



Biblical Symbols in the Works of Rudolf Steiner's Followers: *Initiation/Archangel Michael* by Amalia Luna Drexler as an Example of an Anthroposophical Interpretation of the Spiritual Mission of the Slavs

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Abstract

At the beginning of the 20th century, national mythologies inscribed in the Christian tradition were held in high regard within the milieu of Polish and Russian followers of esotericism. The international anthroposophical movement initiated by the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner is a special case. Among his Russian and Polish devotees sprang the common idea of the Slavic spiritual mission in the service of Archangel Michael. The author of this article explores this idea using the example of a sculpture entitled *Initiation/Archangel Michael* made in 1927 by the Polish artist Amalia Luna Drexler, who belonged to the group of “first generation” anthroposophists.

Keywords: anthroposophy in Poland, anthroposophy in Russia, anthroposophical art, biblical symbols, esoteric initiations, Archangel Michael, Slavic messianism and missionism, Luna Drexler

Słowa kluczowe: antropozofia w Polsce, antropozofia w Rosji, sztuka antropozoficzna, symbolika biblijna, ezoteryczne inicjacje, Archanioł Michał, słowiański mesjanizm i misjonizm, Luna Drexler

Esotericism at the turn of 20th century in Central and Eastern Europe has certain features that distinguish it from similar phenomena in Western European countries, although it is worth noting that the most significant inspirations for the growing interest in non-dogmatic spirituality in this region before the outbreak of World War I actually arrived from the West.¹ The differences result primarily from historical and

¹ See A. Świerzowska, I. Trzcńska, *The Variety of Polish Esotericism 1890–1939*, [in:] *Polish Esoteric Traditions 1890–1939. Selected Issues*, A. Świerzowska (ed.), Gdańsk 2019, pp. 3–14.

geopolitical circumstances, especially those related to national identity, with national mythologies particularly deeply rooted in countries such as Russia and Poland.

Let us recall that the dominant feature of Polish and Russian mythologies are the ideas of messianism and missionism formed in the 19th century.² Polish messianism is the vision of Poland as the Christ of Nations, a country crucified by other states, and then resurrected, also redeeming the sins of others. This religious metaphor is associated with what is called the partition of Poland by three powers: Russia, Prussia and Austria. The loss of freedom gave birth to the myth that Poles had a special mission – they, having experienced a national Golgotha and a hundred-year hell of slavery (from 1772 to 1918), had not lost their identity and faith, but were reborn and had risen to become spiritual guides for other nations.

In turn, Russian messianism and missionism (what is called *russkaya ideya*, the Russian idea) comes down to a belief in the unique spirituality of the Russians, which was thought to have developed over centuries of practicing Orthodoxy – the branch of Eastern Christianity that, according to the Russians, is the only source of the true spirit of Christ’s community. There, spiritual development was not crushed, neither by the Mongol enslavement from the 13th until the 15th century, which could have destroyed the foundations of the Christian tradition that was only just emerging, nor by the westernisation of the empire initiated by Tsar Peter the Great. The Christian community of the Russian people (ru. *sobornost*) is the central tenet of this concept, according to which it is not the individual but the community that forms the basis for the Russian mentality, which should be manifested, for example, in peaceful co-existence with other nations. In their opinion, this feature confirms Russia’s special role in the process of transforming the world into the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Convictions about the spiritual mission expressed by representatives of both nations, resulting not only from different historical premises, but also standing in clear opposition to each other, arose on the basis of the Christian tradition that legitimised them. In both cases, the power of faith in Christ was understood as a source of spiritual might that was thought to play a soteriological role in relation to the rest of humanity.

An intriguing clash of such ideas occurred at the beginning of the 20th century, in connection with the participation of Russians and Poles in the European anthroposophical movement – next to theosophy, one of the most important contemporary trends of Western esotericism, created by an Austrian named Rudolf Steiner. Representatives of both conflicted nations were able to reconcile their respective stances thanks to anthroposophy, even though, according to the narratives that played out in these circles, for the Poles Russia remained the main perpetrator of their Golgotha, and the tsarist empire was treated as a synonym for loss of collective and individual freedom. In turn, the Russians viewed the Poles, followers of Roman Catholicism

² Missionism, a concept rarely encountered in the context of Polish philosophy, often appears in relation to Russian messianism. It signifies the soteriological mission of the nation towards other nations and states. See, e.g., N. Losskiĭ, *Russkiĭ messianizm i missionizm*, [in:] *idem, Kharakter russkogo naroda*, München 1957, pp. 106–116; M. Rzczycka, *Esoteric Mythologies in Action. Images and Symbols of Russian Anthroposophic Historiosophy (From Ludvig A. Novikov’s Archive)*, “Studia Humanistyczne AGH” 2017, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 49–57.

and papacy, not only as traitors to true Christianity, but also as communities of Slavic peoples “naturally” associated with Orthodoxy. Furthermore, the issue of the partition of Poland, the forced incorporation of a significant part of the Republic into the Russian Empire, questioned the impartiality declared by the Russians and their mythologised friendliness towards other nations.

