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The Beginnings of Theosophy in Poland: From Early Visions to the Polish Theosophical Society¹

ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the functioning of groups promoting Theosophical ideas in Poland from the beginning of the 20th century. Subsequent institutional stages of Theosophical groups are discussed, such as the Circle led by Kazimierz Stabrowski, the Alba lodge, the Warsaw Theosophical Society, the Polish Theosophical Societies in Warsaw and in Nydek, up to and including the registration of the Polish Theosophical Society as a section of The Theosophical Society in Adyar.

KEYWORDS

Theosophy, Theosophical Society, Western Esotericism in Central and Eastern Europe, Polish Intellectual History in XX Century, The Polish Theosophical Society

The history of esoteric groups is often surrounded by an aura of mystery. With regard to most of them, however, it is possible to establish the most important moments in their history, and to name the people who were engaged in their practices. Differing visions of activities of such nature have been reconstructed in academic research. Nevertheless, sometimes, for reasons that are out of the researchers' control, or even of the members of a given esoteric

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group, the recovery of basic information can prove problematic. We face such a situation in trying to reconstruct the beginnings of the Polish section of the Theosophical Society (henceforth TS), which dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. The political situation in the Polish lands, which were at the time divided between three neighbouring powers, was a significant obstacle to the establishment of the TS and the realisation of its aims. The political situation contributed to the dispersion of crucial documents, but even greater damage was done during World War II. Fire and war ravaged irreplaceable documents, notes and other writings which would be of great value to a researcher.

At a certain time, Theosophy was not only an initiatory program and a complex world-view system, a constellation of beliefs with the pretence of science, but also a lifestyle, a set of norms purporting to be universal and a cultural trend, whose popularity remained a significant factor in Western societies for many decades. Today, the Theosophical movement is all but forgotten in mainstream Polish culture, and only occasionally comes back to life in heterodox religious groups; it is an object of interest for a relatively small group of researchers of Western Esotericism. Despite the fact that the TS's most active period has long passed, and in Poland there are no members of the organisation (whose headquarters has been located in Adyar, India, for over a century), the influence of this movement on European thought can hardly be overestimated. The connections between Theosophy and art, philosophy, psychology and other fields of 19th century intellectual culture are still being recovered, and they present a challenge for a study of intellectual history at the beginning of the 21st century, when this topic became an object of academic interest, also in Central and Eastern Europe.

The beginning of the worldwide Theosophical organisation – dating back to 1875 – are well-documented, despite the fact the figures of its founders are shrouded in legend and exaggerated anecdote. This is a result not only of the later popularity of Theosophy, but also of the actions of its creators. The lives and deeds of theosophists (and the intellectual history of the TS itself)² have been described in detail; each division of the TS in the world (and many of them had appeared rapidly) also collected reports on their own activities. Theosophical thought arrived quickly in Poland, where it was met with interest. A reconstruction of the history of Polish Theosophical groups would probably be impossible if not for the diligence of the people engaged in them,

² There are some excellent studies of the movement, see e.g.: J. Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, New York 1994 and *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, eds. O. Hammer, M. Rothstein, Leiden–Boston 2013.

who, after all the damage brought on by the wars, were able to write down their memoirs, including even minute details, which could have seemed insignificant at the time, but constitute now a priceless relic of the forgotten past. The aim of my paper is to characterise the activities of the Theosophical movement in Poland before 1923, when the Polish lodge was affiliated with The Theosophical Society (International Headquarters at Adyar).

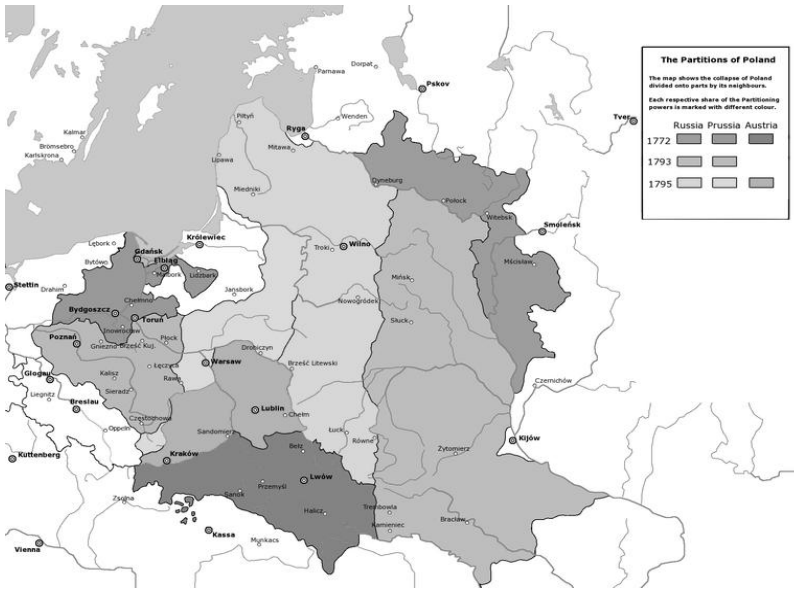
One of the reasons for a lack of greater interest in Theosophy in Poland in later years is the fact that organised activity of Theosophical groups ceased relatively early – and together with the theosophists, any wider interest in the movement disappeared. As a consequence, any literature on Theosophy in Poland is very scarce, in comparison with other countries; especially studies written in Polish, either on the Polish Theosophical groups, or the idea as such, are rare.³

