

INTRODUCTION

Esoteric beliefs and practices have always been an important component of Western culture. Although never formed the mainstream, they were a kind of creative margin with a sometimes astonishing power to influence. Therefore, the study of esotericism has a significant tradition in European academia. Among the most famous centres involved in this issue are the department of Histoire de l'Ésotérisme Occidental at the Sorbonne (now part of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes), the London Warburg Institute, the Center for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam and the Exeter Centre for the Study of esotericism (EXESES0). In Poland, although research in this area has been ongoing for many years, it has not hitherto been thought of as a distinct academic unit dealing with such specific issues, and so research has been somewhat disjointed. The first attempt to create a common academic forum in which academic cooperation and the exchange of experience within the study of esotericism would be possible was the establishment in December 2013 of the Polish Association for the Study of Western Esotericism affiliated with the Department of Comparative Studies of Civilisations at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. The Association brought together people representing various research centres in Poland as well as different areas of the humanities who, in their research, address the issues of esotericism on the basis of Western culture.

The work carried out by the members of the Association and people working with it have been gathered into three volumes. This issue of "The Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture" contains English-language texts that provide an overview of all the research areas explored by Polish scholars in relation to esotericism. Another book is a 7th volume of the series called "Światło i Ciemność" [Light and Darkness] entitled "Polskie studia ezoteryczne" [Polish Esoteric Studies], edited by Monika Rzeczycka and Izabela Trzecińska and published by the Laboratory of Non-Dogmatic Spirituality affiliated with the Faculty of Languages at the University of Gdańsk. This volume consists primarily of methodological studies and historical research. The third volume, entitled "Studia ezoteryczne. Wątki polskie" [Esoteric studies. Polish Themes] edited by Izabela Trzecińska, Agata Świerzowska i Karolina M. Hess, soon to be released in Krakow, will include a study of esotericism in Polish culture.

This publication, like the other two mentioned above, which were inspired by the Polish Association for the Study of Western esotericism, is the first

with such a large and diverse selection of articles on the issues concerning esotericism born from Polish academic circles. We hope that this volume will encourage further research in this area.

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