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Adrian Mac Liman
Centro Ibérico de Estudios Masónicos (CIEM)
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Freemasonry in Poland — formerly and today

Norbert Wójtowicz

As a first freemasonic organisation on the Polish territory one should consider „la Confrérie Rouge”, which already in January 1721 had quite well developed structure. Since the very beginning it has grouped aristocracy and the nobility exclusively. Some foreigners (initiated abroad) of the King August II Wettin's court have been appearing in Warsaw more and more numerously. Their meetings have initially been rare, and only in 1729 „aux trois Frères”, an independent lodge using French language, was initiated. Among many initiated here, we find future founder and propagator of the movement in Saxony, natural brother of the King, count Fryderyk Rutowski.

The good conditions for the Polish movement were terminated by Holy See encyclical „In eminenti” of Clement the XIIth, directed against masons. The wide masses have started to blame freemasonry for all the difficulties and failures; this subsequently has led to directing the wrath of people towards the Masons. Soon the king's order closed the freemasons institutions throughout the country. The restoration came fast, and already in 1742 a lodge in Poznań was established. In 1744 a small group of noblemen restored freemasons society in the capital. With the coming to Warsaw (in May 1749) of Jean Luc de Toux de Salverte, a rosicrucian of high degrees, Polish freemasonry was given a new quality and permeated by elements taken from esoteric and occult societies. Soon in the capital there was created a conspiratorial lodge of higher degrees „du bon Pasteur” of highly hermetic background. In 1768, by the „au vertueux Sarmate” lodge connected with „Strictiae Observantiae”, the probably first „adopting” lodge in this part of Europe was established.

On the 4th August 1769 in „Code des Status” for the first time criteria of the society membership were set. It was necessary due to increasing interest the organisation induced. Dignitaries, people of art and science, military men diplomats found their place there in equal degree. Among the guests present during the celebration of the Midsummer Night in 1769 we find the head of the polish Catholic Church, Primate Gabriel Podoski. Although only minute part of the Polish clergy belonged to the lodges, antimasonic projects have not won the Church's approval, because most of the bishops were loath to risk a conflict with the king and his faction.

In 1772 the neighbouring countries, making use of the weakness of Poland, signed three treaties dividing Poland between them and commenced a military action. The Republic has lost almost one third of her territory and over 1/3 of the overall population. A confusion in Polish freemasonry at the moment was used by the Strict Observance, which established the eighth diocese — a part of the VIIth Ordensprovinz — with head in person of count Aloysius Friedrich Brühl. The King Stanisław August Poniatowski himself entered its ranks accepting name of „Salsinatus Eques a Corona vinidicata”.

In the 1780s Polish freemasonry experienced a significant growth. Its cause was chiefly the sum of western novelties and some degree of secrecy, which gave rise to an increased interest in the organisation. The Polish faction consisted mainly of the nobility, whereas the lower ranks — doctors, lesser officers or higher servants of the Court — were mainly foreigners. The huge growth was also visible in the second branch of the Polish freemasonry, which was constituted by the „adopting” lodges. We can consider this period to be the time of the greatest development of Polish Freemasonry. In 1788 the Warsaw headquarters mastered 23 symbolic lodges and 4 Scottish lodges. There were about 1000 people in its ranks, intellectuals and patriots, among whose the clergy was not absent.

After 1787 the freemasonry in Poland enters a period of visible stagnation. The activities of the Great Parliament (1788-1791) left the brethren, engaged in politics, less and less time to work in lodges. On the parliamentary benches one could find the most active brethren, who constituted 22% of the Members of Parliament and 19,2% of the Deputies. The direct result of the then-proclaimed Constitution of the 3rd May was an intervention of the neighbouring states and the second partition of Poland. In such a diametrically changed conditions almost no one thinks about freemasonic activities, but former connections give good background for the opposition against intruders. Not all of the people were going to accept the next trimming of the country territory, and the Kościuszko Insurrection has broken out — the brethren take part in it numerously. After its fall and the third partitioning of Poland in 1794 the Grand Orient vanishes and Polish freemasonry also disintegrates. Only in the Prussian part it survived, but the only allowed form of activity was charity.

The next step in the Polish freemasonry development is the Napoleon period and freemasonry „nationalised” by him to propagate his apotheosis. As a result of peace treaties signed in summer of 1807 in Tylża, the Warsaw Princedom has been established. Several months later in Warsaw appears „Les Frères Polonais Réunis” lodge, whose ranks were filled by military men initiated mainly in French workshops. Since the very beginning there existed an almost religious cult of Napoleon, whose person was awakening numerous, often as uninhibited as unfounded, hopes. Connections with the Grand Orient of France and the presence of Napoleon's officials caused new Masonic institutions to be often Polish-French ones. In March of 1810 the Wielki Wschód Narodowy Księstwa Warszawskiego (National Grand Orient of the Warsaw Princedom) was constituted. Although the military have not been the most numerous group, they have been main propagators of Freemasonry and played the most significant role. After crushing defeat of Napoleon in the east, Masonic activities in Poland are again suspended.

