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## Esoteric Mythologies in Action : Images and Symbols of Russian Anthroposophic Historiosophy (from Ludvig A. Novikov's Archive)

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**ESOTERIC MYTHOLOGIES IN ACTION:  
IMAGES AND SYMBOLS  
OF RUSSIAN ANTHROPOSOPHIC HISTORIOSOPHY  
(FROM LUDVIG A. NOVIKOV'S ARCHIVE)<sup>1</sup>**

This article is devoted to the esoteric symbolism of anthroposophy. Russian anthroposophy, which developed in the underground of Soviet Russia and in isolation from the Goetheanum, the Anthroposophical Society's headquarters in Switzerland, created its own unique symbolism and mythology that surprisingly combines motifs of Western esoteric traditions with elements of native mysticism and historiosophy.

Keywords: Ludwig A. Novikov's archive, Russian anthroposophy, anthroposophic mythology, symbolic imagination, Russian messianism, symptomatology of history

In 2014, research work began on the archives of Ludvig Alexandrovich Novikov (1934–2005), entrusted to the Department of manuscripts at the Gorky World Literature Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow (see Rzeczycka 2015: 137–146). This archive is a rich collection of documents related to the activities of the Moscow anthroposophists over several decades. There are archives concerning the theosophical period, immediately preceding the formation of the Anthroposophical Society, from the first decade of the twentieth century. In addition, there are documents from the years of the construction of the Goetheanum in Dornach (1913–1922), the fire that burned down the temple on New Year's Eve 1922, and on the activities of the Russian Anthroposophical Society in the 1920s and 30s, with its turning point in 1931 when arrests and trials began, resulting in many participants in initiation groups, including anthroposophic circles, being sentenced, exiled or displaced.

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<sup>1</sup> This research was carried out within the framework of the Minister of Science and Higher Education's programme entitled "National Programme for the Development of Humanities" in the years 2016–2019: Polish Culture in Relations to the Western Esoteric Philosophy in the years 1890–1939 (0186/NPRH4/H2b/83/2016).



Occultist activity was outlawed in Soviet Russia in 1923, and from 1927, especially after 1931, it was associated with a serious risk of oppression (see Жемчужникова 1992 – Спивак 2005: 366–422). From the material available it seemed that the decimated Muscovite anthroposophists functioned until the end of the 30s at the latest. It turns out, however, that this was not the case, as clearly evidenced by Novikov’s archives. The stored documents speak of continued underground activity of groups up until the 1990s, that is until the change in the political system, as a result of which in 1991 the activities of esoteric organisations could resume – legally.

No wonder that Novikov’s archive has proven to be a highly valuable source of knowledge about the secret undercurrent of Russian culture in Soviet times, one that bore quite a different narrative from the official Soviet version. Of particular note is the symbolic imagination of Russian anthroposophists of the first, second and subsequent generations. At the forefront are messianism and the associated missionism<sup>2</sup>, a kind of anthroposophic variant of the mystical historiosophy of Russia.

As for the first generation of Russian anthroposophists – the Russians who personally knew Rudolf Steiner and participated in the construction of the Goetheanum – these elements of messianism and missionism were constantly present in their discourse. Without messianism it is difficult to imagine the works of anthroposophists such as Andrey Bely, Margarita Sabashnikova, Maximilian Voloshin, Leo Kobylinski-Ellis, Boris Leman or Nikolai Belocvetov (see Rzczycka 2008; Богомолов 2000; Oboleńska 2009). Russian students of Steiner saw themselves as apostles, not only in bringing the “Gospel of anthroposophy” to Russia but as the initiators of a new stage in the evolution of *all* humanity. This was no accident. Doctor Steiner repeatedly pointed to the Russians, emphasising their unique role in the culture of the future. In 1912 and 1913, the occultist gave two lectures in the capital of Finland, designed exclusively for Russians, which emphasised their role in the spiritual transformation of the world (see Штейнер 2001).

