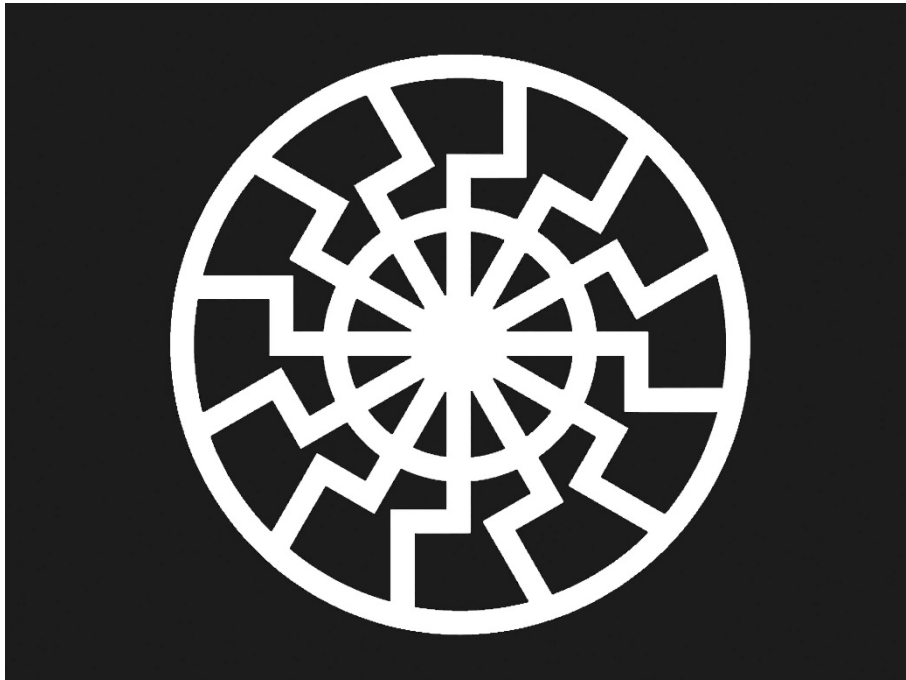


# **‘Occult Reich?’ A Reassessment of the Occult Agencies of Nazism**



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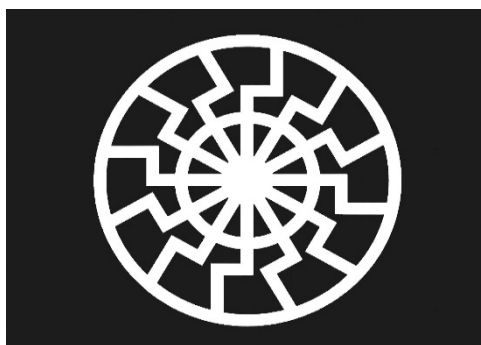
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## Abstract

For over seventy years following the end of the Second World War, various journalists and conspiracy theorists have claimed that the scale of the atrocities and destruction committed by the Nazis were directed by the supernatural, occult and Satanic forces. These claims are enmeshed with speculation that Hitler consulted with magicians and mystics during his early career, through his rise as Fuhrer and throughout the Second Word War. Attempts have been made to link Hitler to underground occult groups including the Ariosophists, the Munich-based *Thule Gessellshaft* (Thule Society) and the Spear of Longinus. This esoteric speculation is often without credible evidence and most major historians have dismissed the topic. This dissertation critically explores this historiography to reassess the most popular theories of the Nazi occult genre. It examines through primary sources and secondary studies written by historians who support and repudiate the most popular occult theories of Nazism. The work argues that whilst it is unfounded to view Hitler as an occultist, certain Nazi power structures accepted beliefs related to occultism. It is true that Hitler was deeply entranced by the Nazi symbol, the Swastika, which had occult origins, and held superstitious self-belief in his own providence. Heinrich Himmler was a mystic who consulted with occultists over his designs for Hitler's Praetorian Guard, the SS. This dissertation concludes that the occult was intrinsic to the ideology and cultish aspects of Nazism; something mainstream historians have disregarded as conspiracy theories that, despite its popularity, have no academic bearing on historical studies. However, the topic needs to be continually assessed as mythologizing amongst the extreme right continues to the present day.

# Occult Reich?'<sup>1</sup> A Reassessment of the Occult Agencies of Nazism



Nazi Black Sun Symbol<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to Joseph Brennan's 1975 book *The Occult Reich*.

<sup>2</sup> The Nazi Black Sun Flag, *Neo-Nazi Symbols*, [https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/qt-z\\_sym.html](https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/qt-z_sym.html).

## Introduction

The Second World War plunged Europe into one of the darkest periods in its history, causing the deaths of over 50 million people, including six million Jews murdered in the concentration camps. Hitler's plans for *Lebensraum* (Living Space) for the German people had ended with his suicide in the Berlin Bunker on April 30<sup>th</sup> 1945. Since then, historians have sought to understand how the Third Reich inflicted on a modern civilised Europe six years of terrible destruction. Most orthodox historians have assumed that Nazism was created from the conditions of the inter-war period and the humiliation of Germany following the First World War. Many argued that Hitler's charisma embodied the qualities of a guru or a messiah who had hypnotised millions of Germans. The messianic nature of Nazism is implicit in the insistence that the Nazi Party was more than a rational political grouping, but a movement (*Bewegung*) intent on salvaging Germany from a destructive apocalypse. There was a seeming religious fanaticism headed by Hitler's self-belief in providence and messianic notions of him as a saviour.<sup>3</sup>

Because of their openness to embrace myth, irrationalism and ritual politics, many non-academics seeking to understand Nazism have found the rational approaches of historians inadequate. Journalists with a prurient or a sensationalist approach to Nazism have sought to blame its rise on the occult, the supernatural and even Satanism. The occult is a vague term, but in this dissertation it suggests uncovering aspects of historical events normally associated with mystical forces, or at least a belief, on the part of the protagonists of the events, in the mystical and the supernatural. There is no shortage of books claiming to have uncovered the occult

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Fascism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race and Nation in Germany and Italy, 1900–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2010), 3–4.

dimension of Nazism where the Nazis took the arcane seriously or were in contact with 'hidden superiors' and cultivated superpowers. The legacy of these works has been that they have brought little academic value to the topic of Nazism. They have merely tapped into the readers imagination, giving colour to the destructive reign of Nazism as the embodiment of metaphysical evil that defies any powers of explanation.<sup>4</sup>

Understandably these books, website, articles and lectures, have been dismissed by mainstream historians and have never appeared on any school syllabus. In 1985, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke published *The Occult Roots of Nazism*. In this work he sought to separate empiricism from unfounded and wishful thinking, by arguing that books portraying the image of Nazis as occult masters were largely under-researched and based on an ignorance of primary sources. Many were littered with wild inaccuracies and conspiracy theories that tried to link Nazis to many myths and legends. By the 1970s 'Nazi Mythomania' had broken into popular fiction and cinema with such film as the *Indiana Jones Series*, *Outpost*, and *Captain America*.<sup>5</sup> There was no shortage of writing portraying Nazism outside a secular frame of reference. By the 1980s, this approach led to the belief that Nazism was driven by metaphysical forces that could not be understood by conventional historians. This dissertation sets out to establish how far an insistence on the occult dimension of Nazism is a form of 'fake history'. It will examine whether the alternative histories of the Third Reich yield any evidence that should be taken seriously by historians.

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Staudenmaier, "The Nazis as Occult Masters? It's a Good Story but it's Not History", (2014), *Aeon Magazine*, <https://aeon.co/ideas/the-nazis-as-occult-masters-its-a-good-story-but-not-history>.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), xi–xiii.