State of uncertainty has not lasted long, since soon Russia returns to the idea of incorporating all formerly Polish lands. When in 1815 during Vienna Congress a minute Polish Kingdom is born, everything seems to normalise. Main part of Polish society believes in obtaining sovereignty from the hands of the Tsar Alexander I, who claimed that „*the independence of peoples we will see under guarantee of justice, moderation*

and liberalism, which have been erased from the civil and political law of nations by military despotism". As a few years ago Napoleon was praised, now Alexander was held in awe.

The Tsar, showing liberal tendencies, since 1804 has been an evident protector of Russian Masonry, what forced many officials to do the same. He revives the organisation in the Polish Kingdom, what induces violent inflow of adepts. In the middle of 1821, in the symbolic lodges subordinate to the Grand Orient there worked already about 3000 persons. The membership of many dignitaries added to the popularity, but most of the neophytes saw their own membership in purely social terms.

The reverence towards the new emperor has not lasted long. An obvious lack of keeping to the agreements and breaking of the constitution created an opposition towards the monarch. Authorities tend strongly to pacify and subordinate Polish Masonry. Not all members are going to accept this, and soon the organisation is divided into factions. The edict issued on 25 September 1821 by Józef Zająček, Prince-Steward of the Kingdom, Masonic activities were suspended.

This edict was not entirely successful. Secret organisations appear, like e.g. „Wolnomularstwo Narodowe” (National Freemasonry) of Walerian Łukasiński. A defeat of the patriotic insurrection of 1830/31 helped to increase the Polish emigration, which reinforced workshops in Besançon, Avignon and Le Puy. Many brethren arrived to British Isles, where numerous initiations took place, and even „Polish National Lodge” was created. In 1880s there appeared in the Polish Kingdom a surrogate of former lodge — so-called „lounges”, meetings where important and current problems were discussed.

First signs of the reawakening of Polish Masonry appeared at the beginning of the XXth century. In November 1909 seven candidates from Warsaw were initiated in Parisian lodge „Les Rénovateurs” and soon started their work in „Wyzwolenie” (The Liberation) movement. An outbreak of war, being a serious opportunity to change the map of Europe, activated Polish adepts. There were attempts to negotiate with Russian cadets; independence movements were supported. Attempts to contact the Entente governments were made, but proved unsuccessful. After the Armistice there started attempts to create an own obedience. On 19 March 1920 a regular lodge „Kopernik” was opened; it was a mother lodge for subsequent workshops. Soon the Supreme Council of Poland, supervised by Andrzej Strug, was called to life, and there was established Wielka Loża Narodowa „Polacy Zjednoczeni” (National Grand Lodge „Poles United”) governed by Rafał Radziwiłłowicz.

First years of independence are the period of intense growth of Polish Masonry. A serious drawback, however, proved to be the lack of experienced managerial group. Perhaps this partly evoked stagnation, apparent after 1923, which developed into regression of Polish obedience. The reason was also partly unfriendly attitude of the Church and the Right supporting clericalism. Restrictions on members' number resulted in paying more attention to attract people holding important positions in public life. The

ranks of Polish Masonry were filled with well-known solicitors and members of judicature, numerous scientists and higher governmental officials. The influence of the Masonry on the current affairs of State was initially very high. Andrzej Strug claimed that „*in every government of the restituted Poland there were at least two ministers, and in each ministry at least one departmental director, who were Masons*”. These words were no idle boasting, because comparatively small number of Masons constituted a real political power.

After death on 12 May 1935 of Józef Piłsudski, who till then had been at the helm of the government, several competitors emerged. Indecision about the future of Polish politics gave the Masons a new chance. In 1935-36 once more there was an enlivenment of the Polish organisation. However, they did not make the correct choice, as soon appeared. At that period the governmental circles' views drifted towards those of nationalist Right. This brought a serious intensification of the anti-Masonic campaign since June 1937. Concentrated attacks against the Freemasonry in the Parliament as well as in the media resulted in „the Decree of the President of Republic of Poland on 22 November 1938 concerning Dissolution of Masonic Organisations”. Having known beforehand of this decree, the Grand Lodge suspended its activity. After „removal” of Polish Masonry discussions have not stopped, and till the outbreak of war the efficacy of the decree has been doubted. It has not lasted long, because in next year Poland was once again removed from the Europe's map.

After the war many of the freemasons joined new structures of power, actively participating in new system's creation. Of all the brethren who remained in the country, 40,5% occupied high positions in the state Administration (departmental directors, PMs, even ministers), 32,1% became higher education teachers, 9,5% gained high ranks in the cooperatives. Only a few freemasons have been persecuted, but the reason has been their political activity, not the fact of Freemasonry membership. In first after-war years president Bolesław Bierut suggested restoring the lodge. Highest-ranking freemasons refused lest the organisation should become just a tool in the hands of the ruling party. Later attempts were equally unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, a conspiratorial lodge has existed since 12 February 1961, when a ritual „reawakening” of the pre-war „Kopernik” lodge took place. A week later first initiations were accepted, among others also initiation of future Grand Master, Jan Józef Lipski. The post in Warsaw has not avoided an unofficial participation in the political life of the country. From these circles support came for „Komitet Obrony Robotników” (Committee for Defense of Workers) in which establishing many brethren were involved, and later for the „Solidarność” also. „Kopernik” of Warsaw was a conspiratorial workshop. Till 1989 only little more than twenty adepts have been initiated, and the resuming of workshop activities has not been announced to the brethren holding high official positions. The conspiracy was so perfect, that even in the Masonic circles for nearly thirty years only the Polish „Kopernik” lodge in Paris knew officially of the existence of the Warsaw post.