This thread also appeared frequently in open lectures, attended by representatives of various European nations. They concerned the complex esoteric concept of evolution, according to which every stage of history is dominated by a determined race, thanks to which some features may develop and lead to the transformation of humanity. According to Steiner, the Slavs, especially the Russians, as a people endowed with a unique spirituality, could – and should – become the dominant nation of the New Era. Among the Slavs, including the Poles, participating in these lectures<sup>3</sup>, a kind of mythology was born, or various mythologies in line with the traditional national messianic narratives<sup>4</sup>. However, as long as the Doctor was alive

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<sup>2</sup> Messianism and missionism are key religious ideas for Russian thinkers: Vladimir Solovyov, Nikolai Lossky, Nikolai Berdyaev and others (see Лосский 1957: 106–116).

<sup>3</sup> The most famous Polish students of Steiner include the artists Luna Amalia Drexler, Jadwiga and Franciszek Siedlecki, and Tadeusz Rychter (see Rzczycka 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Against this background, there were tensions among the team that built the Goetheanum. The Russians, as “the people of the future”, tended to emphasise their superiority. The Germans, accustomed to their well-established position as the “enlightened representatives of Western civilisation” reluctantly agreed to the role of a transient race. The Polish messianic voice was also audible in this environment – this belonged primarily to Jadwiga and Franciszek Siedlecki, emphasising the role of Polish spirituality in world history. After World War II, the

(d. 1925), these narratives were subject to constant verification, especially in Dornach and wherever Steiner travelled with his lectures<sup>5</sup>.

Let me recall that the basis of anthroposophic symbolism was the visionary narrative of Steiner, based on his personal spiritual experience, “to know Higher Worlds”, as he called it (see Steiner 1926). This includes many well-known motifs of western esotericism, although with distinctive Christian features transformed into an original and unique vision. The basic images and anthroposophic symbols of the imagination are:

1. metamorphosis and cosmic evolution, as an extremely complex, long-lasting, but purposeful and logical, definitely non-accidental process that has led to the transformation of the cosmos and all the creatures living in it;
2. Christ as a cosmic being and the esoteric dimension of Christ’s sacrifice in the mystery of Golgotha;
3. hierarchies of spiritual beings, including (on the side of the forces of the light): the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel, leading the cosmic processes, as well as (on the side of the forces of darkness) Lucifer, Ahriman and Assur, as cosmic beings, responsible for human desire to escape from earthly problems (Lucifer) or, on the contrary, for making people dependent on matter rather than spirit (Ahriman), as well as aiming at complete destruction of the human self (Assur), which play an important role in the process of transformation of man and the cosmos;
4. the legend of the Holy Grail;
5. the myth of the Rosy Cross and the idea of the Rosicrucian fraternity;
6. the myth of the Temple (as the place where Spirit joins matter);
7. the chronicle of the history of the Earth – (*Akasha-Chronik*), a kind of record of the history and karmic destiny of individual beings that exists in higher dimensions, which can be accessed through appropriate spiritual practices.

An important role in anthroposophic mythology has been played by the great initiated<sup>6</sup>, who are the consciously incarnating ghosts that have decided to actively influence the course of earthly and celestial events. These key figures of the Steiner narrative are Jesus of Nazareth, Parsifal, and Christian Rosenkretz, as well as, inter alia, Joan of Arc, Kaspar Hauser, and Ludwig II of Bavaria. This collection of motifs and images I conventionally call *classical anthroposophic mythology*. Classical, because – as we shall see – it was subject to local modifications in the context of the application of Steiner’s proposed methodology by his Russian supporters.

Steiner’s method is a kind of anthroposophic hermeneutics, named by its creator as a “symptomatology of history” (Steiner 1982). This stems from the romantic idea of the

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Polish painter Franciszek Walczowski would be heavily influenced by Slavic-anthroposophic ideas (see Walczowski 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Steiner delivered more than 5,000 lectures in various European cities. He never made it to Russia or Poland, although he was invited and reportedly considered such a trip.