## Historiography

The first suggestion of Nazism been linked to the occult emerged during the 1920s when the German intellectual Jean Gebser argued that the near ritual nature of Nazi rallies represented the supernatural cries of the “German sub-consciousness”.<sup>6</sup> The French esoteric René Kopp, argued that Nazism reflected the future destiny of mankind. Later works, including those from the German conservative politician and former Nazi, Herman Rauschning, claimed in *Gespräche mit Hitler* (Hitler Speaks, 1940), that Hitler spoke openly about bizarre esoteric doctrines that envisioned the rise of the Aryan superman:

My policy is not a national policy in the conventional sense. It draws its criteria and its objectives from a complete and comprehensive recognition of the essential nature of life...But you can only shorten her path when she chooses to grant you the new variety...The new man is among us. He is here...I have seen the vision of the new man—fearless and formidable...<sup>7</sup>

Whether Rauschning’s testimony is valid, such strange encounters with Hitler, where he spoke with such ecstasy of a providence of creating a superman was as if he was in secret consort with some sort of supernatural force. Rauschning’s claims were later incorporated into the popular genre of Nazi occult alternative histories of the 1960s and 1970s that sought to portray Hitler as a mystic in communication with the occult.<sup>8</sup> The most famous of these books was Louis Powells and Jacques Bergier’s, *Les Martin des Magiciens* (The Morning of the Magicians) that included a chapter on Nazism entitled: “A Few Years in Absolute Elsewhere”, in which the attempt was made to link the Nazis directly to the occult. This was later followed by Trevor

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<sup>6</sup> Gary Lachman, *Jung the Mystic: The Esoteric Dimensions of Carl Jung’s Life and Teachings* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 60.

<sup>7</sup> Hermann Rauschning, *Gespräche mit Hitler* (Hitler Speaks) (London: Eyre & Spottiswide, 1940), 244, 247.

Ravenscroft's, *The Spear of Destiny*, Dietrich Bronder's *Bevor Hitler Kam* (Before Hitler Came), Michel Jean-Angebert *Les Mystiques du Soleil* (The Mysteries of the Sun), J.H. Brennan's *The Occult Reich* and Kenneth Hite's *The Nazis and the Occult*.

These books were exposed as fantasies by Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke. To counter their arguments, Goodrick-Clarke focused on the evidential links between Nazism and the Ariosophy movement, a *völkisch* sect in Austria and Germany, who espoused a mixture of esoteric theories, racism, anti-Semitism and nationalism. He argued there did exist an interesting connection between Nazism and Ariosophy through the *Thule Gessellschaft* (Thule Society).<sup>9</sup> Recent books, including Corinna Treitel's *Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (2004), Eric Kurlander *Hitler's Monsters* (2017), and Paul Rolland's *The Nazis and the Occult* (2018) have continued in this vein. Though Goodrick-Clarke conceded there was an occult component of early Nazism that should be taken seriously, this dissertation will argue that there are more important undertones to consider which shaped mainstream Nazism. Therefore, the occult agencies of Nazism is a significant topic in need of further research by historians.

## Methodology

The aim of the dissertation is to reassess and evaluate the Nazi occult phenomenon through secondary sources, both rational histories and occult books, and using their bibliographies to locate primary sources to assess their reliability. Due to the relative obscurity of the topic and the speculation of the primary source material it is not always easy to make comparisons with available secondary source material. Another

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<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), vi.



risk is the danger of conflating topics related to the Hitler cult, including “evil”, “shaman” and “magician” with speculation about any Nazi occult dimension.<sup>10</sup>

The positive side of the research is that enough documentation exists online that helps to provide a complete overview for readers into the topic and leaves opportunities for new academic approaches into studying Nazism. Archives used included the British Library’s Rare Books Collection and the Imperial War Museum Archive.<sup>11</sup>

The paper is composed of four chapters. Chapters one to three will be an examination of the most popular theories of the Nazi occult alternative histories relating to Ariosophy, the *Thule Gessellschaft* (Thule Society) and the mysticism of Heinrich Himmler. The final chapter will examine the central Nazi symbol, the Swastika. The researcher will argue that the unfounded speculation discussed in the first three chapters represented a post-war hysteria amongst alternative historians driven by a profound sense that the atrocities committed by Nazism did not belong to ‘conventional’ history. The chapters on Himmler’s occult beliefs and Hitler’s entrancement with the undeniable arcane symbol, the Swastika, will show how the orthodox history has underestimated the role played deeply by irrational myths and cultic practises that can be found at the heart of Nazism. The paper will conclude with the proposal that future historians wishing to examine the Nazi occult phenomenon, should focus on Himmler mysticism and Hitler’s entrancement with the Swastika, to integrate the topic into scholarly history.

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<sup>10</sup> Trevor Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny: The Occult Power behind the Spear which Pierced the Side of Christ* (Boston: Weiser Books, 1973), 7–9.

<sup>11</sup> The British Library Rare Books Collection contains various materials on Ariosophy.

## Chapter One

### *Ariosophy*

In Vienna in 1909 a young man entered the office of the Austrian ex-Cistercian monk and journalist, Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels (alias Adolf Josef Lanz, 1874–1954), searching for several issues of Lanz's occult magazine, *Ostara* (named after the German goddess for “spring”). The young man identified himself as Adolf Hitler and said he was impressed by *Ostara*. Lanz, moved by Hitler's shabby appearance, gave him the magazines he was looking for and money for a taxi home.<sup>12</sup>

*Ostara* was a racist broadsheet which channelled Lanz's fantasies of an eternal racial struggle between the Aryan *Gottmenschen* (god men), who originally inhabited the sunken continents of Hyperborea and Atlantis, with inferior races (Tschandals).<sup>13</sup> Lanz was also a close friend and pupil of the Germanic mystic, Guido von List (1848–1919) who claimed an ancient Germanic Aryan religion (“Wotanism”) that had been driven underground by Christianity and the modern world.<sup>14</sup> Lanz's ideas of race were bounded by a post-liberal and democratic utopia, which dreamed of establishing Aryan *Zuchkloster* (eugenic communes), where women would be oppressed and inferior races exterminated. Lanz later coined the term Ariosophy (the occult wisdom of the Aryans) in 1915 to cohere his theories and those of Guido von List.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Wilfried Daim, *Der Mann, Der Hitler die Ideen Gaab* (The Man Who Gave Hitler his Ideas) (Vienna: Dietz Verlag, 1998), 34–36.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Levenda, *Unholy Alliance: A History of Nazi Involvement in the Occult* (New York: The International Continuum Publishing Group 2006), 86.

<sup>14</sup> Matthias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 24.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Rudgley, *Pagan Resurrection: A Force for Evil or the Future of Western Spirituality* (London: Century Press, 2006), 111.

After the conclusion of the Second World War, Lanz elaborated on his encounter, claiming that his ideas had filtered down to Hitler and had authored the Third Reich. The story was to be taken up by the Austrian psychologist Wilfried Daim who claimed Hitler had avidly read *Ostara*. To corroborate Lanz's account, Daim took part in several interviews with Lanz in 1951. Lanz revealed to Daim a long-held admiration for the Third Reich. However, relations between Hitler and Lanz turned sour following Hitler having his writings banned following the *Anschluss* in 1938.<sup>16</sup> Lanz's claims later paved the way for an industry of books that suggested Hitler consulted with the occult in Vienna. For example, the former British commando Trevor Ravenscroft, claimed in the early 1970s in *The Spear of Destiny* that Hitler sought to harness the occult powers of the Spear of Longinus, the spear that had pierced Christ at the Crucifixion and was exhibited at the Hofberg Museum in Vienna. Hitler, according to Ravenscroft, had become possessed by supernatural forces that gave him powers to acquire the spear following *Anschluss* in 1938.<sup>17</sup>

Historians however, have been sceptical of this claim. The British academic Ian Kershaw cited the prevalence of plagiarism in the accounts of individuals who Daim interviewed in the early 1950s. For example, Josef Greiner's account of Hitler was found to have been plagiarised from Hitler's autobiography *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), and Kershaw concludes that Greiner's testimony was also unreliable due to his failing memory.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the Austrian scholar Brigitte Hamann, argued that Hitler never expressed interest in magazines such as *Ostara*, which only frustrated

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<sup>16</sup> Wilfried Daim, *Der Mann, Der Hitler die Ideen Gaab*, 30.

<sup>17</sup> Trevor Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny*, 59, 64–65.

