

Introduction:

Nordic Ideology, Religion and Scholarship

Horst Junginger and Andreas Åkerlund

1. The Relevance of the Nordic Myth

Although our modern understanding of the world seems to oppose timeworn stereotypes such as the “North” and proscribed ideologies such as Nordic or *völkisch* ones, the Nordic myth is perhaps only hibernating and may be reinvigorated if time and circumstances allow. In the current financial market crises, many and sometimes tough accusations have been voiced against those lazy people in the southern parts of Europe who would squander the money of hard working people further to the north. If they continue with both their incapability and unwillingness to stick to Northern standards in terms of economy, labour and a less idle attitude toward life, the only appropriate answer would be to discipline them or possibly show them the door. And not far below Greece the black abyss lies in waiting to overrun Europe exploiting its social welfare system and the wreck of its prosperity.

The ideological borderlines of European Nordicism have, quite obviously, shifted from eastern Communism and western Capitalism towards the south in geographical as well as in political and religious concerns and are now primarily directed at the spread of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism. And again the question becomes pressing how Europe and the North may attain a defensible coherence by means of common ideas and values. Since identity formations generally function better by way of distinction, the fight against everything perceived as dangerous and hostile usually supersedes all efforts for a positive definition of Europe rapidly. Ideological unity still seems to be unachievable without an ideological enemy. In states of tension, intellectuals often fall prey to or even profit from the conceptualisation of otherness, having no qualms about acting against the principles of scientific universalism and the international constitution of scholarship.

Due to the general rejection of everything connected with National Socialism any new form of Nordicism will, at least in the respectable parts of our societies, have to take a detour around ordinary forms of nationalism or proto-Nazi ideas. Therefore, it is little wonder that the political programmes of conservative revolutionaries are undergoing a revival these days and that socio-biological views centring on a *homo europaeus* in the tradition of Madison Grant (1865–1937), the influential anti-miscegenation activist and propagator of a “scientific racism”, are booming. Beyond that, eugenic and racialist ideas proliferate all over Europe’s far right and Northern imaginations are bundled into fascist sheaves anew. The *European Declaration of Independence* of Anders Behring Breivik (born 1978) is greatly influenced by Madison Grant’s postulation of genetic purity, which Breivik takes as an

ideological tool for the defence of Europe against the Islamic intruders from outside and the Marxist adversaries from within.¹ Breivik e-mailed his manifesto to some 1,000 addressees shortly before the Oslo blast and the Utøya massacre on 22 July 2011, many of them members of the Christian right, but also Pagan Odinists. While Breivik concedes Odinism is part of the nascent movement against the political establishment, he strongly emphasised that only a powerful Christian self-consciousness in the tradition of the Templars would have the power to overthrow multiculturalism, cultural Marxism and the Islamic threat. Posing the rhetorical question of whether Odinists could become part of a resistance movement based on Christian values, he answered in the affirmative: “Even Odinists can fight with us or by our side as brothers in this fight as long as they accept the founding principles of PCCTS, Knights Templar and agree to fight under the cross of the martyrs.”² Breivik’s Nordic worldview seeks to transcend a narrow-minded understanding of Christianity into a rightist interconfessionalism, similar to the sorts seen in the 1930s and 40s.

In his own words, Breivik studied Old Norse mythology and had “a lot of respect for Odinist traditions”, thinking highly of them as an important part of Norwegian culture and identity. He nevertheless left no doubts about his own religious commitment and the ideological superiority of Christianity compared to Nordic Paganism:

Odinism is significant for the Nordic countries but it does not have the potency to unite us against such a devastating force as Islam, cultural Marxism/multiculturalism and capitalist globalism.³

Only the reinvigoration of a military Christian spirit would avert the ongoing attack on the occidental way of life. As Europe is at the edge of disaster, immediate action, indeed a holy war, would be necessary to prevent its extinction. The Christian basis of Breivik’s imaginations of the North unfortunately passed widely unheeded in the public debate and did not attract the scholarly attention it deserves. Since Christian terrorism is generally conceived as a contradiction in itself, someone like Breivik appears to be completely alien to the majority. His view of things is therefore relegated from a possible option within the mainstream discourse of the radical right to a state of mental illness. Breivik must be crazy, otherwise he could not

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- 1 Breivik’s manifest *2083: A European Declaration of Independence* is to be found all over the web. It considers 2083 the year when the conservative revolution ought to be completed. Four hundred years earlier the Great Turkish War, the War of the Holy League initiated by Pope Innocent XI, had started to expel the Ottoman troops from Europe in 1683. 2083 means 2011 by way of adding 8+3 in the second part of the number.
 - 2 Breivik, *A European Declaration of Independence*, p. 1360. PCCTS is the abbreviation of *Pauperes Commilitones Christi Templique Solomonici*, the Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon (Christian Military Order of the Temple).
 - 3 Ibidem, p. 1361.

