



Maciej B. Stępień

Okultyzm

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DR MACIEJ BOGDAN STĘPIEŃ jest historykiem idei, wykształconym w Instytucie Historii Kościoła Wydziału Teologii KUL. Jest autorem *Poszukiwaczy prawdy* (2000) i *Polskiej Bibliografii Wolnomularstwa* (2004–). Jego zainteresowania naukowe dotyczyły najpierw tradycji masońskiej, następnie ezoteryki zachodniej jako całości, a obecnie wychodzą ku jeszcze szerszemu zagadnieniu – obecności tzw. wiedzy odrzuconej w kulturze, przyczyn tego fenomenu oraz jego daleko idących konsekwencji. Książka *Okultyzm* podsumowuje drugi etap pracy dra Stępnia, związany z opisem tradycji ezoterycznych, żywych w kulturze zachodniej.

Oryginalność tego ujęcia to przedstawienie okultyzmu na szerokim tle dziejowego rozwoju koncepcji ezoterycznych, które do niego prowadziły. To pozwala uchwycić historyczne powiązania i przenikanie się elementów myśli ludzkiej różnych epok i ich oddziaływanie we współczesnej kulturze.

Ks. dr hab. Włodzimierz Bielak

Jasna synteza zagadnienia. Przedstawienie jej w języku polskim, w dodatku w tak dobrej szacie stylistycznej, to znaczne osiągnięcie.

Ks. prof. dr hab. Zygmunt Zieliński

Ta książka daje jasne rozeznanie w zawilej problematyce. Autor po mistrzowsku potrafi podjąć krytykę utrwalonych w nauce stereotypów, które nigdy prawdy nie odsłaniają, a wręcz przeciwnie – zakrywają ją.

Prof. dr hab. Eugeniusz Sakowicz

Jest to jedna z niewielu rzeczywiście ważnych publikacji na ten temat, dostępnych w języku polskim. Jej lektura pokazuje, że w badaniach nad tą problematyką jesteśmy, co najmniej, w europejskiej czołówce.

Dr hab. Robert T. Ptaszek

To ważna dla polskiej kultury książka.

Ks. dr hab. Aleksander Posacki



Książkowa wersja rozprawy doktorskiej *Okultyzm w świetle badań nad ezoteryką zachodnią*, napisanej pod kierunkiem ks. prof. dr. hab. Zygmunta Zielińskiego w Instytucie Historii Kościoła i Patologii KUL, w latach 2000–2014. Komitet Badań Naukowych (Warszawa) odmówił finansowania przedstawionych tu badań. Narodowe Centrum Nauki (Kraków) odmówiło i zakazało autorowi występowania o finansowanie ich kontynuacji. Zarówno rozprawa, jak i książka zostały przygotowane i wydane w całości ze środków prywatnych dr. Macieja B. Stępnia.

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Okultyzm

Studium ezoteryki zachodniej

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Summary

This book is a dissertation in history of ideas that aims on explaining the cultural phenomenon of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century occultism. The book gives account of major trends in occultism, its founders and the organisations they have created. It also points toward western esotericism as a broader field of research to which the discussed phenomenon belongs. The author rejects unprecise and outdated concept of Edward A. Tiryakian describing occultism as a set of practices and procedures based on esoteric belief. Occultism is not 'a practical side of that which is esoteric'. It is one of modern currents of western esotericism, with its own 'theoretical' side of immense proportions, and that very side is precisely what makes occultism a distinct and trackable set of ideas, capable of becoming an object of studies for a historian.

Western esotericism as a field of research constitutes 'probably the largest corpus of unexamined sources in all humanities' (Versluis). It is a field open to methodological pluralism (Hanegraaff) and scholarly works dedicated to that field are authored by philosophers, theologians, culture-studies researchers and historians: of religion, of science, of literature, of art, and of ideas. The field itself has been delineated by historical facts: rejection by mainstream religion and science of a large body of early modern knowledge and thought which presumed unity of religious, philosophical and scientific truth. What was rejected (hermeticism, Christian kabbalah, alchemy, astrology, paracelsianism, Christian theosophy, rosicrucianism, 'natural' and 'scholarly' magic) made up a group of closely related intellectual currents, with the closeness between them first described in mid-90s of the 20th century by Antoine Faivre. Modern occultism reached out to that corpus of rejected knowledge, transformed it, and synthesised out of it a new, magical spirituality for modern times.

In reaching out to the magical and esoteric speculations of old occultism have used a valuable supporting agent: freemasonry. It's role in historical transfer of the old and rejected esoteric traditions into modern times is undeniable, as well as the role of the Masonic model of organisation in the development of formally constituted esoteric societies and occult orders. In the first years of existence in its final, speculative form freemasonry claimed ownership of everything that was esoteric. In mid-18th century 'the esoteric' has been equalled with 'Masonic', and taken, and studied, and reworked as inseparable part of the Masonic tradition. That changed in the 60s of 19th century when circles of british fringe Masons, deeply interested in occult lore, have come to conviction that everything esoteric was not really 'Masonic', but 'rosicrucian', thus adding an entirely new chapter to the rosicrucian myth, which had already been incorporated by Masonic systems of initiation. That new mythography of the Rosicrucians has elevated their mythical brotherhood to the peaks of occult adeptship and styled them as members of a cosmic supervising institution that guides and controls the process of development of the humankind. That idea has been taken up by the founders of occultism and lingers on in modern 'occulture' in varied forms until now.