<sup>18</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889–1936: Hubris* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 1998), p.59.

him with their *völkisch* worldview and led to him to remove Nazi Party associations with *völkisch* wandering scholars.<sup>19</sup>

Ian Kershaw has therefore downplayed Lanz von Liebenfels's influence on Hitler, arguing that evidence of Hitler having read *Ostara* is inconclusive. Kershaw argues that whilst Hitler would certainly have been affected by the widespread anti-Semitic atmosphere in Vienna, his forced relocation from the hostel on the *Felberstrasse* in 1909, following the shrinking of the small inheritance from his family in Linz, meant he had more important issues to think about than anti-Semitism.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Hitler's did not specifically acknowledge Lanz in any of his early speeches which was most likely due to him having read various anti-Semitic works circulating in Vienna and not just *Ostara*.<sup>21</sup> However, any evidence made by Hitler in *Mein Kampf* reflected only animosity:

...I brought the first anti-Semitic pamphlets of my life. Unfortunately, they all proceeded with the supposition that in principle the reader knew or even understood the Jewish question to a certain degree. Besides, the tone for the most part was such that doubts arose in me, due in part to the dull and amazingly unscientific arguments...I relapsed for weeks at a time, once even for months. The whole thing seemed to me so monstrous, the accusations so boundless, that, tormented by the fear of doing injustice, I again became anxious and uncertain...<sup>22</sup>

The question remains as to why Lanz von Liebenfels has been cited in many accounts of Hitler. Many historians cite similar views between Hitler and Lanz on

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<sup>19</sup> Brigitte Hamann, *Hitler's Vienna: A Portrait of the Tyrant as a Young Man* (New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2010), 222, 349.

<sup>20</sup> Allan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 41–42.

<sup>21</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889–1936*, 40–41.

<sup>22</sup> Adolf Hitler *Mein Kampf* trans., Marco Roberto (Munich: Franz Eher Nachfolger, 1925, [translated edition: 2005]), 45.

race, anti-Semitism and derogatory ideas of women, as a reason to support Lanz's authorship of Hitler's worldview. In 1905, Lanz published his most ground-breaking work on race, *Theo-zoology, or the Rites or Sodom's Apelings and God's Electrons*, which espoused his beliefs of a religious struggle between the superior and inferior races.<sup>23</sup> The bizarreness of Lanz's beliefs also led to his founding in 1907 of the *Ordo Novi Templi* (Order of the new Templars, O.N.T) at the ruined castle of *Berg Werfenstein*. Its emblem was a four-legged cross on a yellow icon shaped like a *Hakenkreuz* (Swastika).<sup>24</sup>

The historian Paul Hamm showed that Hitler's early reading material during his Vienna sojourn, would most likely have ranged from articles from incendiary pan-German firebrands such as Karl Lueger, the anti-Semitic mayor of Vienna in the 1890s, to racist thinkers such as Houston Stewart Chamberlain who Hitler would later acclaim as one of the spiritual precursors to Nazi ideology.<sup>25</sup> Many historians, including Richard Weikert cited Chamberlain's warnings on racial decay in his *Foundations of Nineteenth Century* (1899) as one of Hitler's most significant influencers, alongside Nietzsche and Oswald Spengler.<sup>26</sup>

Ian Kershaw argues that Hitler's worldview was largely practical, based on a modern understanding of race and anti-Semitism, with the solution of a national revolution intent on salvaging the Aryans from the Jews.<sup>27</sup> That Hitler undoubtedly loved Germanic prehistory and mythology, Kershaw argues, is demonstrated through his attendance at Wagner's operas. Indeed, Hitler became a life-long devotee of Wagner

<sup>23</sup> Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, *Theozoologie oder die Kunde von den Sodoms-Äfflingen und dem Götter-Elektron* (Theo-zoology, or the Rites or Sodom's Apelings and God's Electrons), trans., Stephen Flowers (Vienna: 1909 [translated edition 2004]), 81, 87.

<sup>24</sup> Joachim C. Fest *Hitler*, trans., Richard & Clara Winston (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 36; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, 113.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Hamm, *The Young Hitler: The Making of the Führer* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2017), 40.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Weikert, *Hitler's Religion: The Twisted Beliefs that Drove the Third Reich* (Washington: Regnery Time Publishing, 2016), 64.

<sup>27</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The Section Lecture: Hitler: Anatomy of a Dictator* (Reading: University of Reading, 2005), 9.

especially the opera of *Rienzi*. However, Kershaw argues that Hitler's spiritual radicalisation was only developed following Germany's defeat in World War One in 1918.<sup>28</sup>

Hitler, having been wounded by British mustard gas in October, was to learn of Germany's surrender from a hospital outside Berlin on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918. The news sent him into a rage and converted him into a nationalist intent on revenge. Military reports from his superiors in the *Reichswehr* garrison in Munich in 1919, show his worldview as hostile to Judaism. But this worldview cannot be treated in isolation because many of Hitler's fellow contemporaries were also horrified by Germany's political collapse after the defeat. Norman Stone describes Hitler's feelings as representative of many who believed in a *Dolchstoßlegende* (stab-in-the-back legend) of a conspiracy of Jews, freemasons and communists being responsible for Germany's defeat and the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, in a letter to a comrade Adolf Gemlich in September 1919, Hitler demanded the removal of the Jews from public life.<sup>30</sup> In October that year, Hitler's superior Captain Karl Mayr asked him to spy on the *Deutsche Arbeiter Verein* (German Workers Party, DAP). The meeting, where the German civil engineer and economist Gottfried Feder was speaking, was attended by half a dozen people. After a heated argument with the party leadership, Hitler was encouraged to join the party, becoming leader in 1920. The party renamed itself the *National Sozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiter Partei* (The National Socialist German Workers Party, NSDAP – the Nazi Party). Indeed,

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<sup>28</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889–1936*, 54.

<sup>29</sup> Norman Stone, *Hitler* (London: The Bloomsbury Reader, 1980), 36–37.

<sup>30</sup> "Letter between Hitler and Adolf Gemlich," *Hareetz*, (1919), <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/1.5186746>

the British historian Michael Burleigh notes that after Hitler's entry into the party his use of his oratory skills transformed him into a messiah.<sup>31</sup>

In conclusion the argument that Hitler was colluding with occult forces is a product of fantasy, as is the image of him being directed by hidden dark mystics. As to the influence of Ariosophy, there is no hard evidence to prove any sort of link between Nazism and the *völkisch* mystical seers in Vienna. Due to the absence of such evidence Hitler should not be viewed as an occultist.

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: MacMillan, 2000), 100–101.

## Chapter Two

### *The Thule Society*

Several months after Hitler came to power in 1933, *Bevor Hitler Kam* (Before Hitler Came) was published in Bavaria. This book chronicled the activities of the Turkish-German freemason and occultist, Rudolf Freiherr von Sebottendorf (1875–1945) during the Bavarian Revolution of 1919. The son of an engine driver from Dresden who had trained in Turkish occultism, Sebottendorf, began his memoir with this opening paragraph:

Thule members were the people to whom Hitler first turned, and who first allied themselves with Hitler. The armament of the coming Führer consisted – besides the Thule Society itself – of the Deutscher Arbeiterverein – founded in the Thule by Brother Karl Harrer at Munich, and the Deutsch-Sozialistische Partei, headed there by Hans Georg Grassinger, whose organ was the Münchener Beobachter, later the Völkischer Beobachter. From these three sources Hitler created the Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei....<sup>32</sup>

Writers Reginald Phelps and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, from examination of the early Nazi Party's membership, have revealed that Sebottendorf's statement was quite correct. The *Münchener Beobachter* had been a local anti-Semitic newspaper founded in Munich in 1868 by the publisher Franz Eher. Goodrick-Clarke documents that the paper was taken over by Sebottendorf in June 1918 and rebranded the *Völkischer Beobachter und Sportsblatt* (People's Observer and Sports Paper). The newspaper remained virulently anti-Semitic in its content and political orientation,

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<sup>32</sup> Rudolf Freiherr von Sebottendorf, *Bevor Hitler Kam: Urkundlich aus der Frühzeit der Nationalsozialistischen Bewegung* (Before Hitler Came: Documents from the Early Days of the National Socialist Movement) (Munich, Deukula Grassinger, 1933), 3.



and Goodrick-Clarke argued that disguising it as a sports magazine reflected the need to conceal its politics from the Socialist authorities in Munich, in order to stop it being labelled as reactionary. Goodrick-Clarke also cites evidence to support Sebottendorf's claims that Gottfried Feder and the anti-Semitic sports journalist Karl Harrer, both helped to co-found the *Deutscher Arbeiterverein* (DAP). Feder was one of Hitler's earliest followers in Munich and it is probable that Karl Harrer's *völkisch* ideas penetrated the party.<sup>33</sup>