The task of reconstructing the beginnings of the TS in Poland is not an easy one, as the official activity of the Polish organisation ceased after World War II. Never again was there an attempt to register the Society, some of whose members died tragically during the war. However, the lack of a Polish division did not mean that there were no people engaged in TS activities. It was always possible to join a division in another country or the headquarters in India.

Members of the TS engaged in lively correspondence – it is letters in the first place that form the main part of the legacy of this forgotten period. Many precious memorabilia such as photographs, as well as copies of documents, letters of TS members and fragmentary descriptions of the Society's functioning were collected by General Kazimierz Tokarski (1930–2007) during his work on the biography of Wanda Dynowska Umadevi. The documents collected by Tokarski have been complemented here by source material from other archives, including private ones, as well as Theosophical libraries, and journals devoted to Theosophy published around the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century and later. Studies on the history of the TS in neighbouring countries were also used.

³ The only monograph in Polish that is wholly devoted to the theosophical current, albeit mostly from a theological point of view, is the book by A. Wańka, *Teozoficzna pan-religia* ["Theosophical pan-religion"], Szczecin 2006. Several papers referring to Polish theosophists can be found, i.a. Tadeusz Doktor's (*Towarzystwo Teozoficzne*, „Zeszyty Filozoficzne” 1997, Vol. 7, pp. 81–101). A priceless source is provided by the books of Ludwik Hass, a historian of Masonry, who in his studies enumerates also the connections between Masonry and Theosophy. Apart from a few exceptions, Theosophy only appears as a subject in dictionaries and lexicons. Neither the history of the Polish Theosophical Society, or the biography of its leading figure, Wanda Dynowska, has been comprehensively studied so far.

In analysing the early period of TS history in Poland, it should be born in mind that due to the complicated political situation the terms “Poland” or “Polish lands” can refer either to the area within the pre-partition borders, or to the present-day territory of the country. The situation of Poland under the partitions (1772–1918) is illustrated by the following map:



Partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth⁴

For those political and historical reasons it is difficult to indicate unequivocally any Polish activity in the TS; however, some data can be extracted from the proceedings of International Congresses or from reports that TS divisions in the occupying nations sent to the headquarters in Adyar. Besides the TS head office in India and the divisions in particular countries, in 1903 The Theosophical Society in Europe was established; known also as the European Federation of The Theosophical Society (EFTS), it coordinated to some extent the activities of country divisions in Europe and organised international conferences for TS members.⁵

⁴ Partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772, 1793 and 1795. By Halibutt [GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>) or CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons [accessed: 31.08.2014].

⁵ See: K. Wais, *Teozofia nowoczesna*, Lwów 1924.

Seven International Congresses organised by EFTS took place before World War I – every year from 1903 to 1907, in 1909 and 1913. They took place, in chronological order, in London, Amsterdam, London again, Paris, Munich, Budapest, and Stockholm.⁶ World War I dispersed some of the members (some of them were engaged in fighting or in taking care of the wounded) and activities in the lodges were suspended; during the war, Central European divisions lost contact with the headquarters in India.⁷ The names of the participants of the Congresses alone are not enough to tell where they came from. The same goes for members registered in the central division in Adyar. Poland did not exist as a country, and so members of the TS were rarely identified as Polish nationals.⁸

It is also important to remember that the TS in Adyar lost most of its American divisions, which seceded in 1895 (i.e. four years after the death of Helena P. Blavatsky), in the wake of a conflict between, among others, the founders of the Society, William Q. Judge and Henry S. Olcott (with whom Annie Besant also sided). As a result, the American divisions followed Judge, while the TS in Adyar, together with all of its European organisation, remained under the influence of Besant and Olcott.

KAZIMIERZ STABROWSKI'S THEOSOPHICAL CIRCLE AND THE ALBA LODGE

In the journal “The Theosophist”, which published, among other things, reports sent in by various divisions of the Society, no information related to Poland can be found in the first thirty years of the organisation’s existence.⁹ The earliest relevant remark comes from a 1909 Russian report, whose author was Alba, i.e. Anna Kamiensky.

In the first decade of the 20th century, there were several Theosophical initiatives in Russia. In 1907 a plan to create a Federation of Russian Lodges

⁶ The Theosophical Society in Europe, *History of the Theosophical Society in Europe*, [online] <http://www.ts-efts.org/history.html> [accessed: 30.08.2014].