The new, common attitude, which can be taken as a kind of unprecedented bilateral victory over national prejudices, emerged on the basis of the esoteric concept of Christianity of the future proclaimed by Rudolf Steiner. His vision became a platform for genuine understanding between Polish and Russian anthroposophists who, as residents of Central and Eastern Europe, were assumed to have unique spiritual potential.³ According to Steiner, certain specific features turned them into new apostles, bringing the “Good News of Anthroposophy” to a Europe that had been secularised and shackled by materialism. This common goal was to be realised as early as in the 20th century and then develop in the centuries to come, preparing the world for the arrival of the New Era of the Spirit.

Steiner as a researcher of higher worlds

The creator of anthroposophy began his career as a spiritual teacher with a solid university background, a PhD and academic work stretching back several years.⁴ His exceptional sensitivity to metaphysical reality, by his own account, had developed as far back as his childhood. After years of independent spiritual practice, in 1902 Steiner began working with theosophists, and two years later he became head of the German Section of the Theosophical Society (TS) and the main representative (Arch-Warden) of the Esoteric School (or Esoteric Section) of Theosophy in Germany, Austria-Hungary and Switzerland. From the outset, his lectures deviated from the classical line propagated by the theosophists from Adyar in India. Their dominant feature was the esoteric Christian tradition, which Steiner combined with elements of theosophical ideas. In 1907, the Steiner school separated from the Theosophical Esoteric School, while still formally remaining within the structures of the Theosophical Society. The reason was Steiner’s conviction that only the Christian tradition was the right developmental path for Europeans seeking spirituality. From 1907, oriental motifs gradually disappeared from his esoteric lectures. The law of karma and the specific kind of evolution as understood by the theosophists and the concept of what is called *Akasha*

³ This is confirmed by documents from this era. A. Biely and M. Voloshina (Sabashnikova) wrote about the friendship between Polish and Russian devotees of Steiner, as well as about the ongoing discussions on the mission of nations. Cf. *Andreĭ Belyĭ i antroposofia, Material k biografii (intimnyĭ)*, publ. J. Malmstad, “Minuvshee: Istoricheskiĭ al’manakh,” Paris 1988, vol. 6, pp. 337–450 (Part 1); Paris 1989, vol. 8, pp. 409–472 (Part 2); Paris 1990, vol. 9, pp. 409–488 (Part 3). A. Belyĭ, *Rudol’f Shteĭner i Gēte v mirovoznemii sovremennosti. Vospominania i Shteĭnere*, V.M. Piskunov (ed.), komment. I.N. Lagutina, Moskva 2000; M. Voloshina [Sabashnikova], *Zelēnaia zmeia. Istoriia odnoi zhizni*, Moskva 1993.

⁴ For Steiner’s biography, see: P. Selg, *Rudolf Steiner. 1861–1925. Lebens- und Werkgeschichte*, Bd. 1–4, Arlesheim 2018.

*Chronicle*⁵ were presented by Steiner in new, original interpretations, inscribing them in the circle of the esoterically read Christian tradition of the West. He considered his entry into the TS community in 1902 as an attempt to reform theosophy from the inside, redirecting it toward the proper, Christocentric and Eurocentric path of development. Steiner's final break with theosophy occurred at the turn of 1912 and 1913. At that time, the Anthroposophical Society (AS) was founded.⁶

Russians and Poles in the ranks of Rudolf Steiner's students

It seems that due to a significant shift of emphasis towards the esoteric Christian tradition, it was at the end of the first decade of the 20th century that Russians and Poles became Steiner's students.⁷ Anthroposophy proved to be the answer to their quest for spiritual experiences outside the confines of official Christian church institutions, which did not meet their expectations, without having to unmoor themselves from their own religious and national traditions. The problem of nations as spiritual communities, having to fulfil specific missions in the history of humanity (and even the cosmos), was presented by Steiner in terms related to romantic ideas familiar to both nations. An important factor that attracted the Slavs to Steiner was the presence of his close associate (and from 1914, his wife) Marie von Sivers, a German born in the small Polish town of Włocławek and raised in Russia. It seems that many historiosophical ideas that can be traced back to Russian religious philosophy (e.g. sophiology, cosmism, or the pan-Slavism that assumed the integration of the Slavs under the spiritual leadership of Russia) actually emerged from Steiner's teachings thanks to Marie von Sivers, whose close relations with Russian theosophists aided and abetted the spread of Steiner's teachings in Russia and, consequently, the intensive development of anthroposophy both before and after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.⁸