The historian Reginald Phelps argues that Sebottendorf's claims in *Bevor Hitler Kam* have largely been overlooked by historians. The Thule Society is barely mentioned in books on the Nazi Party, including Joachim Fest's biography of Hitler, or in other works on the Bavarian revolution, and it only appears in a footnote of Allan Mitchell's *Revolution in Bavaria* (1965).<sup>34</sup> Phelps argues the Thule Society was only one of various *völkisch* groups existing before the Nazi Party which were declared heretical by Hitler. He also documents the fact that the Thule Society took part in the mobilisation of nationalist and paramilitary forces against the socialist regime of Kurt Eisner.<sup>35</sup>

The Thule Society was a secret Bavarian sect established in 1917 by the anti-Semitic politician Theodor Fritsch as an offshoot in Munich of the *Germanenorden* (German Order). This quasi-masonic group dabbled in Ariosophical ideas and produced pamphlets warning against the growing influence of Jews in German society during the First World War.<sup>36</sup> The historian Jay Hathaway documents that by early 1919 the Thule Society's membership had reached over 1,500 members in

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<sup>33</sup> Reginald H. Phelps, "Before Hitler Came: The Thule Society and the Germanenorden", *The Journal of Modern History*, 3 (1963): 245–261; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, 174–175.

<sup>34</sup> Allan Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria, 1918–1919: The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 203.

<sup>35</sup> Reginald Phelps, "Before Hitler Came", 246.

<sup>36</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 18–19.

Bavaria, with 250 members belonging to its lodges in Munich. Following the creation of the Bavarian Socialist Republic, the Thule Society was involved in counter revolutionary activity, including the abortive Palm Sunday Putsch on the April 13<sup>th</sup> 1919.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, a political workers group was founded by members of the Thule Society, Karl Harrer, Anton Drexler, Gottfried Feder and Dietrich Eckart. This group became the DAP. Hathaway shows that the party gave Hitler the means to channel his vengeful messianic nationalism and provided the blueprints for a *völkisch* revolution.<sup>38</sup>

The historian David Luhrssen describes how the political workers circle that had emerged from the Thule Society sought to create a political movement under the leadership of *völkisch* activists. Many influential figures who had been Thule members, such as Rudolf Hess, Dietrich Eckhart and Alfred Rosenberg, became part of Hitler's inner circle during his first years of power. One such potent patron of Hitler, Dietrich Eckhart became his mentor, helping to develop his oratory skills, a quality that aided the party to expand from a few hundred members in 1920 to several thousand by 1923.<sup>39</sup> Following his death in 1923, Eckhart was acclaimed as a personal mentor and friend by Adolf Hitler and his grave became a Nazi shrine. William Gillespie would argue that Eckhart was the spiritual founder of the Third Reich.<sup>40</sup> However, Ian Kershaw argues that Eckhart's relationship with Hitler has been overstated by historians such as Gillespie. Hitler, in fact, no longer needed Eckhart in the mid-1920s because his own independent political power had grown exponentially as he sought to build a mass political movement. Indeed, many of the

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<sup>37</sup> Jay Hathaway, "The Pre-1920 Origins of the National Socialist German Workers Party", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3 (1994): 443–462.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*: p.458.

<sup>39</sup> David Luhrssen, *The Hammer of the Gods: The Thule Society and the Birth of Nazism* (Washington D.C: Potomac Books, 2012), 151–59.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph Howard Tyson, *Hitler's Mentor: Dietrich Eckhart, His Life, Times and Milieu* (New York: Universe Inc., 2008), 319.

original *völkisch* leadership of the party, including Karl Harrer, were expelled from committee meetings.<sup>41</sup>

Other figures, including the émigré Baltic German Alfred Rosenberg, who in 1930, published *Der Mythos des Zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (The Myth of the Twentieth Century) and Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess, became iconic figures in the movement. However, mainstream orthodox historians have argued that the Thule Society's role in the roots of Nazism has been greatly exaggerated, particularly by occult historians and conspiracy theorists, who suggested that the early Nazi Party in its genesis had links to occult lodges. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke began to downplay the role of the Thule Society and dismiss the claims of Sebbottendorf (such as the occult reached the centre of the leadership of Nazi Germany), as examples of exaggeration for two reasons: Firstly, there is little evidence that figures such as Eckhart, Feder and Rosenberg were no more than guests at Thule Society meetings; secondly, the Nazi party under Hitler sought a national, patriotic revolution which would overthrow the Weimar Republic and undo the Treaty of Versailles, and the occult never became part of the Nazis ideological programme.<sup>42</sup>

Despite evidence to the contrary there are many myths surrounding the Thule Society. The German historian Johannes Herring argued that the myth of Hitler having attended Thule Society meetings before joining the DAP had little factual evidence.<sup>43</sup> Other myths perpetuated by Louis Powells and Jacques Bergier's *The Morning and the Magicians* described the Thule Society as an occult lodge which sought, through black magic, to harness the mysterious underground energy of the Vril-ja:

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<sup>41</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889–1936: (Hubris)*, 52.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, 150.

<sup>43</sup> Johannes Hering, "Beiträge zur Geschichte der Thule-Gesellschaft" (Contributions to the History of the Thule Society), *Bundesarchiv*, (1985): 201.

“The vril is the enormous energy of which we only use a minute proportion in our daily life...Whoever become master of the vril will become master of himself, of others around him and the world...”<sup>44</sup>

Powells and Bergier claimed that Hitler was initiated into the Vril-ja by Professor Karl Haushofer, the architect of the *Lebensraum* (Living Space) policy, during Hitler’s nine months sentence in Landsberg Prison for his part in the failed Beer Hall Putsch in 1923. They also said that Haushofer established communication with hidden mystics in Tibet that, in turn, helped him to initiate Hitler.<sup>45</sup> The claims of the Thule Society’s role in the demonic possession of Adolf Hitler were particularly directed towards the occult beliefs of Dietrich Eckhart. A letter supposedly from Eckhart to a friend before 1923, suggested Eckhart was in secret communication with these arcane forces:

Follow Hitler, he will dance, but it is I who called the tune. We will give him the means of communication with them. Do not mourn for me for I would have influenced history more than any other German...<sup>46</sup>

Ian Kershaw argued that the Thule Society was a masonic lodge during the short-lived Socialist Revolution in Bavaria. It took part in the organisation of counter-revolutionary violence against the socialist government, whilst shedding off many of its original occult ideals beyond its belief in Aryan man. It was later, following the rise of Hitler to the political leadership of the Nazi Party, did the party shake off any associations with the Thule, when Hitler expelled Karl Harrer from membership in 1921.<sup>47</sup> The argument of minimal links between the Nazi Party and the Thule Society can similarly be deduced from articles in *Völkischer Beobachter*. Hitler only

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<sup>44</sup> Jacques Powells & Louis Bergier, *Les Martin des Magiciens*, trans., Rollo Mayers, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1960), 192.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*: p.193; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, 221.

<sup>46</sup> Trevor Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny*, 93.

<sup>47</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889–1936*: (Hubris), 60.

purchased the paper following Sebottendorf's termination of the paper's funding in 1921. Detlef Mühlberger has documented the party's early articles contained various national and racial questions, that showed a transition on ideas of a *volk* (people) bound together by the spiritual unity of the German people, into a pseudo-scientific definition which reflected Hitler's beliefs on the dangers of the Jews.<sup>48</sup>

The society's occult beliefs have however remained overlooked by historians. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke documents the Thule Society's writings were influenced by the writings of Guido von List and Lanz von Liebenfels, and were included in columns of the *Münchener Beobachter*, which espoused the prehistorical spread of Aryan culture: "The Trojan and Mutaenic culture, is of Germanic origin...India and Persia bear the stamp Germanic-Aryan culture and what we later developed from the east..."<sup>49</sup>

The choice of the society to adopt the name 'Thule' referred to the ancient lost Northern continent, located somewhere between Iceland and Greenland, as described by the Greek philosopher Pytheas of Marseilles and later mentioned by the Roman poet Virgil.<sup>50</sup> Madam Blavatsky gives a brief retelling of the Thule myth in her *Secret Doctrine*, with its capital of Hyperborea, as having been the original inhabited continent of the Aryan Fifth Root Race.<sup>51</sup> In 1911, the nationalist poet Eugen Diedrichs reproduced twenty four short volumes on the Nordic sagas, appropriating the idea of Thule as the sunken Nordic homeland. The idea of Ultima-Thule (Greater Thule), lying somewhere in the Far North was adopted by the Thule

<sup>48</sup> Detlef Mühlberger, *Hitler's Voice: The Völkischer Beobachter, 1920–1933, Volume II: Nazi Ideology and Propaganda* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishers Inc., 2004): 68–69.