<sup>6</sup> Steiner’s outlook was influenced by the concept of Édouard Schuré expressed in his book *Les Grands Initiés. Esquisse de l’histoire secrète des religions* (first ed. 1889).

incarnation and evolution of the Spirit in history<sup>7</sup>, based on identifying the links between important events in history that reveal the different levels of reality. Steiner stressed the convergence of certain dates, calendar rhythms (e.g. 33-year cycles referring to the earthly period of Jesus' life), the "symmetries" of events, repeated threads, recurring symbols, and so on. Above all, however, he emphasised the *recognition* of historical events as *symptoms*, the signs of true history played out on a much deeper, spiritual level of reality:

From my earlier lectures in which I discussed analogous themes you already know that from the standpoint of spiritual science what is usually called history must be seen as a complex of symptoms. From this point of view what is usually taught as history, the substance of what is called history in the scholastic world, does not touch upon the really vital questions in the evolutionary history of mankind; it deals only with superficial symptoms. We must penetrate beneath the surface phenomena and uncover the deeper layer of meaning in events and then the true reality behind the evolution of mankind will be revealed. Whilst history usually studies historical events in isolation, we shall here consider them as concealing a deeper underlying reality which is revealed when they are studied in their true light (Steiner 1918).

This method, akin to the hermetic idea of correspondence (see Faivre 1994: 10–11), proved extremely fruitful when it came to Russian historiosophical concepts, growing in the bosom of anthroposophy in the second half of the 1920s. Three factors conducive to this process coincided. First, in 1925 Steiner died; supporters no longer had direct contact with his thoughts and thus began the process of creating the legend of the Master. An important role was also played by the politically conditioned isolation of Russia from the West, which cut off the Russian anthroposophists from Dornach. Both of these factors contributed to the development of a specific "apostasy", in the sense of ideas that differed from the mainstream. The final factor is the previously mentioned oppression that became – as the anthroposophists who remained in the country felt – the fulfilment of the sacrifices that the adept must bear in the process of initiation. This last element played a very important role: it was a confirmation that Steiner's Russian students were indeed the chosen ones, destined for the unique spiritual role of apostles and martyrs.

Under these conditions, anthroposophic mythology in Russia adopted its own particular form. Local mnemohistorical threads become dominant in this narrative, and, interestingly, have not only remained to the present day, but have even become the dominant anthroposophic Russian discourse. Tales belonging to the Western tradition (the above-mentioned narratives of the Holy Grail and Parsifal mission, Joan of Arc, Christian Rosenkretz, Kaspar Hauser, Rudolf Steiner) were combined with appropriately selected and interpreted events in the history of Kievan Rus' and Russia: the baptism of Rus'; the achievements of the mythical *Byliny* heroes, who attained the status of cosmic incarnation; Mongol invasion and captivity; the secret mission to the holy town of Kitezh, hidden under the waters of Lake Svetloyar; miracles performed by icons; the activities of Russian saints and *starets*; battles lost and won (especially in the defence of the Orthodox Church, as well as the whole of Christianity) – i.e.

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<sup>7</sup> Historiosophical romantic ideas of Jung-Stilling and Hegel primarily were very close to the Russians through the work of philosophers such as Chaadaev and Khomyakov.

with actual historical events and myths that in this narrative became *symptoms* of real events, battles waged in other higher dimensions. On the other hand, these events (or symptoms) became the anthroposophists' proof of Russia's participation in the process of the Spirit's realisation in history. The story of the Christian West without the story of Orthodoxy is, according to this narrative, incomplete. Not only that, the role of Russia and Orthodoxy in the cosmic battle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness is crucial.

Examples of such narratives abound: from the works of the highest quality literary pen of the above-mentioned Andrei Bely, a declared anthroposoph and most distinguished Russian symbolist, to the less literarily valuable, but highly interesting from the point of view of research into Western esotericism, treatises of Nikolai Belocvetov (*Книга о русском Граале*<sup>8</sup>) and other Russian first-generation anthroposophists, all the way up to the contemporary tracts of Ludwig A. Novikov, devoted to the history of Russia identified in the key Steiner symptomatology.