The core of the emerging European anthroposophical movement, however, consisted mainly of the representatives from German-speaking countries: Germans, Swiss, and citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Russians, Poles, Czechs and

⁵ According to the initiated, the *Akasha Chronicle* is a chronicle of the history of the Earth, all its people, their past lives, recorded in the astral world. Thanks to spiritual exercises which develop metaphysical perception, a person can gain the ability to "read" it. See R. Steiner, *Aus der Akasha-Chronik. Gesammelte Artikel aus der Zeitschrift "Lucifer-Gnosis" 1904/05*, Dornach 1969.

⁶ See B. von Plato, *Zur Entwicklung der anthroposophischen Gesellschaft. Ein historischer Überblick*, Stuttgart 1986.

⁷ See D. Oboleńska, M. Rzeczycka, *Rudolf Steiner and His Polish Emissaries: Tadeusz Rychter and Other Anthroposophists from Poland*, [in:] *Polish Esoteric Traditions 1890–1939. Selected Issues*, A. Świerżowska (ed.), Gdańsk 2019, pp. 138–158.

⁸ For more on this topic, see e.g. E. Biernat, "Doktor i Dornach." *Wspomnienia o Rudolfie Steinerze*, [in:] *Literatura rosyjska przelomu XIX i XX wieku*, J. Sałajczyk, L. Kalita (ed.), Gdańsk 2005; R. von Maydell, *Vor dem Thore. Ein Vierteljahrhundert Anthroposophie in Russland*, Dokumente und Analysen zur russischen und sowjetischen Kultur, Bd. 29, Bochum–Freiburg 2005; D. Oboleńska, *Put' k posviashcheniiu. Antroposofskie motivy v romankh Andreia*, Gdańsk 2009.

Slovaks were a small group within the movement,⁹ although – as time has shown – they played a significant role in the development of anthroposophy in the West and in their countries of origin. It is worth emphasising that members of this group were, above all, people educated in European universities and academies, intellectuals and artists of various disciplines, for whom Dr. Steiner was not only a charismatic teacher and visionary, but primarily a credible scientific authority.¹⁰ Neither was it without significance that Steiner himself, although not a Slav, came from the Slavic “center of Europe,” for he was born in Kraljevec (now in Croatia).

Anthroposophical missionism

It seems that from among Steiner’s students, the anthroposophical concept of returning to the ideal of the Slavic community as a neo-Christian ecumene, resonated the most with Russians and Poles. This ideal that existed, according to the creator of anthroposophy, in the Slavic past was to be implemented at a new, higher level. The task of modern Slavs was to rediscover their spiritual roots, which meant in essence experiencing their own being as Christ’s nation. Then, it was necessary to transfer this vivid feeling to a rational level – “from heart to mind.”¹¹ Slavs were considered to be especially predestined for this new experience of Christ’s presence. Their unique experience was to be an actual counterweight, a kind of defensive shield against the Ahrimanic forces of darkness operating on Earth. This, in turn, made them knights, assistants of heavenly forces. This tempting vision was part of the traditional national narratives, yet it differed from them at the same time. Transformed by Steiner, it became a new universal quality rather than a local myth. Steiner argued that every region of Europe had its own mission to fulfil.

In our considerations, the two missionisms that took shape in the anthroposophical milieu between 1907–1939 are of particular importance. Alongside the Slavic trend discussed above, the “mission of Eastern Europe,” nestled the extremely strong German current, namely, the “mission of Central Europe.” These two missions did not contradict each other, although they doubtlessly fought for primacy.¹² While Russian anthroposophists associated their future with the mission of Eastern Europe, the Poles saw their place somewhere between the Slavic East with its Christ mission and the German “center of Europe,” whose task was to prepare the world for the epochal change, sowing the seeds of a new spiritual reality in various areas of social life and

⁹ The author of this article established this on the basis of research conducted in 2017 and 2018 at the Goetheanum Dokumentation Archiv in Dornach.

¹⁰ M. Rzczycka, K. Arciszewska-Tomczak, *Z dziejów polskiej antropozofii*, [in:] *Polskie tradycje ezoteryczne 1890–1939*, t. 1: *Teozofia i antropozofia*, M. Rzczycka, I. Trzcńska (eds.), Gdańsk 2019, p. 140, *passim*.