<sup>49</sup> Rudolf Frieher von Sebottendorf, *Münchener Beobachter und Sportsblat* (Munich Observer and Sports Paper) (Munich: Franz Eher Verlag, 1918), 1.

<sup>50</sup> "As sailors reverence your glory alone and farthest Thule servers you, and Tethys with all the new waves bids for your seeds, or whether bestow yourself..." see: Virgil, *The Georgics: A Poem of the Land*. trans., Kimberley Johnson, (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), 30.

<sup>51</sup> Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: Volume Two* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1893), 7.

Society in 1918. The historian Georges van Vrekhem gives evidence of lectures in Runes, the Edda Sagas, the Nibelung songs and suggests that members dabbled into astrology.<sup>52</sup>

According to David Lührssen, Sebottendorf in *Bevor Hitler Kam*, was not only trying to claim mentorship of Hitler but also that the party and Hitler's leadership of it relied on the Thule Society. This contravened official Nazi party history that stated that Hitler was the sole founder of the movement. Goodrick-Clarke documents the fact that Hitler had *Bevor Hitler Kam* banned by the Gestapo in 1934.<sup>53</sup> As such, historians have treated this book with caution. Goodrick-Clarke and Kershaw concluded that Sebottendorf's book was a piece of Nazi 'mythomania' written by a narcissistic adventurer.<sup>54</sup>

In balance there are demonstrable links between Ariosophy, the *Germanenorden*, the Thule Society and the formation of the Nazi party. However the association all but ended when Hitler took over the leadership. The Thule Society members and its associates Alfred Rosenberg and Rudolf Hess were marginalised. Instead of giving audience to the occult, Hitler turned to modernising propagandists such as Josef Goebbels and technocrats such as Albert Speer, Herman Göring and Fritz Todt to organise the Third Reich. They were forward-looking in their plans, including the building of the Autobahns during the 1930s and who reflected Hitler's vision of a revitalised Germany, rather than looking at a restoration of the mystical halcyon past. Overall, despite the attempts of fantasists and pseudo-historians to link Nazism to

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<sup>52</sup> Wilfried Daim, *Der Mann Der Hitler Die Ideen Gaab*, 144.; Georges van Vrekhem, *Hitler and his God: The Background to the Nazi Phenomenon* (Leersum: Stitching Aurofonds, 2006), 49–51.

<sup>53</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, 150.

<sup>54</sup> Koenraad Elst, *Return of the Swastika: Hate and Hysteria versus Hindu Sanity* (Budapest: Arktos Media Ltd, 2015), 100.

occult groups, Hitler remained opposed to occultism and never as suggested, turned his Alpine retreat at Berchtesgaden into a lodge for an occult sect.

## Chapter 3

### *The Nazi Black Order: Himmler and the SS*

In 1936 the *Reichsfuhrer* of the SS Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945) visited the tomb of the dead Saxon King Heinrich I (Henry the Fowler, 876–936), at Quedlinburg Cathedral in Luneburg. Heinrich had led the Saxons against the Magyar hordes at the Battle of Riade in 933 A.D. In a heroic victory, Heinrich made sure the Magyars never invaded his lands again. A thousand years later at the sight of Heinrich's tomb, Himmler vowed to continue the King's mission of conquering the Slavic hordes in the East.<sup>55</sup> To historians, the speech at Quedlinberg symbolised Himmler's fascination with ancient history. However, Himmler's interest in Heinrich went deeper. The historian J.H Brennan discovered documents belonging to the *Reichsfuhrer*, in which he sought to transform Heinrich's tomb into a mystical shrine for Germanic pagan rituals.<sup>56</sup> This claim has led Brennan to question how such a man, who was responsible for the Holocaust, could be in contact with supposed ghosts from the Dark Ages?

The answer lies in the mystical seers Himmler consulted between 1933 and 1945. Scholars have tended to agree that Himmler was known to have practised occultism, but they have rightly focused on his rational capacity for organising the Holocaust and the SS (*Schutzstaffel*). It is only since the publication of *The Occult Roots of Nazism* by Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke that studies of Himmler's occultism have been undertaken, particularly his patronage to the Austrian clairvoyant, Karl Maria Willigut (alias "Weisthor", 1866–1946). The French academic Christian Bouchet documents

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<sup>55</sup> "Himmler speech on Heinrich I's" - *Das Schwarze Korps* (The Black Corps), (Berlin: Das Schwarze Korps 1937), 115

<sup>56</sup> J. H. Brennan, *Whisperers: The Secret History of the Spirit World* (New York: Overlook Press: Peter Myers Publishers Inc, 2013), 15.



that “Weisthor” claimed to possess an ancestral clairvoyant memory of an extinct prehistorical Germanic tribe known as the *Irminones*.<sup>57</sup> Goodrick-Clarke argues that under Himmler’s patronage, Willigut became a rising star within the SS and quickly became a key figure of his personal think tank known as the *Das Ahnenerbe* (Ancestral Heritage Research and Teachings Society). The *Ahnenerbe* was founded by Himmler in 1935 to uncover the existence of the German people’s Nordic Aryan ancestral forebears, and to use their findings to educate the German public into the Nazi myth of master race. Indeed, Goodrick-Clarke records that Willigut was a key figure in these investigations, helping to direct sites of German pagan worship through his clairvoyant memory.<sup>58</sup> One eyewitness recollected Willigut’s occultism:

During the summer, Heinrich Himmler visited the *Externsteine* several times. We were not overly pleased. Because he stood at the prehistory in the relationship of an unhappy lover...*Weisthor* was taken with the changed image very much. That’s the way it should be; for that is the way it used to be – only bare rocks – all trees would have to fall – and he accompanied his words with his right-hand gesture...Himmler turned to *Weisthor* with the question of how old the drywall could be. Without hesitation came the answer ‘four thousand years’...<sup>59</sup>

At the centre of this Nazi spiritual renaissance stood Wewelsberg Castle near Paderborn in Westphalia. Himmler purchased the stronghold in 1933 and began an extensive restoration project that cost thirteen million marks. He sought to have the walls strengthened, the valley below flooded, the north tower rebuilt, and in the dungeons a ceremonial crypt for SS Generals was to be consecrated. Central to the development was the *SS Ober-gruppenfuhrer Tsall* (SS Generals’ Hall) which would

<sup>57</sup> Christian Bouchet, *Karl Maria Willigut: le Raspoutine d’Himmler* (Karl Maria Willigut: Himmler’s Rasputin) (Paris: Avatar Editions, 2007), 8, 15.

<sup>58</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, 177, 184, 186.