Let us look at how Novikov (not only an archivist for the anthroposophists, but a learned mathematician, a doctor of physics and mechanics), conducted his analyses and interpretations. His historiosophy, based on meticulous analysis of historical sources as well as Russian myths and tales, embraces a wide range of aspects. Novikov searched for 1. connections, not obvious and hidden from casual observers, between historical events of Western civilization as well as Rus' and Russia; 2. key figures in the history of Rus' and Russia, spiritually (karmically) related to important figures of Western culture; and 3. motifs and subjects of initiation in folklore and classical Russian literature (for example, in Pushkin), which were supposed to prove the unique spiritual potential of the Russian people, especially their genius representatives. About the battle of Kulikovo – a key victory of the Ruthenian princes over the Golden Horde under the command of Mamai in 1380 – he wrote:

The image of the [Kulikovo] battle and what came before drew me in somehow [...] I was lucky to see **the (“karmic”) relationship** [bold text – M.R.] between the year 1378, the year of the battle of Vozha River, close to the date of the holiday of the Dormition of the Mother of God, the death of Saint Aleksij, the Metropolitan of Kijev and all Russia [...] and the birth of Christian Rosenkreutz (1378). It was, if I may say so, the preamble to my “discovery”. In 1378 the building site for the Cathedral of the Dormition in Stromyn was consecrated. And that was where Sergius of Radonezh [worked]. Under his leadership, the Cathedral of the Dormition was built in honour of the victory over Vozha. The Kulikovo battle was an extraordinary alloy of SPIRITUAL AND EARTHLY elements. It was, without a doubt, a purely SPIRITUAL ACT, a SPIRITUAL BATTLE against the demonic Mamais horde. The inspirational spiritual element, the “catalyst” of the battle was blessed Sergei of Radonezh, the earthly representative of the Patroness of Russia – the Virgin Mary. The battle took place on the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary: 8 September (according to the old style, but due to the fact that the reform of the calendar [...] took place in 1582, so the West still lived then according to the Julian calendar, that is, it turns out that the celebration of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary was like a pan-European celebration of Russia and the West at the same time). And the battle itself did not only affect the fate of Russia itself, but Europe as a whole.

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<sup>8</sup> This text is currently about to be published in an academic version with a commentary by Diana Oboleńska.

Therefore, the Kulikovo battle was a great spiritual and earthly act aimed at overcoming the demonic influence of the Golden Horde, the influence of Lucifer and Ariman, directing their impulse toward the fifth epoch of culture, the era of the formation of the MIND-SOUL, and therefore the force opposing the designs of the forces of good, plans for the normal development of human civilisation and culture. The Kulikovo battle is a SPIRITUALLY-THERAPEUTIC CONTRIBUTION TO EASTERN EUROPE, Russia in the approach of the fifth culture. **This was a spiritual “barrier” against the demonic aggression from the East [...]** [bold text – M.R.]. The spiritual-historical ground of the future sixth culture in this battle revealed their right to participate in the fate of the FUTURE EVOLUTION OF MANKIND. The Kulikovo battle was a UNIQUE SPIRITUAL ACT OF EASTERN EUROPE [...] the fruit of the Eastern spiritual tradition, the Eastern school of initiation. The spiritual potential of Eastern Europe made itself known, and initiated a new wave in accordance with the repeated 33-year-old rhythm, acting under the banner of struggle and in the name of defeating demonic impulses flowing from the East.

**1380 + 33 = 1413** [bold text – M.R.] – the beginning of the fifth culture.

And 1413 is the year that marked the end of the journey Christian Rosenkreutz made to the EAST to contact the initiating schools of the East (Eastern Orthodox) (Новиков 2017: 56–58<sup>9</sup>).