have committed such crimes, such ungodly deeds in opposition to all human values and Christian tenets.⁴

On a less dramatic level and far away from religious-based violence, Northern myths also prevail in our present day culture, where they normally appear in the form of romantic idealisations of the North. The clearness and naturalness of the Scandinavian landscape and people are not only cited by the leaflets of tourist agencies but have found widespread, almost global, acceptance. Scandinavia's welfare system continues to be appreciated as a symbol of Nordic solidarity and as model of how a wholesome folk community could and should function. Other examples may be added to one's liking. Nothing is wrong with a particular predilection for Nordic literature, Nordic jazz or Nordic crime movies even if those preferences come along with an element of resentment toward other forms of film, music and literature. If we are honest to ourselves, we have to concede that our own mindset is not always as free of bias as we like to imagine. Individual preferences for what people like to label "Nordic" should therefore be accepted as unproblematic, but not without question, as it is difficult to differentiate a clear line where the tolerable inclination ends and the questionable preconceptions start. Well before the advent of fascism, plenty of myths and illusions connected with the North flourished all over Europe in various branches of the arts as well as in tourism and sales promotion without exceedingly adverse effects. But it is quite evident that economic and political depressions, not to speak of the chaotic aftermath subsequent to military conflicts, inevitably generate derogatory prejudices of all sorts and reinforce the tendency towards aggressive encapsulations or even hatred against others. To put a stop to violent clashes becomes almost impossible when feelings have started to run high. Perhaps only education and knowledge acquired long time in advance may have the necessary countervailing effects when the going gets tough.

2. The Starting Point of this Volume

The present volume originates from an international symposium on "Nordic Ideology between Religion and Scholarship. Pagan and Christian Imaginations in Scandinavian-German Scientific Exchange in the First Half of the 20th Century" that was organised by the authors of this introduction and that took place at the University of Uppsala from 23–25 August 2010. Participants came from Sweden, Germany, Finland, Norway and Australia. It was our intention to address with it the religious and scientific contexts in which the idea of the North evolved into a mainstay of extreme nationalism not only in National Socialist Germany but also in a number of pro Nazi-German movements in Scandinavia. Based on the initial ob-

4 It should be noted here that Christian terrorists, unlike Islamic terrorists, are considered to act in contrast and not in compliance with their religion and holy writ.

ervation that the imagination of the North could prosper equally on Pagan as well as on Christian premises, the religious indistinctness of the Nordic idea required, in our view, scientific clarification. The revival of Nordic and Old Norse myths was not restricted to an anti-Christian heathendom, where it served as spiritual fundament of a new Pagan religion. Also within the realm of Christianity, especially among Lutheran Protestantism and *völkisch* German Christians, the idea of a Nordic heritage found a firm rooting. Common features in the intersection of Nordic types of Christianity and Paganism included the deeply ingrained antagonism against Judaism and Bolshevism in first place. To a lesser extent the imperialism of the British Empire functioned as political antipode to consolidate the idea of a Nordic alliance especially in the course of World War I and II. After 1945, the political post-war constellation compelled a modification of the old enemy images that were partly abandoned, regenerated or complemented by new spectres of exaggerated libertarianism carried to extremes by the hippie subculture.

In addition to the strictly religious parts of the Nordic idea, the aim of the conference was directed at a new scholarly occupation with the North that increased considerably in the first half of the twentieth century. From a narrow-minded religious or anti-religious perspective the amalgamation of religion and science looks as it would be improper or mutual exclusive. On the contrary, however, the correlation between scientific and religious constituents is an indispensable prerequisite for any successful religion or religious worldview in modern times. Therefore, disciplines like archaeology, Germanic and Nordic studies, ethnography, folklore studies, history, prehistory and especially religious studies featured prominently in the shaping of what counted as “North” and “Nordic”. In search for the inner bonds of the assumed fellowship of all Nordic men and peoples, a science-based religious perception turned out to be the crux of the matter. Questions of spiritual kinship became closely intertwined with questions of biological lineage. Since the natural and biological sciences totally failed to produce any definitive evidence of a Nordic race or of hereditary traits of its members, other factors had to constitute the community of the North and establish a reliable border dividing between Nordic and un-Nordic. A combination of religious and scientific explanations provided the ideological basis for the setup of a commonly shared Nordic identity with the final goal of justifying the supremacy of the North and rationalising a ‘natural’ contradiction between people of Nordic descent and their opponents.