<sup>59</sup> Kirsten John Stucke, “Himmler and Willigut at the Externsteine” in Wewelsburg 1933–1945. *Kult- und Terrorstätte der SS*, 282.

feature a round table modelled on the legend of King Arthur, for the twelve SS generals of Himmler's own personal staff. On the floor, was inscribed the German occult symbol, *Schwarze Sonne* (The Black Sun).<sup>60</sup> Himmler's plans for Wewelsberg utilised a slave labour force of over 4,000 inmates from the neighbouring Niederhagen concentration camp. Adrian Weale documents that by the time Himmler halted construction in 1943, over 1,285 prisoners had died during its renovation.<sup>61</sup>

Much of Himmler's occultism stemmed from his fascination with the Middle Ages and the remnants of a past civilisation of Nordic supermen who sought to enslave inferior racial groups throughout Europe. Poems written in Middle High German such as the *Nibelungenleid* revealed to Himmler insights into this ideal Nordic past. His niece Katrin Himmler wrote that her uncle was interested in various forms of medieval masculinity which romanticised violence and chivalry. Also, his reading habits between the years 1923 to 1925, indicated an obsession with pagan lore, including studying Werner Jansen's *The Book of Loyalty* (1917).<sup>62</sup> Bill Yane writes that Himmler's fascination with this Nordic worldview resulted in the abandonment of his Catholic upbringing; he had rejected Christ and turned to Odin, Thor, and Wotan.<sup>63</sup>

The historian Peter Loewenberg has documented that Himmler's enthusiasm for Hitler during the 1920s would emerge from his crisis of self-identity following the First World War. Having failed to become an officer, Himmler's chivalrous ideals of becoming a conqueror were temporarily frustrated by Germany's capitulation in 1918. Following a failed attempt in poultry farming, in which he became engrossed in

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<sup>60</sup> Joseph P. Farrell, *Reich of the Black Sun: Nazi Secret Weapons and the Cold War Allied Legend* (Kempton: Adventures Unlimited Press, 2004), 47–48.

<sup>61</sup> Chris Mathews, *Modern Satanism: Anatomy of a Radical Subculture* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2009), 11; Adrian Weale, *The SS: A New History* (London: Abacus, 2010), 127–8.

<sup>62</sup> Martin A. Ruehl, "German Horror Stories: Teutomania and the Ghost of Tacitus, *A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 22, no.2 (2014): 129–190 (accessed: 22/10/2018).

<sup>63</sup> Bill Yane, *Hitler's Master of the Dark Arts: Himmler's Black Knights and the Occult Origins of the SS* (Minneapolis: Zenith Press, 2010), 6–7.

the German peasant way of life, he immersed himself into the various *völkisch* movements that explored alternative lifestyles and politics.<sup>64</sup> This led to his meeting with Hitler in 1922 and he soon became a loyal follower of the Nazi leader. Photographs would show Himmler attending Nazi rallies during the 1920s in constant attendance to the leader. Loewenberg argues that National Socialist ideals introduced Himmler into a cult of ancestor worship of Germany's great heroes, whilst suppressing feelings of guilt and compassion at the same time.<sup>65</sup>

Himmler's rise to power during the 1920s and 1930s transformed the SS from a personal bodyguard to Hitler of 300 men in 1928 into a 'state within a state' by the mid- 1930s. They were charged with terrorising the population and eradicating supposed 'racial undesirables', including Jews, Gypsies, the mentally handicapped and homosexuals. Michael Siemens argued that whereas the SS's sister organisation, Ernst Rohm's *Sturmabteilung* (SA), was recruited from the mass solidarity of the German working classes, Himmler's SS represented the fanatical inner circle of the party. Following the purge of the SA in the "Night of the Long Knives" in 1934, Himmler's removal of Rohm had all but eliminated the barriers to him becoming the second most powerful man in Germany. The former Nazi Albert Krebs recalled in an encounter with Himmler on a train in 1933 in which he spoke of his firm beliefs in the supernatural and Jewish demonic conspiracies.<sup>66</sup>

Central to Himmler's worldview was the vision of the SS man as the noble warrior of the Third Reich. To historians, the SS training of mental conditioning into all aspects

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<sup>64</sup> Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: A Sense of Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 45.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Loewenberg, "The Unsuccessful Adolescence of Heinrich Himmler", *The American Historical Review*, 3 (1971): 612–641 (accessed: 03/03/2018); Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler* trans., Jeremy Noakes & Leslie Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 280.

<sup>66</sup> Albert Krebs, *The Infancy of Nazism: The Memoirs of ex-Gauleiter Albert Krebs, 1923–1933*. trans., William Sheridan Allen (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976), 267.

of Nazi ideology turned each individual into the pinnacle of the Nazi elite. All SS men were required to be of Nordic appearance and over five foot nine inches tall. In 1940 Himmler announced the establishment of the *Waffen* (Armed) SS, drawn both members of the general SS and volunteers from the Nazi occupied countries. This directive envisioned a Nordic fighting force that consisted of the most racially desirable strains of the Aryan race.<sup>67</sup>

As part of his Teutonic order of knights, Himmler also established the SS-*Ordensburgen* training schools at various medieval castles. Recruits were given induction in all aspects of Nazi ideology along with a mixture of occultism, racial pseudo-science and anti-Semitism. They were initiated at candlelit ceremonies and given ceremonial daggers to signify their SS membership. At winter and summer solstice ceremonies, Himmler's SS knights were also given a *Julleuchter* lantern decorated with runes. Himmler wrote: "May each SS man see the small flame of the old year burn out with a pure and upright heart..."<sup>68</sup>

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke documents that Himmler's use of runic symbolism is found inscribed on the *SS-Totenkopf Ring* (Deaths Head Ring). Designed by Willigut, the ring symbolised life membership to the SS and was to be returned to Himmler at Wewelsberg following death in battle.<sup>69</sup>

Himmler's interests can also be found in his vigorous pursuit of an occult alternative history that claimed the Aryans had originated from Atlantis. David Barrowclough shows that various archaeologists, anthropologists and linguists cultivated into the *Ahnenerbe*, sought to find evidence of the master race across the globe. There were

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<sup>67</sup> George H. Stein, *The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War, 1939–45* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 123.

<sup>68</sup> Peter Longerich, *Himmler*, 222.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Moynahan and Stephen E. Flowers, *The Secret King: The Myth and Reality of Nazi Occultism* (Runa-Raven Press, 2001), 52.

expeditions to Tibet, South America, Finland, occupied Greece, France and the Tyrol. Indeed, the Nazi expedition to Tibet in 1938 was based on Himmler's attraction to the mysticism of Tibet and the belief that the Tibetans were the descendants of the Aryans. The leader of the expedition, Ernst Schaefer claimed that Himmler had spoken of the Aryans having invaded Tibet in prehistorical times and left their mark particularly in the Tibetan Buddhist nobility, including powers of telepathy and meditation.<sup>70</sup>

Himmler was also attracted to the Japanese Samurai, believing them to be of Aryan stock. In his foreword to Heinz Corazza's book *The Samurai: Honourable and Loyal Imperial Knights* (1937) Himmler presented his belief in the Samurai as descendants of Aryan noblemen who had given their culture to the Japanese population.<sup>71</sup> Himmler also employed the services of the Dutch historian Herman Wirth, who believed that Atlantis had existed somewhere in Scandinavia and his exclusive studies of its existence, through the Old Frisian *Ura Landa* (Chronicles), led Himmler to adopt its theories as his own.<sup>72</sup> However, Hitler's architect Albert Speer recalled that the Fuhrer had no time for Himmler's antiquarian beliefs:

Why do we call the whole world's attention to the fact that we have no past? It isn't enough that the Romans were erecting great buildings when our forefathers were still living in mud huts; now Himmler is starting to dig up these villages of mud huts and enthusing over every potsherd and stone axe he finds...We really

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<sup>70</sup> Christopher Hale, *Himmler's Crusade: The True Story of the 1938 Nazi Expedition to Tibet* (London: Bantam Books, 2003), p.184–188.

<sup>71</sup> Heinz Corazza, *Die Samurai-Ritter des Reiches in Ehre und Treue* (The Samurai: Honourable and Loyal Imperial Knights) (Berlin: Die Schwarze Korps, 1937), 1.

<sup>72</sup> Herman Wirth and Roeper Bosch, "The Question of the Rigveda", (date unspecified), *Archive.org*, 3–4, 6–8, 23–25.

should do our best to keep quiet about this past. Instead Himmler makes a big fuss of it all...<sup>73</sup>

Himmler's fantasies also led to his partnership with the famous relic hunter Otto Rahn, who in 1933 went to recover the Holy Grail from the ruined Cathar castle at Montségur in the French Pyrenees. Rahn's, *Court of Lucifer* (1935) revealed his debt to Ariosophy, *Völkisch* ideals, and neo-Paganism.<sup>74</sup>

However, there is confusion amongst occult historians whether Himmler's mysticism informed the human experiments at the concentration camps and the eugenic policies, including the *SS-Lebensborn* ("Spring of Life") that produced 12,000 Aryan babies by 1945.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, studies of Himmler including those by Peter Longerich show Himmler's occult beliefs were largely a private matter. There were however, several humiliating personal scandals related to the mystical clairvoyants on his staff. These include the disclosure of the medical records of Karl Maria Willigut from the asylum in Salzburg, which revealed his history of paranoid schizophrenia and resulted in his dismissal in 1939. However, Peter Longerich shows that Himmler continued to consult privately with Willigut during World War Two and even honoured him with a state pension.<sup>76</sup>

The significance Himmler gave to consulting with clairvoyants and practising séances has generated its own mythology. Trevor Ravenscroft claimed Himmler was a doppelganger of Hitler in league with the forces of darkness, and carrying out Hitler's bidding of racial extermination. It is also claimed Himmler believed himself to

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<sup>73</sup> Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: The Memoirs of Albert Speer*, trans., Richard & Clara Winston (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1970), 87–89.