In this passage, we have a perfect illustration of the application of Steiner’s hermeneutics. Historical events are seen as symptoms of the cosmic process, inducing new events of cosmic significance. In this particular case, the victory of Rus’ and the Orthodox Church on the Kulikovo battlefield induces a “new wave”, the effect of which would have profound consequences for the whole of Europe – the journey to the East of the founder of the Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross.

Novikov’s considerations run in a similar vein run through his other tracts. In his *Три дня и три ночи* lecture, the archivist and researcher of anthroposophy writes about the invisible ties between Tsarevich Dmitry, the son of Tsar Ivan the Terrible who died a mysterious death at the age of eight, and Kaspar Hauser, also murdered at a youthful age. Both of these figures, who became the heroes of myths, were supposedly connected by “foundation sacrifices” (*bauopfer*) whenceforth the impulse of the new spiritual Europe would flow again. The mystery of Dmitri was supposedly understood, according to Novikov, by the poets Schiller and Goethe, and in Russia by Zhukovsky and Pushkin.

These narratives combine such seemingly distant topics as: The White Sea and Ancient Egypt, Hyperborea, the Northern Brothers of the Rosy Cross and Mikhail Lomonosov, Emperor Otto IV, Richard the Lionheart, and Russia’s dynastic connections. One of the threads involves a reflection on the *Song of the Nibelungs*, which is interpreted as a series of initiation paintings, which (also according to Steiner) were a gift from the Russian North to Western culture, just as the Rurik dynasty, according to one historiosophical theory, comes from the Normans.

It is worth noting that Steiner’s symptomatology gained quite a few supporters among contemporary Russian anthroposophists. The most interesting proposals of symptomatological exegesis include the work of Gennady Bondarev in 3 volumes (Бондарев 2008–2011), and the late Sergei O. Prokofiev, who for many years was a member of the Executive Council of the General Anthroposophical Society in Dornach. His tract (Прокофьев undated;

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<sup>9</sup> Translated by Monika Rzeczycka.

Прокофьев 1992) revolves around themes similar to the work of Novikov. Russia's role comes to the foreground of these narratives, especially her sacrifices. These victims are composed of, as in the case of classical anthroposophic narrative, specific characters: the aforementioned Tsarevich Dmitry, Sergei of Radonezh, Saint Seraphim of Sarov, numerous martyrs of faith, and the Russian *starets*; however, they also include characters from modern times, such as Steiner's companion, "The Russian-German" Maria Steiner von Sivers. The victims also include the nation as a whole. So, we have the Mongol invasion of Rus' and the victory over the Golden Horde, the later victory in the war against the invader – the antichrist Napoleon Bonaparte, followed by fascism and Hitler. For Russian anthroposophists, the spiritual mission of the Russian nation, inspired by the highest angelic powers, is primarily a sacrifice in defence of Christian Europe in the name of her spiritual transformation after Christ.

These threads connecting the history of Kievan Rus' and the history of the West can be conventionally called (according to the model of concepts of quantum mechanics) "Quantum entanglement" – which appear to be independent, but under appropriate conditions (of the imagination) are closely related. In an act of imagination invisible threads are in fact revealed, connecting these historical events into one common stream of true history that is played out on a much deeper level of cosmic reality.

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MITOLOGIE EZOTERYCZNE W DZIAŁANIU:

OBRAZY I SYMBOLE ROSYJSKIEJ HISTORIOZOFII ANTROPOZOFICZNEJ

(Z ARCHIWUM LUDWIGA A. NOWIKOWA)

Artykuł poświęcono historiozoficznej symbolice rosyjskiej antropozofii. Antropozofia rozwijająca się w sowieckiej Rosji w warunkach konspiracji i w izolacji od centrum Towarzystwa Antropozoficznego w Szwajcarii, wypracowała własną symbolikę i mitologię, która w zaskakujący sposób łączyła motywy zachodniej tradycji ezoterycznej z elementami rodzimej mistyki i historiozofii.

Słowa kluczowe: archiwum Ludwiga A. Nowikowa, rosyjska antropozofia, mitologia antropozoficzna, symboliczna imaginacja, mesjanizm rosyjski, symptomatologia historii