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ One exception is Władysław Reymont, a renowned Polish writer, who in 1984, together with Dr. Józef Drzewiecki, participated in a theosophists’ congress in London. Drzewiecki, doctor and homeopath, was a member of the London Theosophical Society, and simultaneously the Polish delegate to the congress. See: U. Makowska, *Wiedza tajemna Wschodu. Tendencje okultystyczne w kulturze polskiej na przełomie XIX i XX w.*, [in:] *Orient i orientalizm w sztuce*, ed. E. Karwowska, Warszawa 1986, p. 334, and W. St. Reymont, *Lato 1894 za granicą*, Wrocław 1948, pp. 14–18.

⁹ See: the first issues of “The Theosophist. A Magazine of Brotherhood, Oriental Philosophy, Art, Literature and Occultism”.

emerged, although eventually a much more needed organisation was established, i.e. the National Theosophical Society. Annie Besant, who was already the head of the Society at the time, emphasised that a legal registration of the society in a country where the TS had been treated as illegal was of particular importance.¹⁰ Anna Kamiensky became the first Secretary General of the Russian division of The Society.

The Theosophical Society in Russia was registered officially in 1908 and the afore-mentioned report comes from the same year (published in the journal in a following year's issue). We can find an information there, which is also confirmed by other sources,¹¹ that a lodge named "Alba" functioned in Warsaw under the auspices of the Russian division.

The Russian Theosophical Society possesses now	
the branch of H. P. B.,	} in Petersburg.
the branch of Maria Strauch,	
the branch of East,	
Hypatia (the Franco-English branch),	
the St. Sophia branch,	
the Rudolf Steiner branch,	
the branch Alba,	} in Keif
the branch Slovaki.	} in Kaluga
	} in Varsovie
The total number of branches is 8.	

A 1908 report on the functioning of the Russian division
of the TS in a supplement to "The Theosophist"¹²

The typography of the list seems to suggest that there were two lodges in Warsaw: "Alba" and "Slovaki." However, the latter does not appear in any other sources uncovered so far. Its name would suggest some connection either to Slovak territories (which formed a part of Hungary at the time) or to members of Slovak origin, but nothing more can be hypothesised at this stage. It is important to remember, however, that Theosophical groups in various countries emerged in annexed territories, such as Poland or Slovakia, often in a rather random manner.

In the second part of the supplement to "The Theosophist" we read that in 1908 the Russian National division was formed by 42 people, of whom some

¹⁰ A. Besant, *From the Editor*, "The Theosophist. A Magazine of Brotherhood, Oriental Philosophy, Art, Literature and Occultism" 1909, Vol. XXX, p. 194. There is an error in the printed date: MDCIX is the incorrect 1609.

¹¹ See: L. Hass, *Ambicje, rachuby, rzeczywistość. Wolnomularstwo w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej 1905–1928*, Warszawa 1984, p. 74.

¹² A. Kamiensky, *Report of the T.S. in Russia*, "The Theosophist. A Magazine of Brotherhood, Oriental Philosophy, Art, Literature and Occultism" 1909, Vol. XXX, Supplement, p. 55.

(21) belonged already to the pre-existing groups that now formed its branches, and that year they decided to join the registered Russian section. One member from Warsaw died around that time. The number of members in the particular branches: H. P. B. 10, Maria Strauch 11, East 8, (Anglo-French) Hypatia 7, St. Sophia 12, Rudolph Steiner 8, Alba 7, Slovaki 7. 21 members remained independent of any particular branch.¹³

In reports from the same year from Germany and Hungary¹⁴ we find no information on any activities in Poland. Both reports, however, are much less detailed than the one sent by Anna Kamiensky, which is understandable in light of the fact, that German and Hungarian national divisions had already existed earlier, and it was the new section in Russia that required a more extensive characterisation. In the territory of Germany, 37 lodges were active, while in Hungary there were 7.

No.	Name of the Society.	No. of Active Branches.	No. of Active Members.	No. of New Members admitted during the year.
1	American T.S. ...	86	2,479	435
2	British do ...	48	1,910	252
3	Indian do ...	266	4,631	474
4	Scandinavian do ...	29	759	77
5	Australasian do ...	15	747	156
6	New Zealand do ...	16	501	128
7	Netherlands do ...	20	1,125	199
8	French do ...	23	761	92
9	Italian do ...	16	317	60
10	German do ...	37	1,150	336
11	Cuban do ...	26	335	100
12	Hungarian do ...	7	58	13
13	Finnish do ...	12	419	231
14	Russian do ...	8	85	85
	Non-Sectionalised Countries ...	22	340	109

Numbers of members and Theosophical branches of the TS from the report of 1908 printed in 1909¹⁵

¹³ Ibidem, p. 56.

¹⁴ By 1908 two of the three countries that invaded and partitioned Poland changed their identities: Prussia, to put it simply, became Germany, and Austria became the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. However, the reports in "The Theosophist" only list Hungarian lodges, not Austro-Hungarian, or Hungarian and Austrian separately.