¹¹ S.O. Prokofieff, *Misterium Michaela*, trans. M. Waśniewski, Gdynia 2016.

¹² One of the most interesting chroniclers of this movement, the Russian symbolist Andrei Biely, in his memoirs from 1914–1916 wrote about the worldview conflicts of anthroposophists that arose from the conviction of their special mission as Steiner’s students. Cf. *Andrei Belyi i antropozofia, Material k biografii (intimnyi)...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, pp. 409–488.

in the intellectual arena. This intermediary position between the German and Russian apostles of Steiner led his Polish students to perceive themselves as representatives of a unique spiritual culture predestined for specific tasks in the future.¹³ Let us add that this vision confirmed the prophetic narratives of the Polish Romantics and national prophets: Juliusz Słowacki, Adam Mickiewicz and Zygmunt Krasiński, making them the precursors of Steiner and anthroposophy.¹⁴

Anthroposophy as a reinterpretation of Christianity

In Steiner's spiritual teaching, three ideas of esoteric initiation, immersed in the Christian culture of Europe, come to the fore:

1. The Rosicrucian tradition, of which anthroposophy was considered the legitimate continuator;
2. The mystery of Golgotha as the most important event on a human and cosmic scale;
3. The Mysteries of the New Era: the revelation of Archangel Michael, understood as the beginning of a new stage of the development of the Earth and the cosmos – the aforementioned Christianity of the future, based on spiritual freedom.

These motifs, reinterpreted by Steiner, were reflected in the work of his students at an early stage in the development of anthroposophy. Both the mystery of Golgotha and the mystery of the Holy Grail and Rosicrucian symbols can be found in the anthroposophical art of the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁵

Among the many biblical motifs present in the work of the anthroposophists, reinterpretations of Archangel Michael deserve special attention. This traditional religious motif present in Judaism, Western and Eastern Christian churches and Islam, as well as in various esoteric branches, played a key role in the aforementioned process of creating anthroposophic messianism and missionism, in their Central European and Eastern European versions.

In the official interpretations of the Roman and Orthodox Churches, the figure of Archangel Michael is associated primarily with his victorious fight against evil. It was Michael (he. *Mikhā'ēl*, lit. "who is like God") who cast the rebellious angel into the abyss when he turned against God. In sacred art, Michael is most often depicted as a heavenly knight in an armour in a victory pose, with a sword or spear raised in his hand. Under Michael's feet, artists depicted Lucifer cast down from the heavens in human form or, more commonly, a dragon that symbolises evil, defeated by the forces of good.

¹³ The Poles believed that they could take on such a role for themselves. See D. Oboleńska, M. Rzczycka, *op. cit.*, pp. 141–142.

¹⁴ One of the arguments for such an interpretation was thought to be the mystical work of the Polish Romantics, especially *The Spirit King* (pol. *Król Duch*) and *Genesis from the Spirit* (pol. *Genesis z Ducha*), poems by Juliusz Słowacki.

¹⁵ See *Ænigma. One Hundred Years of Anthroposophical Art*, concept R.J. Fäth, D. Voda, texts A. Albert et al., Řevnice – Olomouc 2015.

Steiner's concept does not contradict this traditional image. In his lectures, Michael remains a heavenly archistrateger, the leader of the angel regiments fighting evil. The anthroposophical characteristics of this figure, however, are much broader, and extend far beyond traditional approaches and interpretations. It is worth adding here that the same applies to other religious motifs and symbols. Anthroposophy, as a rule, is not in opposition to theological interpretations but proposes a far broader interpretation of them, resulting from a particular discovery of the metaphysical, spiritual reality that was thought to stem from the experiments and research conducted by Steiner on "discovering higher worlds."

It is impossible to present briefly all the nuances regarding the concept of Michael present in the writings and lectures of the creator of anthroposophy. An in-depth analysis of this topic was proposed by Sergei O. Prokofieff, one of the contemporary interpreters of anthroposophy.¹⁶ However, let us attempt at collating the most important features of this figure, which is undoubtedly of exceptional importance for members of the Anthroposophical Society.

In anthroposophic literature, Michael is an *Archai*, or Spirit of Time, one of the supreme beings of the metaphysical world. "In 1841 he embarked on a path that gradually brought him into the spiritual realm of Earth. At the same time, (...) he rose from the rank of Archangel to Spirit of Time."¹⁷ The process of Michael's descent to Earth ended in 1879. He then took control of our planet, fighting against Ahriman, who had gained authority over people, attempting to subordinate them completely and turn them into living machines. Since then, Michael's relationship with humankind acquired a special character. This spiritual being began to inspire selected representatives of humanity who had the right skills to accept his inspiration and take action under his guidance.