The conference also wanted to shed light on the differences between Scandinavia and Germany with regard to the perception of the Old Norse heritage and its role for the construction and reconstruction of the Nordic Myth. It is obvious that the use of Old Norse material to forge the nation’s past differed considerably between the Scandinavian countries, possessing a lot of pre-Christian antiquities, and Germany, which had no remnants of that time. On both sides of the Baltic, the “North” was thus perceived and defined in different ways long before the period treated in this volume. Any comparative approach therefore has to be attentive to these variations of the same pattern “North” resulting from different historical

conditions. But Germany and Scandinavia were no strangers to each other since there has always been an intensive contact over the Baltic Sea. Contact does however rarely mean equality. At least since the nineteenth century, Germany was an important, if not the most important, reference point or even role model for Swedish intellectual, military and economic elites. At the same time, German intellectuals such as the brothers Grimm showed great interest in Scandinavian pre-Christian culture, using it as a mythological fountain of youth for the German nation. This relationship, formulated as a *Wahlverwandschaft* (elective affinity) between the “Germanic peoples”, is vital for the understanding of the contributions in this book.

The huge impact of the German academe on the intellectual life in Scandinavia and the close cultural contacts between the two regions do however raise the question of how ideas and ideologies ‘travelled’ between them. This addresses the important question of intellectual transfer through publications and personal contacts. The idea of transfer does however mean that both the dislocation and relocation of ideas always entail reinterpretations, which have to be adapted to new political and cultural circumstances. Transfer studies concerning the scientific and *völkisch* Nordicism would not only show patterns of selective reception based in the different scientific and cultural contexts of Germany and Scandinavia, but also help to problematise the idea of a shared image of the North on both sides of the Baltic Sea.

The symposium’s main objective was to fathom the ideological principles and intellectual depth of European Nordicism. Owing to the great number of mythologems that have gained currency in various subject areas under the umbrella term “North”, a reflective interdisciplinarity is needed to deal with the iridescent and multifaceted character of the Nordic idea adequately. It is not easy to apply stable categories to a rather unstable and frayed topic and develop tenable generalisations in so doing. Therefore we thought it important to bring together different scholarly approaches and methodologies to overcome a mere phenomenology of glimmering ideas and repulsive behaviours characteristic of the *völkisch* or Nordic movement. Only if we widen our disciplinary perspective and sharpen our theoretical tools it will be possible to deal with the ramifications and heterogeneous character of the Nordic idea. The question of how the situation in Scandinavia coincided or stood at odds with the German understanding of the North still waits to be answered on the background of a broad analysis of European politics, religion and culture. As a matter of course, international cooperation has to be strengthened in the case of a transnational attempt at a better understanding of Nordic imaginations. Although history does not repeat itself, the reinvigoration of the North as an ideological reference point to cluster fears and threats connected with the East, the West or the South is far from being a purely scientific issue in the world of today. The success of populist right-wing parties everywhere in Europe and the devastating activities of terrorist cells and lone fighters in their wake demonstrate the contemporary relevance of the Nordic myth in a blatantly obvious manner.

Five months after the symposium on “Nordic Ideology between Religion and Scholarship” we held another international congress at the University of Uppsala

from 17–18 January 2011 on “Sven Hedin and His Relationship with Germany: An Elective Affinity Based on Mutual Sympathies”. Two contributions of that gathering – the one by Isrun Engelhardt and the one by Harmut Walravens – have become part of the present collection of articles. Both conferences arose from a research stay of the German signatory of this preface in Uppsala that resulted from a generous grant of the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. It is my particular desire to thank the foundation in Stockholm for the bestowal of its esteemed Humboldt Award that gave me the opportunity for an intensive exchange as scholar in residence at the Department of History at Uppsala University. Many thanks go to the History Department and the Forum for German Studies (*Forum för Tysklandsstudier*) in Uppsala for their logistic backing. The Forum for German Studies also supported both conferences financially. The main funding however came from the Swedish Research Council and the Torsten and Ragnar Söderberg’s Foundation. From my German perspective I cannot do otherwise but praise the dependable and unbureaucratic way in which both institutions allocated their subsidies.