¹⁵ "The Theosophist. A Magazine of Brotherhood, Oriental Philosophy, Art, Literature and Occultism" 1909, Vol. XXX, Supplement.

The year 1907 was a turning point in the history of Theosophy as on 17 February Henry S. Olcott, the co-founder and President of the TS, died. Annie Besant was appointed to his seat. The TS was a heterogeneous organisation in many respects, but its members and branches shared the original objectives of the movement: 1) to create a society of pan-human brotherhood, with no difference of race, sex or religion, 2) to conduct comparative studies of religions, philosophies and sciences, and 3) to study the unknown laws of nature and secret powers of man.¹⁶

Membership in the TS was variously defined, and one could become a member in a variety of ways; some people could also be regarded or regard themselves as theosophists without being members of the TS at all. As Helena P. Blavatsky writes in the first volume of *The Key to Theosophy* "Theosophist is, who Theosophy does."¹⁷ In written sources, also in Polish, we can find examples of people who are described as theosophists, but who never became members of any lodge, and even distanced themselves from TS activities. The organisation did not force its members to change their denomination or world-view, as long as it did not conflict with the basic assumptions of the movement. The Society was divided into an outer and inner circle; not everybody was allowed into the latter.¹⁸ Besides, Wanda Dynowska in her translator's notes to one of Blavatsky's texts remarks: "we call 'free' or 'loose' members those that belong to the Theosophical Society as a whole, and are only connected to the Head Quarters of the Society (Adyar, Madras), but not with any circle or national section; others are members of the latter."¹⁹ People with theosophical interests were more numerous than those that could or would engage in the activities of the particular groups or lodges.

It is known that the ideas of the movement initiated by Helena P. Blavatsky came to Poland in various ways, although the available sources suggest that the most plausible hypothesis is that in an institutional form,²⁰ they ar-

¹⁶ The wording comes from the Statute of the Polish Theosophical Society and differs slightly in other variants. For comparison, the statute of the TS in Cieszyn Silesia, which will be discussed later, names following objectives: (a) promoting education for all regardless of race, tribe, sex, status or denomination, (b) comparative study of religious and philosophical systems, (c) fostering of knowledge, especially occultist knowledge, (d) working for the brotherhood of mankind.

¹⁷ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, Vol. I, Section 2.1. (What the Modern Theosophical Society is not).

¹⁸ See: *ibidem* and the next sections.

¹⁹ W. Dynowska – translator's note in Polish version of Blavatsky's *The Key to Theosophy*.

²⁰ It is known, however, that already earlier, Poles had been members of other national lodges (e.g. the physician and homeopath Józef Drzewicki) or they had participated in

rived first from Russia, brought by the painter Kazimierz Stabrowski. Stabrowski had been a student of the St. Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts since 1887. He travelled extensively during his studies, and after graduating in 1902 he moved to Warsaw. There he became the focal point of an intellectual and artistic circle with strong interests in esotericism and mysticism. In his work, especially in the so-called visionary-mystical period, many theosophical influences can be discerned.²¹ He was a very charismatic figure. Another well-known theosophist, painter and composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis was his student for a time.²² Probably already in 1905 by Stabrowski's initiative a theosophical group was established in Warsaw.²³ Ludwik Hass wrote: "In the beginning of 1905, therefore before (the restitution of) freemasonry, a first theosophical circle was created in Warsaw; the organisation was legalised in the Spring of 1912 as the Warsaw Theosophical Society."²⁴ The road to the establishment of the latter led through Russia.

Besides the previously mentioned registration of the Russian division of the TS in 1908, the data from Russia can present us with other interesting information. From the memoirs of E. F. Pisareva we learn that before the TS was registered in Russia, and thus legalised, public presentations on theosophical topics were illegal. The meetings of the several circles took place in various locales, usually in the homes of people interested in heterodox spirituality. One of the meeting-places, or salons, where theosophists could freely assemble in St. Petersburg belonged to Anna Pavlovna Filosofova (1837–1912), who was known and respected among the Russian intellectual elite.²⁵

international theosophical congresses (e.g. the novelist Władysław Reymont). See: T. Doktor, *Towarzystwo Teozoficzne*, "Zeszyty Filozoficzne" 1999, nr 7, pp. 92–93.

²¹ See: M. A. Dulcka, K. M. Kotkowska, *The Idea of Womanhood in the Paintings of Kazimierz Stabrowski and Its Theosophical Inspiration*, paper presented at the conference *Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy and the Arts in the Modern World*, Amsterdam, September 25, 2013.

²² See: M. Introvigne, *Čiurlionis' Theosophy: Myth or Reality?*, paper presented at the conference *Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy and the Arts in the Modern World*, Amsterdam, September 26, 2013. M. Čiurlionis was a student of Fine Arts Academy from 1904 to 1906, see: *Encyklopedia muzyczna PWM: część biograficzna*, t. 2, red. E. Dziębowska, Kraków 1984, cd, pp. 207–209 and R. Okulicz-Kozaryn, R. Kopszak, *Čiurlionis i Warszawska Szkoła Sztuk Pięknych*, [in:] *Twórczość, osobowość, środowisko*, Katalog wystawy, Narodowe Muzeum Sztuki M. K. Čiurlionisa, Kowno 2001, p. 178.

