



The Secret History of Western Sexual Mysticism: Sacred Practices and Spiritual Marriage

By Arthur Versluis

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The first book to reveal the history of Western sexual mysticism

- Reveals the secret sexual practices that have been used since ancient Greece to achieve mystical union with God
- Details the sects and individuals who transmitted the radical sexual practices that orthodox Christianity never completely silenced
- Distinguishes between sexual magic and sexual mysticism

Beginning with the ancient Greek Mystery traditions, Gnosticism, and the practices in early Christianity, Arthur Versluis uncovers the secret line of Western sexual mysticism that, like the Tantra of the East, seeks transcendence or union with God through sexual practices. Throughout antiquity, and right into the present day, sexuality has played an important, if largely hidden, role in religious traditions and practices. This includes not only Christian but also kabbalistic and hermetic alchemical currents of sexual mysticism, many discussed together here for the first time.

In the Mystery tradition of *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage) and the Gnostic tradition of spiritual marriage, we see the possibility of divine union in which sexual union is the principal sign or symbol. Key to these practices is the inner or archetypal union of above and below, the intermingling of the revelatory divine world with the mundane earthly one. Versluis shows that these secret currents of sexual mysticism helped fuel the rise of the troubadours and their erotic doctrine, the esoteric teachings of Jacob Böhme in the late 16th century, the 19th-century utopian communities of John Humphrey Noyes and Thomas Lake Harris, the free love movement of the 20th century, and the modern writings of Denis de Rougemont and Alan Watts.

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Editorial Review

Review

" . . . an insightful history of the role of human sexuality in the shaping of ideas and cultures." (*Chard Currie, New Dawn, Sep/Oct 2008*)

"In this scholarly paperback, [Versluis] traces the twisting and turning path of Western sexual mysticism." (*Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, Spirituality and Practice, Oct 2008*)

"This book addresses a topic that is often overlooked (or else looked at as an embarrassing part of the mystical tradition) here in the Western world. This book looks at both the Pagan and Christian mystic traditions in many of their manifestations, with an emphasis of the Christian side. . . . There is no titillation in this book, merely accurate historical reporting." (*Michael Gleason, Witchgrove.com, Apr 2008*)

"*Secret History of Western Sexual Mysticism* offers up a unique set of cross-connections essential to connecting spirituality with religious history. New Age collections, in particular, will find it an exciting survey packed with history and religious examination." (*Midwest Book Review, July 2008*)

"Like his other works, this book is essential reading for those who desire to understand some of the more hidden and truly esoteric streams of thought and practice that have been instrumental in the various traditions of Western esotericism." (*Institute of Hermetic Studies, Aug 2008*)

"At rare occasions sober and traditional presentations of commercialized magical activity appears as a counterweight to the occult sentimentalism that often finds its way to publication. Versluis's masterful presentation of sexual mysticism is one of those rare books that cannot be recommended enough. . . . the landscape he opens is going straight to the nerve of this rich field of enlightenment. Highly recommended." (*O Caldeirao, Issue 16, May 2008*)

From the Back Cover

SEXUALITY / SPIRITUALITY

Beginning with the ancient Greek Mystery traditions, Gnosticism, and the practices in early Christianity, Arthur Versluis uncovers the secret line of Western sexual mysticism that, like the Tantra of the East, seeks transcendence or union with God through sexually charged practices. Throughout antiquity, and right into the present day, sexuality has played an important, if largely hidden, role in religious traditions and practices. This includes not only Christian but also kabbalistic, hermetic, and alchemical currents of sexual mysticism, many discussed together here for the first time.

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ARTHUR VERSLUIS is the editor-in-chief of *Esoterica* and the founding president of the Association for the Study of Esotericism. He is the author of numerous books, including *Sacred Earth*, *Magic and Mysticism*, *Restoring Paradise*, and *The New Inquisitions*. He lives in Michigan where he is a professor of interdisciplinary humanities at Michigan State University.

About the Author

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