3. Particular Aspects of the Nordic Myth as Presented in this Volume

The first part of the book provides clarification of what usually figures into the Nordic idea and ideology. Uwe Puschner starts with an historical survey of the emerging *völkisch* movement and the intrusion of its political slogans into the public discourse in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century. He makes clear that *völkisch* worldviews were based on certain historical premises and accompanied by particular linguistic characteristics, distinguishing the literal meaning of the word “folk” and its derivations from related semantic fields around notions such as ethnicism, chauvinism, conservatism, jingoism, nationalism, Nordicism, patriotism, populism, racism and such like. The well-known impossibility of translating the German expression *völkisch* into other languages is caused by the glimmering nature of the *völkisch* ideology itself. Even today, scholars are bothered with definitional problems and try to determine the specific nature of the *völkisch* concept properly. Puschner outlines a large part of the relevant literature on various aspects of the *völkisch* idea and movement. He brings to mind how difficult it is to achieve appropriate generalisations in the complicated habitat where the Nordic mindset evolves. Particularly in the transition towards “normal” forms of national hyperbole, problems differentiating the precise meaning of the *völkisch* or Nordic surplus increase. Specifying the role of the German paradigm appears therefore as plausible option to attain a better understanding of the ideological content and function of *völkisch* Nordicism in Europe.

Horst Junginger treats in his article the question of whether the general trend towards a non- or anti-Christian interpretation of the North in the SS and related organisations was really representative of the situation in National Socialist Germany as a whole. Contrary to the assumptions of the so-called historiography of the church struggle, we have in fact no reliable data of the extent of the estrangement from Christianity and the breadth of the interest in founding a new heathen religion. None of the various Pagan groups in Germany succeeded in imparting its religious agenda to the SS or gained any significant influence in the Third Reich. Quite the reverse, their proverbial and well-kept sectarianism constituted a key obstacle to the forming of a new Nordic religion. In fact, almost all branches of organised Paganism fell under the surveillance of the SD, the Secret Service of the SS, being considered a menace to the unification of the German people. Though NS politicians frequently used the anti-Christian impetus of the *völkisch* religious movement to put pressure on the churches, Pagans failed to shift National Socialism in the direction of a Nordic, Germanic, or Indo-Germanic religion. This notwithstanding, it has to be conceded that a significant part of the SS leadership and a considerable number of intellectuals sympathetic to organisations such as the Ahnenerbe of the SS were in search of a new Nordic worldview encompassing elements of a Pagan religion. That this kind of religious seeking would have led to church-like structures, the establishment of a Pagan priesthood and the creative “invention” of novel gods and dogmas appears to be quite unlikely. Treating the SS Ahnenerbe, the brain trust of Himmler’s black order, and its activities in terms of a conventional think tank and not as spearhead of a new Pagan religion, Junginger pleads for a better distinction between supernatural religions and intermundane worldviews, with an interesting contact zone in between.

Section two deals with the ideological absorption of intellectuals in Germany and Sweden who put emphasis on particular aspects of the Nordic myth. Debora Dusse explores at the beginning how a number of politically and ideologically involved scholars such as Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (1881–1962), Bernhard Kummer (1897–1962) and Åke Ohlmarks (1911–84) managed to include the system change that took place after World War II in their scientific agenda. Following the idea of a “surplus value” of Eddic literature, Dusse’s starting point is the observation that academics working on Old Norse material had an explicit or implicit interest in transcending the aridity of academic scholarship towards worldview issues related to the demands of one’s own folk and life. Translating and writing commentaries on the *Poetic Edda* and the *Snorra Edda*, as adapting features of Norse mythology to original literary works, provided these intellectuals with the opportunity to expound their political views in scientific guise. This occurred in marked contrast to the marginal importance of the Eddic tradition in scientific contexts (in opposition to political ones) in previous times when the focus regarding the Old Norse tradition had been on the Icelandic sagas. The main reason for that bias was the primacy of the interest in Nordic or Germanic culture, of which religion was only one aspect.

Another reason arose from a different reading of the Eddic texts and the mythological value attributed to them regarding their capacity to function as a source for the resuscitation of an Old Norse religion. The spectrum of interpretations ranged from the idea of the Edda as a Germanic or Nordic bible of *völkisch* Pagans to treating the texts as a strictly literary tradition transmitted in Iceland in Christian times. Hence Dusse underlines the various ways in which the reception of the Eddas evolved among philologists, historians of religions as well as in Pagan contexts before and after 1945.