²³ T. Doktor, op. cit., p. 93.

²⁴ Idem, *Liberalowie, ezoterycy, pilsudczycy. Z dziejów polityki w Polsce w latach 1925–1928*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 1973, nr 3, p. 55.

²⁵ E. F. Pisareva, *Early years of Theosophy in Russia*, [online] <http://www.theosophy.ru/pisar-e.htm> [accessed: 10.05.2014], see: eadem, *The Light of the Russian Soul: A Personal Memoir of Early Russian Theosophy*, Wheaton 2008.

One of the most important figures in Russian Theosophy, Anna A. Kamiensky “Alba” (1867–1953) frequented Filosofova’s salon. Kamiensky had developed an interest in the Theosophical movement in 1902, during her stay in Great Britain, and she became a member of the English section the same year. Thereafter, she continued her activities in other parts of Europe and, most importantly, in Russia.

It was probably in St. Petersburg that Stabrowski first learned about Theosophy and met Alba – which later resulted in naming the Polish lodge after her. The first and largest Russian lodge was named H.P.B. (after Helena P. Blavatsky), while another was called Maria Strauch – it was usual to name lodges after people of significance to the movement, commonly ones that were directly engaged in or connected to the establishment of a given section.

Władysław Bocheński wrote in his memoirs:

Before the first world war there was in Warsaw a Theosophical Society, but I have no direct information on it. It was probably from their initiative then that a small book *The Voice of Silence* was published, which contained advice for those who would want to impersonally serve the world and to follow the path of inner development.²⁶

This group was the circle mentioned earlier which was transformed into the Alba lodge, and in 1908 registered as a branch of the Russian division of the TS, although it could hardly be called a Russian lodge; most of its members were Polish. Their connection with Theosophy was mostly mediated by Russian influences, but the Russian theosophists, similarly to others around the world, in their efforts for universal brotherhood, kept their distance from politics. They described their situation at the time as a nightmare.

When the Russian division of the Theosophical Society was registered in 1908, 7 people belonged to Alba, according to Russian sources (see the report quoted above). In April 1910, about 50 people in Poland were already engaged in Theosophy.²⁷ The difference in numbers is not a result of such a sudden growing interest in Theosophy (although this was certainly also a factor), but it follows from the fact that Polish theosophists were reluctant to engage in

²⁶ W. Bocheński, *Moje wspomnienia z okresu należenia do Polskiego Towarzystwa Teozoficznego w latach 1922–1939*, p. 1, [in:] Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU w Krakowie, Kazimierz Tokarski (1930–2007), Signature: KIII-180 j.a. 16 and 20.

²⁷ “We have now 50 actual Members and very many sympathisers [...]”. K. Stabrowski (the letter to Headquarters of TS in Adyar from 1910) the attachment no. 1, [in:] Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU w Krakowie, Kazimierz Tokarski (1930–2007), Signature: KIII-180, j.a. 20.

any way with an organisation with strong ties to Russia.²⁸ Therefore, more people belonged to the Polish Theosophical circle than those that decided to join Alba, which was still a part of the Russian Society. Whether the lodge should be regarded as a Polish one was a matter of great import and symbolic value. The relevance of the issue was expressed by Kazimierz Stabrowski, the secretary of Alba, in his 1910 letter to one of the representatives of the head office of the TS in India (but not directly to Annie Besant, as the letter begins with “Dear Brother” and ends with “Accept our most cordial greetings and transmit to the President our assurance in Love and Loyalty to Her.”)²⁹

The nationality issue was very much alive at the time. In the surviving documents of the Polish TS we can find an unsigned letter that was sent to the President of TS in Adyar, A. Besant, on July 7 of the same year (1910):

To The President Theosophical Society

Adyar, Madras, S., India,

Informed that the Polish Lodges are to be called “LINKS” reason given, as explained before, in March and January last, impossibility to get the right class of Polish people into a Russian National Society, because they would regard this movement as one of the schemes of the Russian Government for the Russification of Poland, but the prospects of rapid growth of a own Polish National T. S. is evident, the people in Poland are more ready than their other Slavish Brothers not excepting Russians. Therefore very strongly recommended to grant the request of the Poles and give them a National Organisation, accepting the slightly modified Constitution of the Russian National T.S.³⁰

To summarise this early stage, a Polish Theosophical circle was formed a few years before (probably in 1905) it was formalised as the Alba lodge within the structures of the new Russian division in 1908. Right from the start, there were attempts to create an independent Polish division, free of the connection to Russian structures. This did not happen before the end of World War I; however, some successes were noted.