The breakthrough of 1989 opened way to the renaissance of Polish Freemasonry. Finish of the communist experiment greatly enhanced openness to various influences. Brethren grouped around „Kopernik” increased their activity, and on 27 December 1991 they performed a ritual reawakening of the Wielka Loża Narodowa Polski (National Grand Lodge of Poland). Since 1990, due to the Grand Orient de France, there is apparent increase of liberal freemasonry activity. The first workshop of this current, „Wolność Przywrócona” (Liberty Restored), began its activity on 26 April 1991. Six years later the Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Orient de France, Eric Vanderberghe, said during his stay in Poland: „*We can already withdraw from Poland. We leave here our ritual and organisation, we declare to help our Polish brethren in their independent activity*”. Some months later, on 11 July 1997, the Wielki Wschód Polski (Grand Orient of Poland) came to life. In July 1993 there appeared in Warsaw a first lodge of „Le droit Humain” system, called „Pierre et Marie Curie”.

Nowadays several hundred freemasons „work” in Poland. The regular line is represented by the National Grand Lodge of Poland of about 150 members, whose head is a historian of literature, prof. Janusz Maciejewski. This lodge has five subject lodges: „Kopernik” in Warsaw, „Łukasiński” in Warsaw, „Przesąd Zwyciężony” (Superstition Defeated) in Kraków, „La France” in Warsaw, and „Świątynia Hymnu Jedności” (Temple of the Anthem of Unity) in Poznań. To the regular current there also belongs „Horus” lodge in Wrocław, now subordinate to the Grosse Loge der Alten Freien und Angenommenen Maurer von Deutschland. The Grand Orient of Poland has about 200 members congregated in the following lodges: „Wolność Przywrócona” (Liberty Restored) in Warsaw, „Nadzieja” (Hope) in Warsaw, „Europa” in Warsaw, „Gabriel Narutowicz” in Kraków, „Trzech Braci” (Three Brethren) in Warsaw, and in the combined lodges of „Tolerancja” (Tolerance) in Mikołów and „Jedność” (Unity) in Katowice. The head of this obedience is a historian of philosophy, philosopher of culture and religion, prof. Andrzej Rusław Fryderyk Nowicki. Co-masonry is represented by the Polish Jurisdiction of Orde Maçonique Mixte Internationale „Le droit Humain” governed by a journalist and writer Cezary Leżeński. There are five lodges of this current in Poland: „Pierre et Marie Curie” in Warsaw, „Orzeł Biały” (White Eagle) in Katowice, „Pod Ulem” (Under the Hive) in Toruń, „Konstytucja Trzeciego Maja” (3rd May Constitution) in Warsaw, and „Recontre Fraternelle” in Warsaw using French language. Women's Masonry has so far no workshop, although for several years there exists in Warsaw a circlet connected with Grande Loge Feminine de France. The office of Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council of Poland is currently held by Jan Wojciech Siciński. The following are connected with this Council: Improvement Lodge „Tadeusz Gliwic”, The Chapter of Secret Masters, The Chapter of Selected Masters and „Jan Józef Lipski” lodge. On 31 August 1994 the Polish National Group of Universala Framasona Ligo began functioning, and its president is a journalist and political commentator Adam Witold Wysocki.

Although, as the brethren emphasise, legal registrations of Polish obediences have met no obstacles, the everyday life of Polish freemasons is not all roses. From time to time

there appear various attacks of their adversaries. Most of these accusations are connected with the secrecy shrouding Masonry and its members. Lately one of widely known cases was one initiated by Zbigniew Rutkowski, who informed the court of criminal offences committed by Masons; these crimes were, among others, totalitarian inclinations and spreading of racial prejudice. He invoked Article 127 of the Polish Criminal Law, which concerns e.g. crimes against state independence and forced change of the Republic political system. To tell the truth, freemasons themselves do not do really much to change the stereotype existing in the society. Lodges do not function in social life, their members seldom are interviewed by media. An independent magazine „Wolnomularz Polski” (Polish Freemason), connected with the liberal current, is labelled „for internal use” and hardly anyone knows of its existence. In quite similar way some other brochures are published: series „Biblioteczka Wolnomularza Polskiego” (Polish Freemason Library) and series „Ex Oriente Lux”, the latter published on demand of the Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Poland. Apart from that, there exists a quarterly „Ars Regia” devoted to freemasonry, but due to its scientific character it is addressed to rather narrow range of readers. Polish freemasons are thus still far from what could be called openness towards the society.

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