What happened to the Nordic or *völkisch* strain within Old Norse studies after 1945? This question is approached by Bernard Mees in his contribution on Walter Baetke (1884–1978). Professor of history of religion in the Third Reich and of Nordic philology in the German Democratic Republic at the University of Leipzig, Baetke is probably best known for his 1942 study *Das Heilige im Germanischen*. After the war, Baetke turned more surely to Old Norse mythology, where he continued developing his prewar reputation as a critic of romantic excess. He moreover played an important role for the re-shaping of religious studies in both parts of Germany. Criticised recently for his radical source criticism, Baetke seems to have adopted a quite transformed attitude toward the studies of Old Germanic Heil after 1945. Yet was does Baetke's skepticism mean for the modern-day understanding of Heil in Old Norse and Germanic studies? Did he become a hypercritic after 1945 or was his work from the Nazi period itself tainted by the obvious association of *Königsheil* with the Führer cult? Dealing with these kinds of questions, Mees analyses the context of Baetke's understanding of Heil in light of recent studies of Germanic antiquity, post-war academic apologetics and influential discourses of Aryanism, leadership and charisma, which prevailed in the years of the Nazi dictatorship. Whereas the fact that Baetke's political opposition to National Socialism was grounded on a conservative Christian point of view is beyond question, his scholarly position regarding Old Norse studies appears more ambivalent and open to interpretation, as Mees shows.

In the case of the German-Dutch amateur historian Herman Wirth (1885–1981), his classification as a staunch propagator of National Socialist Germanophilia is unambiguous and leaves little space for reservation. As founding member of the predecessor organisation of the SS Ahnenerbe and inventor of what he himself titled *Geistesurgeschichte*, Wirth can be seen as a paradigmatic model of Germany's scientific decline in the time of fascism. The article by Luitgard Löw casts fresh light on Wirth's work after his exclusion from the Ahnenerbe in 1938. Already at the beginning of 1939, Wirth approached the Swedish National Antiquarian Sigurd Curman (1879–1966) with a treatise on Scandinavian rock art sites that would reveal the symbolism of an ancient Indo-Germanic religion. Wirth moreover claimed that the ideograms he had detected during two expeditions on behalf of the Ahnenerbe in Sweden in 1935/6 would be the definite proof of a primeval Nordic civilisation, which, however, had been over-layered and partly destroyed by Christianity

in later times. Wirth's interpretation of the runic alphabet in particular was intended to provide material evidence of the high level of civilisation the Germanic forefathers had reached long before the advent of alien traditions such as Jewish Christianity. Wirth occupied himself with all sorts of "Nordic" signs, cultic symbols, writing systems and iconographic remnants, merging them together without consideration of geography or dating. On the basis of a wide variety of studies, he detected age-old symbols, myths and narratives, which he used to imaginatively reconstruct a primeval Indo-Germanic worldview that would have originated from the Arctic and have gone back to Palaeolithic times. With the handwritten excerpt from a manuscript titled *Den store Gudens äldsta runor* (The Great God's Oldest Runes), Wirth hoped to convince the Swedish antiquarian Curman to enable his admission into the Swedish academe. Since the book has not been discovered yet, the summary preserved by Curman in his archival records in Stockholm is of great significance for a better understanding of Wirth's Nordic *völkisch* mythology. Given the importance of Wirth for the *völkisch* movement as such, we thought it helpful and reasonable to include an English translation of Wirth's treatise on The Great God's Oldest Runes as addendum at the end of this volume.

Anders Gerdmar is concerned with another vital aspect of *völkisch* Nordicism within the Protestant context, that is to say with an explicit Christian form of *völkisch* antisemitism. It was not only among Pagans, but also among German Christians that the Jewish people functioned as ideological counter-model against which almost all positive values could be set against. Gerdmar's analysis of the Protestant theologian and Luther specialist Erich Vogelsang (1904–44) reveals how a *völkisch* reading of the anti-Jewish statements of the great sixteenth century reformer functioned as religious and political justifications of the Third Reich's persecution policy. Studying the precursors of National Socialist exegesis in German Protestant theology, Gerdmar saw himself confronted with the question how to gauge the general nature of the relationship between Protestantism and Judaism. The Protestant faith had been such an important ideological element in German culture that its anti-Jewish impetus must have had an extraordinary impact on the shaping and spreading of antisemitic resentments. This holds true for Protestant currents of all denominational shades but particularly for upright proponents of Lutheran theology. For that reason, Gerdmar focuses on Protestant confessional and enlightenment theology with regard to their common theological roots and stance towards Judaism. He argues that fundamentals of Protestant theology such as the Law-Gospel distinction not only favoured a dichotomy where Jews represented the negative side, but that this trace can be found in both of the otherwise divided lines in German Protestantism.

