

## **Hermetyzm w Polsce doby stanisławowskiej**

### **Hermetism during Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski's reign**

#### **SUMMARY**

In the cultural movements of the Age of Enlightenment we can find various contradictions and antinomies. Mysticism, theosophy and hermetism had become a subject of a true passion even for outstanding intellects of that time, and more often than not acknowledged on a par with other cultural movements.

During Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski's reign (1764-1795) the movement of mysticism had spread widely throughout the lands of Poland. Neither the activities of the National Education Commission (Komisja Edukacji Narodowej) nor the reform of the Cracow Academy, the reform being implemented by Hugon Kołłątaj, could not drive out the occult trends that intruded into our lands from France, Italy and Germany while the hermetic – alchemic ideas had found numerous adherents among the Polish magnates. Chemistry belonged to those sciences that were entirely neglected whereas the alchemy had the lead. Ian George Forster, a German naturalist (1759-1794) in his letter from Vilnius to Henry Heine in Goettingen wrote in 1785 that as much as two thousands citizens practiced alchemy in Warsaw. The adherents of Hermes Trismegistus arts had their main sponsor, in Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski, the king himself, also a freemason and the Chevalier of Rosi-Golden Cross, an active member of Warsaw Lodge "Under Three Helmets". He had organized a group of alchemists together with Augustus Frederic Moszyński, the Great Master of the Pantry to the Crown and the Chamberlain for king Stanislaus Augustus, and Moszyński was appointed the chairman of alchemist group. Moszyński had a close friendly relationship with his powerful sponsor. In 1768, Moszyński submitted a comprehensive memorial "Remarks on the Hermetic Art" to the king. Since then under supervision of the king himself the experiments of alchemy were carried out in Warsaw while various foreign adepts took part also in the experiments. On November 16, 1769, Moszyński demonstrated a base metal transmutation into silver to Stanislaus Augustus. Among the royal hermetists and alchemists, Ian Lucas de Toux de Salvert vel Salverte, colonel-engineer, a Frenchman who came to Poland in 1749, was the most famous. In Poland, he propagated widely the Rosicrusian Movement and its hermetic ideas. In May 1780, Alexander Cagliostro vel Joseph Balsamo (1743-1795), a known adventurer from Italy, had arrived in Warsaw, where he was very quickly unmasked by Moszyński.

Thaddaeus Leszczyc-Grabianka (1740-1807), alchemist and mystic, a nobleman from Podole and a subprefect of Liwiec, a founder and leader of "New Israel" sect in Avignon shall be also included into the group of researchers who were trying to discover the philosopher's stone. Seweryn Rzewuski (1743-1811), commander-in-chief of the Polish army and Adam Gieryk-Podebrański (1741-1809), the "last alchemist of Cracow" and "engraver, typograph and bookseller of His Royal Majesty" finish up the list.

The case of Cagliostro had estranged Stanislaus Augustus from the alchemy and from giving money for the purposes of transmutation. He had found that it was more effective to built profitable manufactures than produce artificial gold, and therefore he turned his interests in that direction.

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