²⁸ Compare: L. Hass, *Liberalowie, ezoterycy, pilsudczycy. Z dziejów polityki w Polsce w latach 1925–1928*, „Dzieje Najnowsze” 1973, nr 3, and A. Zdrojewska-Żywiecka, *Polka teozoficzna. Kobiety w polskim Towarzystwie Teozoficznym*, „Historia Pol(s)ki” 2009, nr 1, pp. 3–4.

²⁹ See: K. Stabrowski, op. cit.

³⁰ W. Bocheński, *Moje wspomnienia...*, op. cit., KIII-180, 20.

THE WARSAW THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

The attempts to form an independent division in Poland achieved partial success, in some sense at least, in 1912 when the Alba lodge was renamed the Warsaw Theosophical Society.³¹ Under this name it was registered as an official association by the authorities of the Warsaw district, thereby severing its institutional links with the Russian division. However, this did not change the 1910 decision of the head office of the TS in Adyar, which refused to register it as a stand-alone national section. References to the Polish branch disappear from Russian reports at this time, and no other documents published outside of Poland refer to its activities.

In Władysław Bocheński's memoirs we can find the following remark: "In 1907 there was a Warsaw Theosophical Society. Members were, among others, Miciński, Stabrowski, Zosia Wojnarowska, Życzkiewiczowa."³² It is possible then that the name functioned in Poland long before 1912, perhaps from the very beginning of the group's existence. Besides Tadeusz Miciński, Ludwik Hass also count Maria Rodziewiczówna, author of the novel *Dewajtis*,³³ among its members. Sources indicate that the members of the Warsaw Theosophical Society were mostly women "from the spheres of more affluent bourgeoisie and middle-class intellectuals."³⁴ The activities of the Society concentrated on meetings and readings of mystical and esoteric texts; the group kept its distance from political issues, although in 1913 some of the milieu became politicised and joined the Polish independence movement. It seems however that references to a Romantic national Messianism were a characteristic feature of Polish Theosophy, although they only became prominent after the war.³⁵

In 1913 another, and most significant, schism occurred in the European and worldwide Theosophical movement – after numerous philosophical and ideological arguments, Rudolph Steiner left the TS (together with most German and Austrian lodges) to form his own Anthroposophical Society, which was concentrated to a larger extent on Western traditions of thought. The secession reverberated across the world, and it also had consequences for the

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Ibidem. The information was copied by Bocheński from Lodka Piekarska's library, see: Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU w Krakowie, op. cit., file no. 991R titled *Początki Towarzystwa Teozoficznego*, p. 1., and j.a. 20, note 1, p. 17.

³³ D. Bargiełowski, *Po Trzykroć Pierwszy*, fragm. *W obłoku ezoterii i na ubitej ziemi*, see: wolnomularstwo.pl.

³⁴ L. Hass, *Liberalowie, ezoterycy, pilsudczycy...*, op. cit., p. 55.

³⁵ Idem, *Ambicje, rachuby, rzeczywistość...*, op. cit.; T. Doktor, op. cit., pp. 95–96.

Warsaw lodge. From fragmentary information (coming among others from Wanda Dynowska) we know that before World War I the group joined the followers of Steiner.³⁶ Similar information can be found in a lecture which Ewelina Karaś presented in Adyar: “Our Theosophical work in Poland began comparatively late – immediately after the first World War. There were some Lodges before, but they went to Dr. Steiner.”³⁷ It is unknown whether the reasons for this decision were philosophical and ideological, or they were related to the unfavourable attitude of the TS headquarters with regard to the independence of the Polish section. Both interpretations seem equally probable and complementary. The present-day Polish Anthroposophical Society section (organised in a structure of Circles and Work Groups), which continues the Polish Anthroposophical Society established between the two wars, possesses no materials related to anthroposophical activities before World War I³⁸. In any case, the schism was not the end of internal tensions and divisions within the Society.

Other sources indicate, however, that Kazimierz Stabrowski (probably not alone) was still engaged in Theosophy in a later period. He probably continued both theosophical and anthroposophical activities. According to a report from the first year of the functioning of the Theosophical Society in Cieszyn Silesia – which I will briefly describe later in this paper – he gave visiting lectures in Cieszyn and Trzyniec in 1919 “on behalf of the Theosophical Society.”³⁹

THE POLISH THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN WARSAW AND THE POLISH THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

The activities, and especially the works of members of Alba and the Warsaw TS – in particular of Tadeusz Miciński – exerted a great influence on the young Wanda Dynowska, who took upon herself the organisational work after World War I and, with help of others,⁴⁰ she was successful in legalising the Society

³⁶ W. Dynowska, *Historia polskiej Teozofii*, [in:] Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU w Krakowie, Kazimierz Tokarski (1930–2007), Signature: KIII-180 j.a. 16, 6T.

³⁷ E. Karaś F.T.S., *The Theosophical Society and Theosophy in Poland – a Talk given at the School of The Wisdom*, Adyar, March 1958, p. 1. Include note: “For private circulation only”, [in:] Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU w Krakowie, Kazimierz Tokarski (1930–2007), Signature: KIII-180 j.a. 20.