This was not, however, the first period of Michael's reign on Earth. As Steiner argued, Michael, as an archangel, was the spirit of the chosen people during the times of the Old Testament. It was thanks to his inspirations that the Jewish identity was shaped and the religious tradition of this nation was formed. At that time, Michael represented Yahweh – God the Father – but now (after the Mystery of Golgotha, which radically changed the history of Earth), he is the face of Christ, the Son, his mediator and messenger.¹⁸ According to Steiner, the modern path to Christ must lead through Michael.

Therefore, the current role of this spiritual being is definitely more universal in nature than in the first period of his reign. Now he oversees all humanity, while the processes taking place in individual nations are guarded by lower archangels – the spirits of these nations. However, due to the degree of spiritual development of individual populations, Michael's influence is not the same everywhere. The people of Western Europe perceive his inspiration differently than the nations of Central or

¹⁶ S.O. Prokofieff, *Duchowe zadania Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej. Rozważania o oddziaływaniu duchów narodów w europejskiej historii*, trans. M. Waśniewski, Gdynia 2018, p. 99.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 125.

¹⁸ S.O. Prokofieff, *Misterium...*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

Eastern Europe. The various missions of individual nations also stem from these differences on the level of “organs of spiritual perception.”

In Steiner’s teachings, Michael is a true inspiration for anthroposophy, which turns out to be his special gift to humanity.¹⁹ When it comes to relations with the past, anthroposophists consider themselves as continuators of Christian Rosenkreutz’s mission, while at the same time, declaring themselves to be the future Michael community.²⁰ Therefore, this figure became an important organisational symbol for the Anthroposophical Society, particularly after 1923, when construction of the new Goetheanum began (after the first building had burnt down on 31 December 1922), naming it Michael’s fortress “for the protection of all who belong to him.”²¹ In connection with this, Michael was entrusted, for example, with patronage over anthroposophical circles, thus signalling the involvement of members of a given group in his service, that is, in preparations for the transformation of the world. Even in the Soviet Leningrad, where esoteric organisations could still exist until the 1930s, before political trials against Russian anthroposophists ended in 1931 with sentences, exile and resettlements, Michael was an implicit patron of Mikhail Lomonosov’s circle.²² In independent Poland, in Lviv, there was an anthroposophic group that in organisational documents appeared as Michael’s Circle.²³ St. Michael’s Day, which falls on 29 September, is among the most important anthroposophical celebrations.

Through anthroposophy, Michael opens the contemporary path to the higher worlds, giving impulses to transform human intelligence, that is, pre-spiritual thinking. Steiner’s establishment of Michael’s new mysteries at the turn of 1923 and 1924 (a year after the Goetheanum fire, and just over a year before the death of the founder of anthroposophy) was essentially a calling of what is referred to as the school of Michael on Earth, which aims to develop people’s ability to perceive spiritual forces in the material world. We also notice that anthroposophy connects this figure with both intelligence and freedom, because the ability, which we as people have developed, to think in abstract terms (under the influence of “higher worlds,” according to the anthroposophists), makes us free beings. Therefore, Michael’s impulses are directed at free acts of human will, and to them – above all – belong artistic activity and art.

The figure of Michael is one of the most recurring motifs in anthroposophist works. In the album *Aenigma* that presents selected anthroposophical works of the 20th century, the authors included a number of works on the topic of Michael,

¹⁹ R. Steiner, *Christus zur Zeit des Mysteriums von Golgatha und Christus im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, [in:] *idem, Vorstufen zum Mysterium von Golgatha. Zehn Vorträge, gehalten 1913 bis 1914 in verschiedenen Städten*, 2 May 1913, GA 152, Dornach 1990, pp. 33–49; S.O. Prokofieff, *Duchowe zadania Europy Środkowej...*, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

²⁰ See, e.g., P. Mackay, *The Anthroposophical Society as a Michael Community*, East Sussex 2013.

²¹ S.O. Prokofieff, *Misterium...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–107.

²² Diana Oboleńska wrote a comprehensive article on Michael’s symbolism in the works of Russian anthroposophists. See *eadem, Posłannik kosmosa. Motiv Arkhangela Mikhaïla v romane Andreia Belogo “Kreshcheniĭ Kitaets,”* [in:] *Motywy ezoteryczne w kulturze rosyjskiej początku XX wieku*, E. Biernat, M. Rzczycka (ed.), “Światło i ciemność,” t. 2, Gdańsk 2006, pp. 70–88.