Lena Berggren presents the Swedish Manhem Society as one of the most important Swedish pro-Nazi associations. The society was founded in September 1934 in memory of the scientist and writer Olaus Rudbeck (1630–1702) who had published a large treatise *Atland eller Manhem* at the end of the seventeenth century

to prove that Sweden should be regarded as the legendary island Atlantis and, furthermore, as the cradle of civilisation. The main intent of the Manhem Society was to promote the national cause apart from ordinary party politics by way of a national education campaign. During the decade of its existence, some 400 public lectures were held to enlighten the Swedes of their glorious heritage and its responsibilities for the present. The term ultranationalism used by Berggren describes the intention of the Manhem Society very well. Its main characteristics were a romanticist nationalism, opposition to Western democracy, political and social elitism, cultural criticism, racism, antisemitism and a particular inclination towards National Socialist Germany, which increased during World War II. The Nordic ideology of the Manhem Society lacked the anti-Christian impetus of German Pagans. From the perspective of its followers and sympathisers, a revival of the Nordic heritage definitely ought to take place on Christian, i.e. on Protestant grounds. Hence, a recurring theme of the society's agenda was the call for a second reformation and the emergence of what was named an Evangelical Nordic Faith. The most frequent theme of these lectures, however, was the subject of race and Judaism presented in different variations and often intertwined with strands of cultural history and religion, placing the society in a definite *völkisch* context.

Using the example of three Swedish lecturers at German universities, Andreas Åkerlund considers in his paper the question of in what way and in which academic fields National Socialist Germany was attractive to Swedish scholars in the 1930s and 40s. It goes without saying that the change of government in Germany that brought the Nazis to power generated a prolific climate for the intensification of the existing scientific relations between the two countries. Germany's isolation in the aftermath of World War I had prompted politicians and higher education officials to try to recover and intensify scholarly ties, lest they become entirely disconnected from the international developments and lose the leading scientific position Germany had obtained in the nineteenth century. The appointment of Swedish lecturers at German universities has to be understood as part of a general strengthening of Scandinavian studies, which received a boost after 1933. To adapt themselves to the new political situation, several German universities tried to acquire a Nordic profile by enhancing Old Norse and modern Scandinavian studies. Particular specialisations selected by these universities for implementation depended not only on local preconditions but also on the interest and assertiveness of the actors involved. On the Swedish side a national society for the preservation of Swedishness abroad (*Riksföreningen för svenskhetens bevarande i utlandet*) assailed the financial, organisational and ideological consolidation of lectureships in Germany. In combination with normal forms of establishing academic relations, cultural propaganda was a matter of particular importance. Interestingly, the Nazi seizure of power did not alter the mutual appointment of lecturers in Sweden and Germany in principle. Rather it opened up a creative leeway to negotiate the financial terms and ideological arguments for such kind of scientific exchange anew.

The migration of the Nordic idea in geographical and spiritual regard is the topic of the third section. Hartmut Walravens's focus centres upon the relationship between Sven Hedin (1865–1952) and the German scholars Wilhelm A. Unkrieg (1883–1956) and Ferdinand Lessing (1882–1961). In both cases it becomes apparent how important the support of the famous Swede was for the work of these German scholars. Stemming from a long established friendship between Sweden and Germany, the intellectual companionship survived, in Hedin's, case three different forms of government in Germany: monarchy, dictatorship and democracy. Needless to say, Hedin's conduct during the time of National Socialism is of particular interest for historians although this cannot be understood properly without taking his basically monarchic orientation into consideration. Unkrieg as well as Lessing profited very much from their connection with the world-celebrated Swedish explorer, both financially, because of work done for Hedin, and in terms of enhanced reputations resulting from the contact with him and his explorations. Hedin benefited equally from these two excellent German orientalists and their knowledge of the pertaining languages and historical background, which enabled him to utilise and publish the material of his expeditions to Inner Asia on a sound basis.

Hedin's fame and public impact depended to a large extent to his magnetic personality and his organisational talent in preparing, conducting and exploiting his surveys of formerly uncharted or even unknown parts of the world. Contrary to possible expectations, Hedin's cooperation with the two German orientalists shows little political or ideological content. While Hedin undeniably held Nordic views and believed in a natural alliance between the two Nordic countries Sweden and Germany, he more strongly adhered to a traditional antagonism toward Russia and the Soviet Union. For him, Germany ought to help Sweden overcoming this obstacle in order to return, sooner or later, to the former status of a great power in Europe that Hedin longed for so eagerly. His journeys to Asia pursued not at least the objective of strengthening the geopolitical position of Sweden against the un-Nordic imperialism of the Russians and British. As a staunch Lutheran Protestant, Hedin remained entirely immune to any Pagan influence whatsoever. Due to that, his Nordicism was more a sort of conventional nationalism lacking the *völkisch* bias by and large.

