on the Western Esoteric Tradition, including its musical aspects. He teaches at Colgate University and has written, edited and translated numerous books including Harmonies of Heaven and Earth, The Spiritual Dimension of Music from Antiquity to the Avant-Garde, and Mystery Religions of the Ancient World.

Ellen Goldberg, M.A., is both a psychotherapist and a mystic who has been teaching Tarot and the Western Hermetic Tradition for forty years. She has taught at six of the previous Esoteric Quests and been an ongoing part of the Open Center faculty since 1986. She is the founder of the School of Oracles in New York City. Her book, The Art and Science of Hand Reading, is number one in its field.

Rossitsa Gradeva, Ph.D., is a professor at the American University in Bulgaria, and the Center for Thracian Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia. She has published widely on Muslim culture, on Ottoman institutions in the Balkans, and on Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire. Her books include Rumeli under the Ottomans, 15th-18th Centuries and Frontiers of Ottoman Space, Frontiers in Ottoman Society.

Boriana Hristova, Ph.D., is Professor of Philosophy at Sofia University and was formerly the director of the National Library of Bulgaria, the oldest cultural institution in the country. She has been a Fellow at the Warburg Institute in London and is an expert on Bulgarian manuscripts of the 10th to 19th centuries.

Malcolm Kennard, Ph.D., has had a diverse career as a professor, director and consultant in the UK and Canada, with many peer-reviewed publications both in science and the arts. He is currently an adjunct professor affiliated with the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University.

Dilyana Kurdova studied Bulgarian folklore choreography and is the international coordinator of the Plovdiv Folk Seminar at the city’s Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts. She has taught dance all over Europe and is also an anthroposophist and a trained Waldorf kindergarten teacher. She applies this knowledge in her teaching of traditional dances and rhythms.

Scott Olsen, Ph.D., is a Professor of Philosophy and Comparative Religion at the College of Central Florida and the author of The Golden Section: Nature’s Greatest Secret, which was awarded first place for design by the Bookbinders’ Guild of New York. Scott lectures widely on the Perennial Philosophy with special emphasis on the Divine Proportion and Transformative States of Consciousness.

Marjorie Roth, Ph.D., is a Full Professor at Nazareth College in Rochester, NY, where she teaches music history, music and magic, and music and the liberal arts. Her research interests include Italian Renaissance music, spiritualism and music, and musical alchemy. She has presented papers on musicological and esoteric topics at conferences in the United States, Egypt, Greece, Italy, and Iceland.

Mariyana Shabarkova-Petrova is a publisher and author. Her books include Ethiopia, or Beyond Christianity As We Know It and More Than 100 Remarkable Bulgarian Monasteries. She is also co-author of The Mystery of the Bulgarian Church Paintings in two volumes: Touching God and The Sacred History and History.

Yuri Stoyanov, Ph.D., is based at the Department of the Near and Middle East, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and is currently a Senior Fellow at the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, Jerusalem. He has published widely on the interaction between mystical and esoteric currents in Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam and their survival into the modern era. His publications include The Hidden Tradition in Europe and The Other God.

Svetoslava Toncheva, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of anthropology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. She is the author of Out of the New Spirituality of the Twentieth Century: The Dawn of Anthroposophy, the White Brotherhood and the Unified Teaching. She has a long-term interest in the field of contemporary spirituality and the teachings of Peter Deunov in particular.

Galia Valtchinova, D.Sc., is a faculty member of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Toulouse II in France, where she teaches historical and religious anthropology. She has written on female visionaries and worked extensively on holy places and pilgrimages in the Balkans. She is the author of Balkan Prophetesses in the 20th Century.

Conference Staff:

Director: Ralph White, New York Open Center
Co-Coordinator and Production Manager: Carrie Wykoff, Events That Matter
Co-Coordinator and Registrar: Andrea Lomanto, New York Open Center
Director of Finance: Nancy Rotger, New York Open Center
Bulgarian Coordinator: Gergana Petkova
Program Advisor: Yuri Stoyanov, Ph.D.