<sup>74</sup> David Barrowclough, *Digging for Hitler: The Nazi Archaeologists Search for an Aryan Past* (Stroud: Fronthill Media Ltd, 2016), 58.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Weindling, *Victims and Survivors of Nazi Human Experiments: Science and Suffering in the Holocaust* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2015), 56; David Barrowclough, *Digging for Hitler*, 60–61.

<sup>76</sup> Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, 285; Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 55.

be the reincarnation Heinrich the Fowler.<sup>77</sup> There is certainly eyewitness evidence, including Hitler's intelligence chief Walther Schellenberg, to suggest that Himmler performed bizarre rituals at Wewelsberg. What is also clear is that much misinformation has been circulated by writers such as Ravenscroft, who suggest that Himmler's mysticism and the *Ahnenerbe* were connected to the Thule Society. There is, however, little evidence for this.<sup>78</sup>

In 1942 Himmler employed the services of the astrologer Wilhelm Wulff. Arrested during a Nazi purge of occultists in 1941 following Rudolf Hess's flight to Scotland, Wulff had been rescued by Himmler because of his interest in the Zodiac signs.<sup>79</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke shows that Himmler's employment of Wulff sought to fulfil Himmler's astrological beliefs in a German victory in the war.<sup>80</sup> This was never realised and Himmler's role in the Third Reich ended as the Allies enclosed Germany when he committed suicide on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1945.

In conclusion, Himmler was a political occultist who made esoteric ideology central to the SS. This was intermixed with his beliefs in ancestor worship, racial ideology and racial pseudo-science. Historians should not, however, conflate Himmler's occultism with his racial policies and efficient organisation of the deployment of men and equipment, which mattered most to Hitler.<sup>81</sup> Consequently Himmler's mystical beliefs have become a topic sensationalised by crypto-historians. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke concludes that this emphasis on mysticism has obscured the horrors and genocides

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<sup>77</sup> Trevor Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny*, 291–293, 307–308.

<sup>78</sup> Walther Schellenberg, *The Labyrinth: Memoirs of Walther Schellenberg, Hitler's Chief of Counter Intelligence*, trans., Louis Hagen (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 278.

<sup>79</sup> Wilhelm Wulff, *The Zodiac and the Swastika: How Astrology Guided Hitler's Germany* (Miami: Baker, 1973), 187–189.

<sup>80</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, 165.

<sup>81</sup> Julian Strube "Nazism and the Occult" in *The Occult World* ed., Christopher Partridge, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 340.

of the SS and creates a mythic aura in Nazism.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, Himmler's leadership of the SS brought about the creation of a dark esoteric order entrusted with policies of ethnic cleansing and torture. At the same time Himmler worshipped ancient pagan rituals and utilised mystics to search for a Nordic past. All these elements make the role of esotericism within this aspect of Nazism important.

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<sup>82</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 126–127.



## Chapter Four

### *The Swastika*

A major element of Nazi occult history is the Swastika. It became the official symbol of the Third Reich in 1933 and during and following the Second World War it was the icon of hatred, genocide and racism.<sup>83</sup> The Swastika was, however known long before the rise of Nazism as a Hindu symbol for “good luck” and “redemption”; with origins across various cultures around the world.<sup>84</sup> John Prince Loewenstein wrote in 1941 the symbol could be traced to its adoption by the Mayans, Native Americans and the Aztecs.<sup>85</sup>

The Swastika only entered the symbolism of modern occultism when it was adopted as the mystical seal of the Theosophical Society by Madame Blavatsky. She deemed the symbol as one of a few in the world “with inner occult meaning”.<sup>86</sup> It was also embraced by various other occultists, including the English magician Alistair Crowley and the astrologer Richard James Morrison (also known as Zadkiel).<sup>87</sup> Indeed, the German philosopher Hegel wrote that the Swastika symbolised the struggle of the individual’s quest for spirituality.<sup>88</sup> Eugenicists Eugen Fischer and Erwin Bauer saw the Swastika as symbolising the invasion of Nordic culture, a conclusion based on the discovery of a Swastika in 1868 in the ruins of Troy by the archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann. However, Peter Loewenstein argued that it’s adoption by the Germanic

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<sup>83</sup> Julius Evola, *Revolt against the Modern World: Politics, Religion, and Social Order in the Kali Yuga* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1934), 50.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Levender, *Unholy Alliance*, 58–59.

<sup>85</sup> John Prince Loewenstein, “The Swastika: Its History and Meaning”, *MAN*, 41 (1941): 49–55.

<sup>86</sup> Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: Volume II*, 99.

<sup>87</sup> Fred Gettings, *A Dictionary of the Occult, Hermetic, and Alchemical Signs* (London: Routledge: Keegan & Paul Ltd, 1981), 257; Jocelyn Goodwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 219.

<sup>88</sup> Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics and Fine Arts: Volume I*. trans., Michael Inwood, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 72.

tribes only stretched back as far as the Bronze Age through contact with Slavic tribesmen.<sup>89</sup>

The symbol was readily adopted by Germanic occultists and became synonymous with symbols of Nordic Aryan racial transcendence. This first recorded use by Aryanist occultists came when Lanz von Leibenfels flew the Swastika over Berg Werfenstein on Christmas day 1907. In the 1920s Herbert Reichstein's *Ariosophische Bibliothek* (Ariosophical Bible) described the Swastika as a symbol of the mystical transcendence of the Aryan race.<sup>90</sup> Later the symbol was adopted by Theodor Fritsch's *Germanenorden* and then by the Thule Society as a rotating Runic symbol (Aarune).<sup>91</sup> It was also displayed independently by the Romanian proto-fascist and deeply anti-Semitic National Christian Defence League (LANC) in the 1920s.<sup>92</sup>

The Swastika was adopted as the official symbol of the Nazi movement in 1920. Hitler, according to Malcom Quinn, following furious debates within the party committee on a proposed design for the new party symbol, chose an emblem based on a Hindu Swastika. Quinn argues that Hitler sought to display the Swastika within Nazi political pageantry as a symbol of the struggle of the Aryans against the Jews. Writing in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler recalled:

We National Socialists regarded our flag as being the embodiment of our party programme. The red expressed the social thought underlying the movement. White the national thought. And the swastika signified the mission allotted to us—the struggle for

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<sup>89</sup> John Prince Loewenstein, "The Swastika: Its History and Its Meaning", 54.

<sup>90</sup> Herbert Reichstein, *Ariosophische Bibliothek: Warum Ariosophy?* (Ariosophical Bible: Why Ariosophy?), (1926), *British Library Rare Books Collection*, BLL01011258387; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*: 164.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*: 144–146.