In her contribution, Isrun Engelhardt approaches two attempts to reach the Tibetan capital and Holy City of Lhasa, one that had been undertaken by Sven Hedin at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century and one by Ernst Schäfer (1910–92) in 1938/39. Although the quest for Tibet quickly got tied up with esoteric and spiritual imaginations, Hedin's interest in Tibet was fairly devoid of mythological undercurrents. It was a matter of down-to-earth purposes rather than of religious fantasies. The Swedish explorer's thoughts were on geographical and typographical matters, although he did not forget to promote his personal fame in so doing. Surely Hedin's explorations of Inner Asia have to be seen in the context of the so-called Great Game, viz the strategic rivalry for supremacy in Central

Asia between Great Britain and Russia. Hedin succeeded quite well in maintaining an independent position between the Russian bear and the British lion, as they both stretched out into the regions east of Russia and north of India. Compared to the imperialist greed of the British invasion, as manifested so visibly by the Younghusband expedition of 1903–4, Hedin's project was much closer to the interests of the Tibetan people. He nevertheless did not succeed in reaching the forbidden city of Lhasa, which had been one of his main goals since the end of the nineteenth century. A gifted author and an excellent public relations manager for himself, Hedin produced a great number of popular travelogues, appearing in many translations and editions and attracting tremendous interest in Europe. Ernst Schäfer, a young German zoologist, followed in his steps. The Tibet expedition that Schäfer undertook in 1938 in connection with the SS Ahnenerbe brought his team to the Tibetan capital and the famous Potala Palace in January 1939. When Schäfer returned back to Germany in August 1939, he was met by an enthusiastic reception. In order to analyse the material he had collected in Tibet, a new branch of the SS Ahnenerbe for Research on Inner Asia and Expeditions was established under Schäfer's directorship at the beginning of 1940. Three years later it was transformed into the "Sven Hedin Reichsinstitut für Innerasienforschung", which officially opened in January 1943 in Munich.

The relationship between Schäfer and Hedin personalises the elective affinity between Sweden and Germany in a remarkable way. It was impossible that under National Socialist premises the exploration of Tibet could remain politically uninvolved. Down to the present day, Hedin's Germanophilic proclivities inflame heated debates as to how his conduct ought to be assessed. In Germany, the discussion usually revolves around the Tibet Myth and the question of secret aims the "Deutsche Tibet-Expedition Ernst Schäfer" might have had. Counter to the many of esoteric conspiracy theories, more rational interests lay behind Nazi Germany's interest in Asia. In terms of geo-strategic interests, a possible attack of India or the instigation of inner-Indian uprisings promised the weakening of Great Britain at a sensitive point of its Empire.

Using Asatru groups as example, Stefanie v. Schnurbein deals with the migration of the Nordic idea into the broader current of New Religious Movements, a phenomenon that has steadily grown since the 1970s. The term Asatru is a modern compound of two Old Norse words meaning faith in the deities of the Nordic pantheon. Dating back to the *völkisch* point of departure at the end of the nineteenth century, the Asatru movement in Europe and North America had an innate affinity with the political right from the beginning. Contemporary Asatruers resumed the old *völkisch* Paganism and tried to revive the religious connection with the Germanic and Nordic gods. However, at the end of the twentieth century, a profound process of religious diversification affected the Asatru movement. It seems only a small minority of Asatruers with open fascist or racist views are left over. Most of them nowadays concentrate on individual religiosity and the fulfilment of spiritual

needs without attaching themselves to any explicitly political agenda. On the other side of the political spectrum, a small group of leftist Asatru adherents evolved with the intent of cleansing their religion of any *völkisch*, racist or fascist contamination. What all Odinist or Asatru groups still have in common is the antagonism against Christianity, which continues to be attacked for its dogmatic and unnatural teachings. But Stefanie v. Schnurbein is absolutely right to concede a turning away of many Asatruers from uncompromising enmity towards a greater indifference in the recent past. This can be said for Paganism as a whole. Since the influence of Christianity is steadily decreasing in almost all regards, it has ceased to constitute a serious threat against which the own religious ambitions have to be pitted. That general trend notwithstanding, a number of gateways for the re-entering of anti-Christian, anti-Jewish and racist positions remain in existence. Especially in the context of a new emphasis on polytheism, a certain dislike for monotheistic religions has emerged, opening the door for old-fashioned enemy stereotypes against Christianity, Judaism and Islam. It does not seem very likely that the general development towards a greater pluralisation of the religious landscape in all Western countries will come to an end in the foreseeable future and give way for the return of antiquated religious resentments, however.