²³ The documents are stored at Goetheanum Dokumentation Archiv in Dornach, A.02.008.001.

including works of art created by Slavic authors.²⁴ One of the most famous paintings – still reproduced today, for example in the form of postcards sold in the Goetheanum bookstore in Dornach – is a series of paintings by the Russian painter Margarita Voloshina, dedicated to four archangels. Michael is depicted as a character woven from multi-coloured rays.²⁵ This formal innovation allowed the artist to capture the idea that meeting the archangel is a spiritual act that takes place thanks to unique extrasensory perception.

An interesting representation of Michael is portrayed in a work created probably by the Polish artist Tadeusz Rychter, a close associate and emissary of Steiner.²⁶ The image in the form of a round seal shows a luminous spiritual being almost invisible in detail that dazzles the viewer with its unearthly brightness. In this picture Michael is depicted as a dragon-slayer. Unlike the archangel, however, the dragon is distinct, decidedly more material, while luminous Michael – in particular, his head and mountain of wings belonging to the highest echelons of the heavens – is barely visible. Only the fragments of figures that are closest to Earth are outlined more clearly. It seems that in this work, the basic formal procedure involves the use of light, which enables the artist to express the idea of the multi-level hierarchy of the spiritual world. Therefore, the dragon that symbolises the Ahrimanic forces of evil, thrown to Earth during Michael's struggle,²⁷ can be perceived by the human senses, while the luminous solar spirit, Michael, remains a barely outlined figure.

The outstanding sculptor Amalia Luna Drexler, one of the most important figures of pre-war Polish anthroposophy,²⁸ created a completely different image of Michael. From the time she met Steiner, her oeuvre was closely associated with spiritual practice.²⁹ Her friend, and first biographer, the painter Maria Reutt, claimed that Drexler's

²⁴ The artists whose works devoted to Michael were created in the environment of anthroposophists include E. Arlin, R. Michalik, J. Prinke, P. Rackwitz-Bulir, C. Rettich, K. Thylmann, G. Wagner. For more on their work, see *Ænigma. One Hundred Years...*, *op. cit.*

²⁵ This technique was probably derived from the late paintings of Nikolaus Gysis, who taught Steiner's followers in Munich. See Petritakis S., *Quand le miroir devient lampion. Aspects de la réception de l'œuvre tardive de Nikolaus Gysis entre Athènes et Munich*, [in:] *Quêtes de modernité[s] artistique[s] dans les Balkans au tournant du XX e siècle*, C. Méneux, A. Sotropa (dir.), Paris 2016, pp. 71–97.

²⁶ The work is reproduced in S.O. Prokofieff, *Misterium...*, *op. cit.*, p. [2].

²⁷ In 1917, it was foretold that Michael would bring Ahriman and his hosts to Earth. The revolution in Russia 1917 and other subsequent events in Europe, including Nazi rule in Germany and then World War II were interpreted by anthroposophists as the terrestrial effect of this battle in the spiritual world. S.O. Prokofieff, *Misterium...*, *op. cit.*

²⁸ In 1909, while studying in Munich, the artist joined the elite group of Rudolf Steiner's esoteric students, probably introduced by the aforementioned Tadeusz Rychter. In 1914 she found herself in the Johannesbau-Goetheanum construction group in Switzerland. The creator of anthroposophy then entrusted her with the management of the sculptural works of one of the teams, whose task was to hand-craft the wooden architectural elements of this unusual building (probably their work on wooden columns and architects supporting the two domes of Johannesbau-Goetheanum). Drexler also participated in the preparation of the first Eurhythmic performances, which gave rise to this new stage art, combining elements of ancient temple dances and modern esoteric techniques. From 1918, Drexler organised anthroposophical groups in Poland, and in 1923 headed the Polish Anthroposophical Society, a position that she held until the end of her life.

²⁹ Art historians refer to Drexler's works as an attempt to express "spiritual imaginations" Cf. A. Melbechowska-Luty, *Posągi i ludzie. Rzeźba polska dwudziestolecia międzywojennego (1918–1939)*, Warszawa 2005, p. 240.

artistic work was unique, because under Doctor Steiner's direction it not only gained an extraordinary strength of expression, but also became a visible proof of the artist's intense internal creative development.³⁰

Drexler specialised in portrait sculpture. The best known are her busts of famous Polish clergymen Piotr Skarga, Józef Teodorowicz and August Hlond, as well as the writers Maria Konopnicka and Jerzy Hulewicz. Tombstones and religious sculptures, such as the *Madonna and Child* and the *Sermon* fall into another category of work, bursting with exceptional expressive and spiritual power contained within. In Reutt's opinion, this is due to anthroposophy, as it gave Drexler spiritual insight into the deepest essence of her subjects, which she managed to transfer from the metaphysical world.