³⁸ The information from the correspondence of the author with the General Secretary of TAwP, Tomasz Mazurkiewicz in September 1–6, 2014.

³⁹ *Z ruchu odczytowego P.T.T. na Śląsku cieszyńskim*, “Wyzwolenie” 1919, nr 6, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Besides people who signed the Statute, there were among others Irena Brzostowska and Henryk Munch.

in Warsaw and obtaining the blessing of the head office in India. It was of course an important factor that Poland had regained its independence in 1918, and so new possibilities emerged. But this does not derogate from the institutional talent and charisma of Umadevi (this sacral name was given to Dynowska by Mahatma Gandhi), who also initiated the Polish-Indian Library (1944–1971), established in Madras, and had her participate in the publication and translation of numerous works, promoting a cultural dialogue between both countries for many years.

Władysław Bocheński writes that the proper establishment of the Theosophical Society in Poland took place in 1923.

In the spring of 1923, Anna Kamiensky, of many years the president of the Russian Theosophical Society, moved to Geneva. Soon after, the first Congress of TS members in Poland took place, during which the Section of the Theosophical Society in Poland, under the name “Polish Theosophical Society” was established, and Wanda Dynowska was unanimously voted its Secretary General.⁴¹

However, the statute of the PTS was signed by the founding members – W. Dynowska, I. Brzostowska and J. Dejke in Warsaw on February 21, 1921. Corrections introduced into the text of the statute were dated June 20, 1921. The following information can be found there:

On the basis of a resolution of the Ministry of the Interior of June 20 1921, N BS.3719, included in the associations and unions register No. 492 was an association under the name Polish Theosophical Society in Warsaw.

Warsaw, June 20, 1921.

On behalf of the Minister of the Interior,
Undersecretary of State, Kuczyński.

(Round stamp of the Ministry of the Interior)⁴²

There is therefore no doubt that formally a section of the TS under the name “Polish Theosophical Society in Warsaw” was established in 1921. However, 1923 is the date of the PTS becoming a division of The Theosophical Society (International Headquarters at Adyar), and it is probably to this that Bocheński refers. From the beginning of its existence, the PTS published the journal “Przegląd Teozoficzny” (“Theosophical Review”).

⁴¹ W. Bocheński, *Moje wspomnienia...*, op. cit., KIII-180 j.a. 20.

⁴² Ibidem, j.a. 17, the copy of a notarial.



The logo of “Przełąd Teozoficzny” (“Theosophical Review”) from the cover of the 2nd issue, 1921.

The establishment of the PTS was connected with a truly significant expansion of its institutional activities in subsequent years including, among others, the creation of new lodges, and the Polish counterpart of the Order of the Star of the East, the Liberal-Catholic Church, a mixed freemasonry lodge (of the *Droit Humain* obedience) and others, as well as extensive publishing. It should also be emphasised that theosophists often had close relations with Rosicrucians, also in the later period. Quite often as well they were members both of Theosophical circles or lodges and remained active members of masonic lodges.

THE POLISH THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN CIESZYN SILESIA

Alba and the Warsaw Theosophical Society were the predecessors of the Polish Theosophical Society, which was a section of the international TS, but it was not the first formally Polish theosophical organisation. According to the available information, it was preceded by two years (counting from the registration of the Warsaw TS statute) by the “Polish Theosophical Society in Cieszyn Silesia,” founded in 1919 by Andrzej Kajfosz in Nydek. It did not remain in Polish territory for long, as in 1920 after the territories of Silesia were re-partitioned, Nydek became a part of the Czech Republic. A Polish centre of “spiritual knowledge” had been located in Wisła since the end of 19th century.

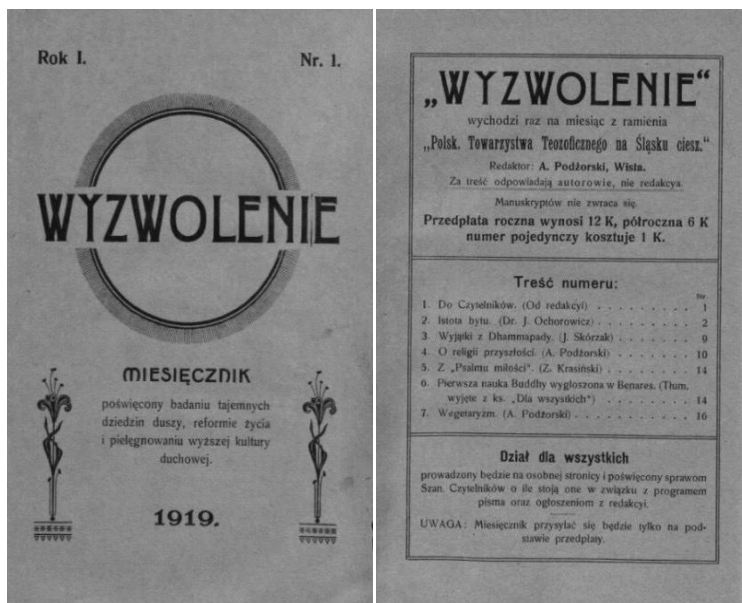
However, the Cieszyn Silesia, before and after the change of borders, remained a multicultural region, and its cultural and intellectual milieus were not greatly influenced by any political movements; the activities of the TS there, once commenced, were continued despite some organisational changes.