<sup>92</sup> Robert G.L. Waite, *The Psychopathic God: Adolf Hitler* (New York: The Basic Book Inc Publishers, 1977), 122.

the victory of Aryan mankind and at the same time the triumph of the ideal of creative work which is in itself and always will be anti-Semitic...<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, this image perpetuated by the Nazis of the Swastika helped the Party to draw the mass support of the German people during 1930s.<sup>94</sup> The final design chosen by Hitler was a black symbol sitting on a white disk amid a red rectangle and rotated to the right.<sup>95</sup> Anton Memminger described the symbol's myriad appearance at Nazi rallies as having almost instantaneously resulted in its subsequent display within people's homes and on various propaganda sheets.<sup>96</sup> Malcom Quinn argues that Hitler's aims of "spreading the Swastika", detached it from its earlier Hindu connotations without losing its original meaning. The sea of Swastikas at Nazi rallies dulled the senses of their participants, whilst Hitler youth members sang "*Unsere Fahne flattert uns Voran*" ("our flag flutters above us").<sup>97</sup>

However, both Malcolm Quinn and Steven Heller's studies of the Swastika have been limited in describing the lineage from Germanic occultists to the Nazi Party. Steven Heller barely devotes one chapter to links between Nazism and occultism, and gives little depth to Hitler's relationship with the symbol. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke also devoted little space to studying the Nazis appropriation of the Swastika, and Ian Kershaw presented only a convoluted lineage between *völkisch* ideals and the Nazi Party in its symbolism. What can be shown is that Hitler's entrancement with the Swastika perhaps was due to the influence of Ariosophy when he sought to uncover the ideological sources of his worldview, but this cannot be proved. The

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<sup>93</sup> Matt Zoniak, "Why Did the Nazis Hijack the Swastika?" *Mentalfloss.co*, (2014).  
<http://mentalfloss.com/article/57165/why-did-nazis-hijack-swastika>

<sup>94</sup> Malcom Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing a Symbol* (London: Routledge, 2015), 22–23.

<sup>95</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Marco Roberto, trans., 496.

<sup>96</sup> Anton Memminger, *Hakenkreuz und Davidstern. Volkstümliche Einführung in die Geheimwissenschaften* (The Swastika and the Star of David: Volk Introduction to the Secret Societies) (Würzburg: Memminger Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922), 121–123.

<sup>97</sup> David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema: 1933–1945* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), 54.

Swastika symbolised to Hitler his vision of Germany's redemption. Indeed, such pageantry, was recorded by the German journalist Konrad Heiden during the unveiling ceremony in 1921:

In 1921, Hitler's new red banner with a Black Swastika in a white disk was unfurled in the open for the first time. The effect was so inflammatory that Hitler himself was surprised and pleased. It gave Hitler one of his mightiest magical weapons ... An uncanny power emanated from the mysterious sign...<sup>98</sup>

The relationship between Hitler and the Swastika has become a subject of the Nazi crypto-historical mysteries. Jean-Michel Angebert's *Les Mystiques du Soilel* (1971), claimed that Hitler had first encountered the Swastika whilst attending singing lessons as a choir boy at the Lambach Monastery in Linz in 1898. Angebert claimed the future Fuhrer became entranced by the symbol inscribed on the monastery gates, which the abbot Theodor Hagn claimed to have brought back from the Middle East.<sup>99</sup>

In truth, the Swastika is a bizarre symbol for Nazism as it conveys a meaning of good luck that comes from many origins. However, it should be noted that Hitler was evidently entranced by the symbol and it became a potent image of the Third Reich that contributed to the dulling of the consciousness of its audiences at Nazi rallies and ceremonies. As a result, the Swastika remains one of the few only tenable aspects of the occult which can be opened as an avenue for historians to examine the arcane links within Nazism.

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<sup>98</sup> Konrad Heiden, *The Fuhrer: Hitler's Rise to Power* (New York Carroll & Graf Publishers Inc, 1944), 143–144.

<sup>99</sup> Jean-Michel Angebert, *Les Mystiques du Soilel D'Akhenaton à Mao Tsé-Toung* (The Mysteries of the Soul: From Akhenaton to Mao Tse-Tung) (Paris: Rústica, 1971), 156.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has sought to address the topic of Nazism and the occult to investigate if there is any empirical basis for future historians to seriously consider any links between them. It has shown that many myths of Nazi occult connections and secret hermetic orders were a product of post-war sensationalism and journalistic fantasy, which had the effect of derailing serious scholarly inquiry. However, there are several important pieces of information, derived from academic refutations of the alternative histories, including from Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke that suggest that occultist beliefs had an impact on mainstream Nazism. Firstly, whilst Hitler was not an occultist, he allowed the creation of a fiefdom for Himmler and his SS. This body organised itself into an esoteric order with its own occult rituals that were directly influenced by Ariosophy and by Himmler's occultist understanding of Aryanism. Secondly, Hitler seems to have retained some arcane superstitions regarding his own image as a providential and redemptive force in German history. These superstitions can be detected in his speeches, private conversations and his enchantment with the Swastika. Indeed, his all-pervasive use of the Swastika at Nazi ceremonies, often held at night with flaming torches, imparted to the Nazi movement the aura of an occultist movement. Arguably, the aura of supernatural and occult forces that 'ordinary Germans' could experience at a Nazi rally helps to explain its seductive powers.

Understanding this minor role played by occultism in Nazi ideology and policies not only brings the topic within the remit of orthodox history, but also emphasizes the

sheer heterogeneity of the Nazis. They embraced dozens of competing ideals and interpretations, some of which strayed into the supernatural.<sup>100</sup> The dissertation also revealed an obsession by pseudo-historians with Hitler as an occultist rather than Himmler, whose mysticism exemplified competing visions within the Third Reich. By taking a new approach based on evidence, orthodox historians could uncover the driving force behind the successes of Nazism in seducing the German people.<sup>101</sup>

Unfortunately, occult myths of Nazism as an esoteric system has continued to enjoy a life of its own, and has led to Neo-Nazis websites and books dedicated to perpetuating alternative histories of neo-Nazism, drawn from *völkisch* ideology, Hinduism, and science fiction. In these Hitler is portrayed as a mystical shaman. Symbols including the Black Sun, Runes, and the Swastika have given birth to Neo-Nazi esoteric theories, including those held by the Chilean diplomat Miguel Serrano.<sup>102</sup> The historian Henrik Bogdan shows these esoteric theories of the Third Reich were shaped by beliefs in Atlantis, UFOs, Shambala and rune magic.<sup>103</sup>

The image of mythopia of white identity and white resistance among the Far Right and Neo-Nazis in America and Europe has emerged to counter the rising tide of globalisation. This is especially relevant in recent years with the rise to prominence of the American Alt Right. Controversial figures, including Donald Trump's advisor Steve Bannon and Alt Right leader Richard Spencer have provided esoteric undertones to Trump's election victory, whilst reviving Nazi occult theories.<sup>104</sup> This may be viewed as another part of the long history of the intersection between

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<sup>100</sup> Karla Poewe, *New Religions and the Nazis* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 149.

<sup>101</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, vii.

<sup>102</sup> Miguel Serrano, *Adolf Hitler: El último Avatâr* (Adolf Hitler: The Ultimate Avatar) (Madrid: Settimo Sigillo-Europa Lib. Ed, 1984), 9, 203.

<sup>103</sup> Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djudevic, *Occultism in a Global Perspective* (Abingdon: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 125.

<sup>104</sup> "Satrivi Devi: The Mystical Fascist Being Resurrected by the Alt Right," *BBC News*, (2017), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-41757047>

American Conservative politics and the occult that dates back to Madame Blavatsky's establishment of the Theosophical Society in New York the 1880s.<sup>105</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke argued that these beliefs formed part of the white esoteric counter-culture, and laced with the rising tide of racist violence with occult explanations of the rise of Nazism, they allow generally poor white males to enact fantasies and find status.<sup>106</sup> Writing thirty years ago Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke argued that this presented a challenge for governments to combat racial discrimination.<sup>107</sup> His warning has even more relevance today. Overall the topic of the occult and Nazism is a fascinating aspect of pseudo-history that requires to be taken seriously by historians as Neo-Nazism once again begins to extend its tentacles into Western politics.

Word Count: 9,987

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<sup>105</sup> "Steve Bannon and the Occult: The Right Wing's Long, Strange Love Affair with New Age mysticism," *Salon Magazine*, (2017), <https://www.salon.com/2017/04/23/steve-bannon-and-the-occult-the-right-wings-long-strange-love-affair-with-new-age-mysticism/>

<sup>106</sup> Brian Phillips, "The Magic Thinking of the Far Right," *The Ringer Magazine*, (2018), <https://www.theringer.com/2018/12/12/18137221/far-right-occult-symbols>

<sup>107</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 306.

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**Visuals:**

(Image) “The Nazi Black Sun Flag, Neo-Nazi Symbols, [https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/qt-z\\_sym.html](https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/qt-z_sym.html)