Besides reaching back to old esoterisms and spreading new mythography of Rosicrucians occultism dwelled on the ramifications of a common 19th-century idea that the ancient, occult lore must have had some rational, scientific core in it, which would be, in time, discovered by science. Occultism has grown this idea to enormous proportions: the ancient lore rejected by modern rationalism, if profoundly and correctly learned and applied, would reveal itself as a system of knowledge and praxis able to crown and concord all human knowledge and experience in their entirety. That system would elevate human being onto a new level of existence. It would join together fragmented and specialised human knowledge in a single corpus of perfect sense. It would sift falshood from truth in all philosophy. It would explain, track and tell, in every detail, all history and prehistory of humankind. It would destroy all claims of established religions, revealing true secret of human nature and destiny providing everyone with a proper perspective of personal development. Last but not least, that system will demonstrate to the amazed public the whole of the multi-level and multi-dimensional universe, populated by powerful, non-human beings, and would equip human beings with effective tools for becoming powers equal to those cosmic ones, enabling thus the people of Earth to enter higher worlds. Because that system was based on occult sciences it was called „occultism” and the first appearance of that term dates back to mid-nineteenth century France.

The main practical goal of occultism was to cut the middleman in contacts with non-earthly beings as opposed to what was believed to be happening during

mesmeric and spiritualist séances, all of them entirely dependent on activities of mediums and seers. Occultists sought to reach out to the same outer and higher realms directly and consciously, without a need for mesmeric trances and mediums as communicators. The exploration of higher levels of cosmos was to become 'active' as opposed to the 'passivness' and powerlessness of mediums. It also implied wielding new powers: *intuitive ones*. The process of development of these powers seemed not to be possible without access to specific background knowledge, without long time of practical training, and most of all – without an organisation.

Occultism has never been a corpus of systematic, objective knowledge and experimentally confirmed practice, quite contrary to what was declared. Moreover, the access to its teachings was subjected to strict control of knowledge, up the ladders of initiatic hierarchies of occult organisations. After a few decades of development main teachings of occultism have become psychologised, and later even sexualised. Magical practice has become a play of imagination, a quest for a vision, an inner travel, an intimate, individual and unverifiable experience. Finally, incarnated as a mere practical psychology, it has also become a pretext for egoistic fulfillment of sexual needs of every kind.

That system also carried within itself a load of cognitive bias. It showed in dating and authorship of fundamental esoteric source-texts, in the opinions on the basis of natural processes, structure of human knowledge, existence of magical power (either natural or supernatural), in concept of symbol, in judgements on the extend of power of human will and imagination, in views of human history (chiefly prehistory of mankind), in opinions on the character of proto-language, on divisions in teachings of ancient thinkers, in highly improper rank awarded to kabbalah, in spiritual interpretation of alchemy and profound meaning ascribed to playing-card images, in tales of existence and role of non-human intelligences, in ignorance of the real effects of psychoactive substances abuse, in interpretations of trance and hypnosis, and in many more detailed matters. In addition to those misunderstanding the occultists have authored a long list of consciously prepared mistifications.

Viewed from the motivational side occultism was for its protagonists a search for a satisfactory synthesis of human experience (including religious experience) with the corpus of systematic, scientific knowledge. It was an expression of strong objection to narrow interpretations of reality. It was a quest to uncover a deeper nature of it, to possess its hidden secret, and to use that hidden lore for explaining everything that was there in nature and culture. It was also an endeavour to gain control over one's own life and future. It was an attempt to achieve the utmost personal success while rejecting both, the traditional religion and morality, and

theoretical and practical materialism. The study of occultism may be regarded then as a study of the deep human need of wholeness and sense: a study of something that makes fundamental and indispensable part of human nature. Among the occultists there can hardly be found a person profoundly cynical and not motivated by the abovementioned need. Many of them, however, turned out to be gullible, naïve and uncritical towards themselves and their environments.

Aside of historical description of the founders and major trends of occultism in part four, the book seeks to answer the question of genesis of that esoteric current. In the broadest view it is the question pointing toward occult sciences, their origin and progress in Western culture. In a much more narrow view it is a question about direct inspirations and sources used by the founders of occultism. In both of these views it was possible to formulate clear answer, based on historical sources and scholarly research. More importantly, that question of genesis was not shelved here as a marginal or introductory issue, but as an equally important task to undertake and complete. The third part of the book is dedicated to compose the history of ideas that make up occultism within the field of western esotericism. They are tracked from 12th until 19th century, that is, from the time when occult sciences, imported from the Islamic Orient, made their appearance in Europe, up to the direct predecessors of occultism, which were mesmerism (in its hypnotic version), spiritualism/spiritism, and, quite importantly, romanticism.

Such a vast overview of the history of western esotericism, followed by a clear and accurate depiction of occultism as a cultural phenomenon would not be possible 15 or even 10 years ago. It has become possible now thanks to the explosion of research activity concerning western esotericism in recent years. Several thousands scholarly books and papers on the subject are but the first shockwave of that explosion, which has by now reached Poland. These academic activities are so fresh, and the communities of researchers so specific that their detailed description seemed to be an indispensable duty to perform. And was it not only for the novelty of it all, but also for some serious methodological issues related to the ongoing research in western esotericism. Hence the first part of the book and its metasubjective contents. The second part is an addition to it, and has been dedicated to a detailed proposal of a more accurate Polish terminology connected with western esotericism as a field of research. The book is then an attempt to formulate the first Polish prolegomena to the most recent developments in scholarly research on western esotericism, which, until now, has been done on major scale elsewhere in the world.