Ralph White is co-founder of the New York Open Center, one of America’s leading institutions of holistic learning. He has directed the Esoteric Quest conferences since their beginning in 1995, and is the author of the highly regarded memoir, The Jeweled Highway: On the Quest for a Life of Meaning. Ralph also edited and introduced The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited.

Carrie Wykoff has been the Conference Coordinator for the Esoteric Quest since 1998. She produces all types of events, and the Quest is truly one of her favorites. She is also an interfaith minister, a musician, a fitness instructor and is the Director of Operations at High Meadow School.

Andrea Lomanto has worked with the Esoteric Quest since 2006. She is also a puppetista, educator, and founder of Power Up Youth Project.
Conference Registration

Main Conference Fee
Course Code: 19SQUEST
Registration through May 13, 2019: $2195
Through July 5, 2019: $2445
The conference fee includes the full conference program, all afternoon activities, evening events and all meals.

Accommodations Fee
Accommodations are provided in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, for the five nights of Thursday, August 22 through Tuesday, August 27.
August 22–27 (five nights) in Plovdiv:
Basic double room: $150 per person
Basic single room: $250
Mid-range double room: $255 per person
Mid-range single room: $375
Upgraded double room: $330 per person
Upgraded single room: $500
For booking double rooms, please specify whether you will be attending as a couple, sharing a room with a friend, or wish to have a roommate arranged for you by the Open Center (pending availability).

Registration
The Open Center invites you to register on our website at esotericquest.org, where you will find our complete registration information and payment form. A deposit is required to secure your registration.

Payment
All payment is in US dollars. Please pay by credit card, international money order or personal check (US bank accounts only). Prices do not include travel to and from Bulgaria. A flexible payment plan for the conference is available. Please contact Andrea Lomanto at 212.219.2527 x101, or at quest@opencenter.org for details.

Travel Arrangements
Main Conference participants must make their own travel arrangements to and from Sofia, where optional group travel will be available, or directly to Plovdiv. Post-Conference participants will return home from either Varna, Bulgaria, or Suceava, Romania.

Arrival in Bulgaria
Those of us attending the Pre-Conference Day will arrive into Sofia Airport on August 20, where taxis will be available for the drive to your hotel. Participants whose travels begin with our Main Conference will arrive into Sofia Airport on August 22 for independent or optional group travel to Plovdiv. More information may be found on our website at esotericquest.org.

About the Conference
Our conference begins with an opening night reception and dinner in Plovdiv on the evening of August 22. Each day, we will have morning plenary sessions followed by lunch. Afternoons will feature workshops, excursions into the town or countryside, or free time. Evenings will have dinner and events exploring Bulgarian culture. The conference ends with lunch on Tuesday, August 27.

Refunds
A full refund, less a $200 processing fee, is offered for cancellations made by Friday, July 5, 2019. Travel insurance is strongly recommended in the event of unexpectedly having to cancel or change your travel plans either before or during the conference, losing your luggage, needing medical assistance, or if the program is affected by circumstances beyond our control.

Scholarships and Student Rates
Student rates and a limited number of partial scholarships are available. A scholarship application can be found on our website at esotericquest.org.

Come, then, blessed being, full of wisdom and generation, come in joy
To thy sacred, ever-varying mystery.
—Orphic Hymn
CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

The Silk Road of Esotericism: From the Far East to the Balkans
Yuri Stoyanov, Ph.D.

Ancient Thrace: Cradle, Crossroads, Cauldron
Leonard George, Ph.D.

The Image of Orpheus
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Boriana Hristova, Ph.D.

The Underworld Journey as Quest and Transformation
Marjorie Roth, Ph.D.

The Sufi Tradition and Dervish Brotherhoods in the Bulgarian Lands
Rossitsa Gradeva, Ph.D.

The Bulgarian Pythia and Her Sisters: Balkan Female Seers
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The Secret Code of the Bulgarian Icon Painters
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August 27–September 1, 2019

The Heart of Medieval, Folkloric, Romania:
Transylvania, Maramures, Bucovina
August 27–September 2, 2019