Her bas-relief dedicated to Archangel Michael is among the artist's most original works. Like the aforementioned *Raising of Jairus' Daughter*, it takes the form of a temple relief. The inventory of works prepared for the posthumous Drexler exhibition in 1934 shows that this sculpture was one of several on this subject. However, it was not possible to determine where any of them are stored, and the one I discuss in this article is known from pre-war press photographs presenting two variants of this work.³¹ Maria Reutt refers to this work by Drexler as *Initiation*, while the caption *Archangel Michael* appears in the mentioned publications under the photographs of the work.



Fig. 1. Luna Amalia Drexler, *Initiation / Archangel Michael*, 1927.

³⁰ M. Reutt, *Luna Amalia Drexlerówna. Szkic do życiorysu*, 5 November 1937, typescript (17 pp.) in the private collections of the Drexler family, Gliwice, Poland.

³¹ *Jednodniówka wydana w dniu wystawy pośmiertnej prac Luni Drexlerówny artystki malarki i rzeźbiarki*, Lwów, 20 May 1934, commemorative print, p. 9, in the private collections of the Drexler family, Gliwice, Poland. The photograph from this edition was reproduced in *Enigma...*, *op. cit.*, p. 289. The second photograph depicting a variant of a sculpture with a few details comes from the weekly "Kobieta Współczesna." See N. Samotyhowa, *Luna Drexlerówna*, "Kobieta Współczesna" 1934 (15 April), no. 15, pp. 270–271.

This sculpture was created in 1927, two years after the death of the founder of anthroposophy. At that time, the Polish Anthroposophical Society already existed, having been established in 1923. It was headed by Luna Drexler, who coordinated the work of groups in Lviv, Kraków, Vilnius and Warsaw. It was a period of intense endeavours undertaken by Polish anthroposophists, primarily aimed at popularising Steiner's pedagogical and social ideas in Poland.³²

It seems that the appearance of *Initiation/Archangel Michael* might be associated with Luna Drexler's participation in the North-Eastern Congresses organised by Margarete von Brederlow in the Free City of Gdańsk in 1926 and 1927. Besides Gdańsk anthroposophists and members of Polish circles, Anthroposophical Society members from East Prussia, Hamburg, Vienna, Tallinn and Uppsala also took part in these meetings. In this international gathering, the spiritual tasks facing this region – according to the speakers, an extremely important link between Eastern and Western Europe – were discussed. Talks given by the Polish contingent concerned the Polish messianists (Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Andrzej Towiański and August Cieszkowski) as precursors of anthroposophy, as well as the issue of the current and future mission of Poland and, more broadly, the Slavic countries. The bas-relief of Drexler may, therefore, be regarded as a kind of artistic commentary on these meetings, an illustration of the present day, albeit presented from the perspective of spiritual reality.

It is worth paying attention to the innovativeness of this work. The author presented Archangel Michael in his new role. While other anthroposophists most often referred to classic takes on this figure, familiar from sacred art of different eras, in their art, Luna Drexler depicted this character in an unusual context, referring to Michael's new mission as the Spirit of Time. Moreover, it seems that in this work the idea of the Slavs' mission as new members of the Michael community came to the fore. This interpretation is justified by the composition of the sculpture, based on a clear division of space between East and West.

The work presents eight characters. The central area is occupied by Archangel Michael sitting on the throne. His figure marks this work's axis of symmetry. Drexler interestingly solved the problem of how to present the heavenly hierarchies. Her Archangel Michael dominates the other characters; although we see him in a sitting position, he matches the height of the figures standing next to him. The artist managed to extract strength and calm from this character. Michael has a beautiful and unshakeable face. He rests his right hand on a long object (perhaps a sword, spear or flagpole), while in the left he holds a shield leaning against a protruding knee, upon which Christ's face is surrounded by rays in the shape of the cross (in the second version of this work, only the cross appears on the shield, as a symbol of Christ and Golgotha). Under the feet of Archangel Michael, Drexler placed the figure of a dragon with a human face and the body of a snake or lizard.

Two male figures facing east and west stand on both sides of Michael. Their silhouettes and gestures (raised hands) suggest that they are probably Michael's guards, his helpers in the fight against evil. To the right of the guard (to the east – from

³² M. Rzczycka, K. Arciszewska-Tomczak, *op. cit.*, pp. 182–198.