The specific culture of this region was determined by historical factors. The beginnings of Cieszyn Silesia as a relatively homogenous and stable cultural, social and economic organism date back to the times of the Habsburg dynasty. The Habsburgs took over the Czech Kingdom, and thus also the Principality of Silesia in 1526. The principality lost its integrality over the next two hundred years until in 1766 it became unified again under the rule of Maria Christina and Albert of Saxony. Historians note that the prominent presence of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession was an important factor in shaping the specificity of this region. In the period that is of interest for us here, Polish migrants from Galicia flocked to Cieszyn Silesia. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century (the rates are similar in 1890 and in 1900) 60,6% of the populace spoke Polish. By 1910 due to processes of Germanisation and Czechisation, the number dropped to 54,8%; at this time 27,1% of the populace spoke Czech and 18% German.⁴³ Cieszyn Silesia's cultural and religious diversity, as well as the climate of tolerance and denominational "elasticity," which were quite unusual in the main area of Poland, were an important subject of research for ethnographers and religious scientists. The region characterised by philosophical and religious pluralism became a natural niche for the free circulation of ideas of an esoteric nature.

Among known figures engaged in such activities were Andrzej Kajfosz, Józef Chobot, Agnieszka and Jerzy Pilch, Andrzej Podzórski, Jan Hadyna, as well as Julian Ochorowicz. The Cieszyn Silesian milieu, which with time became associated with the name "Wisła spiritists" or "Spiritists from Wisła," became a recognised and active centre of dissemination of the so-called spiritual knowledge. It should be noted that despite the name of "Spiritists," their first institutional movements were most strongly connected to Theosophy – which was opposed to Spiritism in a strict sense. The Cieszyn Silesian milieu became also very popular through the journals it published. The first one to appear was "Wyzwolenie" ("Emancipation")⁴⁴, a monthly publication "devoted to the study of the mysterious domains of the soul, the reform of life and fostering of higher spiritual culture." It was published between 1919 and 1920 by the Polish Theosophical Society in Cieszyn Silesia.

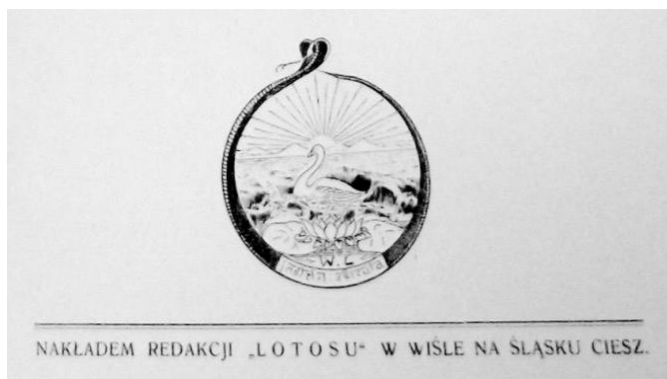
⁴³ *Historia Śląska*, red. K. Maleczyński, Wrocław 1960, pp. 56–57.

⁴⁴ Redakcja, *Do Czytelników*, "Wyzwolenie" 1919, r. I, nr 1.



The covers of the first issue of “Wyzwolenie” (“Emancipation”), 1919

Besides texts by the editor in chief, articles by Julian Ochorowicz were published, as well as thematically appropriate literary works, and fragments of Eastern texts. Other journals that dynamically evolved in the interwar period were “Odrodzenie” (“Rebirth”), edited by Józef Chobot, “Hejnał” (“Bugle Call”) by Agnieszka and Jan Pilch, and “Wiedza Duchowa” (“Spiritual Knowledge”) edited by Jan Hadyna, and later “Lotos” which included a book series.



The symbol marking some books published by the “Lotos” publication;
 photograph by the author

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that in an outline as short as this one it is impossible to fully characterise the early activities of the TS in Poland, the general frames can be sketched, and the main people and institutions involved can be determined that were influential in the blossoming and popularisation of Polish Theosophy in the interwar period. It is surprising how little attention is devoted to Theosophy as an ideological system, which exerted a great influence on many important figures in Polish cultural history, yet is marginalised or even missing from their biographies.

To this day we await a biography of Wanda Dynowska, a monographic study of the esoteric milieu in Wisła or a history of the PTS in its prime time. All the more it seems to be important to study the earlier stages of the development of Polish Theosophy, which are even less known and more poorly documented.

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