

FOREWORD

The current issue of *Researches in Religious Studies* is dedicated to the academic study of esotericism, which is relatively new field of academic work that was institutionalized only in the second half of the 20th century. Although the discipline is relatively young, it has already achieved recognition in the academia. Educational programs related to the academic study of esotericism exist in several countries, including France, the Netherlands, Germany and the USA. Professional academic associations of scholars of esotericism work both in Europe and in the USA, and conferences dedicated to the academic study of esotericism have become common in different parts of the world.

In Russia, the academic study of esotericism is traditionally considered as a part of religious studies. However, understanding is emerging throughout scholars that the academic study of esotericism is an independent interdisciplinary field that is different from religious studies. In this field, scholars of different specialties, including religious studies, history, anthropology, philology and philosophy, communicate with each other in order to create a holistic image of esotericism.

A tendency to describe the academic study of esotericism as an independent field is closely related to our understanding of the place of esotericism in Western culture. One can say for sure that the problem is highly complicated. Esotericism has obvious connections with religion and art, sciences and humanities, it has been influencing them throughout the history but it is not one of these phenomena. Therefore, a new term esoteriology has emerged in Russian to describe this field of study as an independent academic discipline. The term was coined by S.V. Pakhomov in 1999 and now its popularity is continuously increasing.

The Association for the Study of Esotericism and Mysticism established in Russia in 2009 is now working to promote an academic excellence in the study of esotericism and develop the field in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The first Russian MA program dedicated to the academic study of esotericism was created in the Russian Christian Academy for the Humanities (Saint Petersburg) in close collaboration with the association, and it is working now to provide education for future scholars of esotericism.

Articles, included in this issue, should demonstrate how wide and complex the field of the academic study of esotericism is. The authors discuss such topics as esoteric currents in Antiquity (B. Dvinyaninov), alchemy (Y.F. Rodichenkov), spiritualism (V. Razdyakonov), occultism (S. Panin) and traditionalist school (S. Loginovsky, P. Nosachev). We decided to arrange the articles chronologically that should help readers to take the issue as a persistent narrative.

The issue also includes an interview with American scholar G. Magee, report about the conference dedicated to the history of alchemy that took place 27-28 of November 2015 in Smolensk (Russia) and reviews of academic publications.

Editorial board