Michael's perspective) there are two more characters: a boy (or girl) appears in the foreground with his (her) arms joined and outstretched toward Michael. The child, wearing a short tunic, turns its head in the direction whence it came. Behind it (in the background) there is a female face facing Michael, who introduces the child to Michael, while protecting it, as her hand gestures would seem to suggest.

On the other side of the Archangel – to the west, from his perspective – stand two figures as well: in the foreground Drexler depicted a mature man in a mysterious pose (bent knees, head bowed slightly towards Michael, arms straightened at the elbows and crossed, fists clenched). Behind him, as on the opposite side of the sculpture, is the figure of a guide. This time he is a man in a cape forming the shape of wings. This androgynous figure obstructs the man's view of Michael, although he also fixes his gaze on him. All the figures, with the exception of the static, monumental Archangel Michael and the dragon immobilised under his feet, are in motion, which is emphasised by both their gestures and their wavy robes. The harmonious composition and noble, formal simplicity of this work based on symmetry was noticed by art critic Nela Samotyhowa in 1934.³³

An anthroposophical commentary by Maria Reutt, which is a fragment of a reading for Polish anthroposophists on the fourth anniversary of Drexler's death, explains the main idea of this work, in which a special role falls to a Slav, still spiritually young, led by his higher self before Michael – and thus Christ, whom he represents. Here are two quotes from this piece. The first fragment refers to the national mission in the light of anthroposophy, while the second is an anthroposophical interpretation of Drexler's *Initiation / Archangel Michael*:

We, as anthroposophists, know that the era of Michael has begun, that since 1841 Archangel Michael has been fighting "with the dragon" in the spiritual worlds, with the hosts of Ahriman, that he is victorious and has cast them down to Earth. Evil is revealed. Man can decide for himself. One might say that we Poles play a special role in these struggles – both those who die heroically and those who [...] work. [...] Fighting for Poland's independence [in 1918 – MR], supported by the grace of the spiritual worlds, means that Polish souls now feel completely different.³⁴

Archangel Michael in the middle as the great initiate, next to him two guards, the one on the left stops Lucifer and Ahriman, the second on the right keeps two figures at bay: a female [...], a symbol of a higher self, bringing a young man to the temple, a Slav – looking fearfully behind himself because traditions hinder him; but the higher self protects him and wants to vouch for him, paving the way to the temple of initiation.³⁵

Finally, it is perhaps worth asking a question about continuity of the idea of the anthroposophical pan-Slavism, which had its renaissance period mostly in 1914–1916, when Goetheanum was under construction. At that time, personal relationships

³³ "The bas-relief of *Archangel Michael* (1927) is very characteristic for this artist's creative maturation. The symbolic content – the archangel statically depicted in the middle, frozen in motion, constitutes the core of the composition; on both sides are two symmetrical groups, of three forms each; their form features rhythmic dynamics, the pursuit of simplicity and harmony." See N. Samotyhowa, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

³⁴ M. Reutt, *op. cit.*, p. 9, translated from Polish by Monika Rzeczycka.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 12–13, translated from Polish by Monika Rzeczycka.

between Russian and Polish anthroposophists were flourishing thanks to common construction projects and artistic activities, attendance at Steiner's lectures and daily meetings of small groups of friends. However, later anthroposophical pan-Slavism encountered so many historical obstacles that it seemed doomed. Mass returns of anthroposophists to their native countries, caused by conscription (1916–1917), the restoration of the independent Polish state (1918) and the Polish-Russian war (1919–1921), as well as Steiner's death (1925) followed by a profound crisis of the Anthroposophical Society certainly did not favour thinking about a common pan-Slavic spiritual mission of Russians and Poles under the banner of anthroposophy. Still, in the 1930s, which were particularly difficult for Steiner's ideas, when anti-Russian sentiments in Poland were very strong, the Polish anthroposophists decided to establish a Russian group in the Warsaw Circle of the Polish Anthroposophical Society. Dr. Maria Przyborowska, who after Luna Drexler's death became general secretary, invited Alexander Pozzo, one of the most important Russian anthroposophists of the first generation, to be a leader of the group and support Polish groups in Warsaw, Lviv, Vilnius and Brest. Pozzo, who belonged to a small circle of Steiner's closest esoteric disciples and friends of Maria von Sivers, was in 1934–1939 a mentor of many Polish anthroposophists.³⁶

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³⁶ Leon Manteuffel-Szoegé's memories of Alexander Pozzo and his activity in Poland in the 1930s are now being prepared for publication.

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