It was not an easy decision to include a *völkisch* primary source, Herman Wirth's essay *Utdrag ur 'Den store Gudens äldsta runor'*, in this volume. Its content is quite chaotic and incoherent and the outer design is not much better. In view of the fact that Wirth's legacy even today attracts adherents, the danger that his *völkisch* fantasies might be taken seriously by kindred souls cannot be dismissed. On the other hand, Wirth's handwritten treatise fits almost perfectly to demonstrate with its deliberate refusal to correspond to the standard requirements of academic learning the dangers emanating from pseudoscience. Creativity, as such, and the unreserved dedication to a chosen *idée fixe* do hardly suffice to displace scholarly work with fanciful ideas for the purpose of establishing a new theory. Hypotheses of that kind must, sooner or later, end up in the realm of mere fiction. What makes things even worse is Wirth's association with National Socialist racism and his temporarily high-level affiliation with Heinrich Himmler and the SS. Coming forward as a Germanophile Flemish nationalist even before World War I, Wirth achieved astonishing success when he published a *völkisch* bestseller in 1928, his 600-pages volume *The Rise of Mankind. Studies in the Religion, Symbolism and Scripture of the North-Atlantic Race*.⁵ In it he depicts the idea of a Nordic-Aryan people that would have lived around the Atlantic Ocean before emigrating to the south after the Atlantis catastrophe. Outstanding as they were, the descendants of the Nordic race bequeathed their legacy to the world wherever they settled. As a result, Nordic signs and symbols are to be found all along the course of their migration movement though Christianity had destroyed and superimposed itself over a lot of their remnants later on. Wirth de-

5 Herman Wirth, *Der Aufgang der Menschheit. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Religion, Symbolik und Schrift der atlantisch-nordischen Rasse* (Jena: Diederichs, 1928, 2nd ed. 1934).

clared a certain mental accordance with the Aryan worldview necessary to really recognise the Nordic legacy and its value.

With *The Rise of Mankind* Wirth hoped to start an academic career in Germany. This, however, did not happen. The University of Marburg where he wanted to submit it as his habilitation reacted with uncompromising dismissiveness. Hermann Jacobsohn (1879–1933), the renowned linguist and dean of Marburg's philosophy department, reported in his assessment that Wirth was an amateurish layman completely lacking scientific talent. His imaginative conjectures would place Wirth not only outside of academic reasoning but of rational thinking as such.⁶ The Marburg archaeologist Gero von Merhart (1886–1959) concurred, saying that the university would expose itself to ridicule incorporating someone like Wirth into its teaching staff.⁷ A few years later things turned around for Wirth when he received an extraordinary professorship at the University of Berlin with a monthly income of 700 Reichsmark and without any teaching duties after the Nazis had seized power. At the same time, the Jewish linguist Jacobsohn got existentially hit by the first anti-Jewish measurements of the National Socialist government and committed suicide on 27 April 1933 two days after his dismissal from the University of Marburg.⁸

Being in a state of excitement during these days, Wirth formulated great plans to enlarge and institutionalise his projects. He came in contact with a number of Nazi leaders, which gave him the opportunity to found a new society for the study of primeval ideas called "Studiengesellschaft für Geistesurgeschichte, Deutsches Ahnenerbe" in July 1935. As its president Wirth easily managed a research trip to Scandinavia as early as that autumn, followed by another in August 1936. The material he collected in Sweden formed the basis for a manuscript on *The Great God's Oldest Runes*, of which a summary is published here in English for the first time. But Wirth's reputation suffered when he edited the notorious *Ura-Linda-Chronik* in 1933, which gave rise to heated debates.⁹ The alleged chronicle of the Friesian family Over de Linden, however, turned out to be a fake, not the Nordic bible he trumpeted so vigorously and damaged Wirth's prestige considerably. Even Heinrich Himmler, his most influential supporter, was forced to exercise greater caution, eventually withdrawing his protective hand from him.

During Wirth's second trip to Sweden, the Reichsführer SS called a meeting at his private house in Tegernsee at the end of August 1936 to discuss the further

6 Jacobsohn to the Prussian ministry of science and education on 22 November 1929, see Horst Junginger, "From Buddha to Adolf Hitler. Walther Wüst and the Aryan tradition", in idem ed., *The Study of Religion Under the Impact of Fascism* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 115.

7 Ibidem.

8 Ibidem, p. 116.

9 *Die Ura-Linda-Chronik. Übersetzt und mit einer einführenden geschichtlichen Untersuchung*, ed. by Herman Wirth (Leipzig: Köhler & Amelang, 1933). The right-wing publisher Burkhardt Weecke, Horn-Bad Meinberg, offers a reprint of this "standard work of Indo-Germanic research" on demand.

course of the Ahnenerbe together with the fate of his protégé. Under the pressure of public criticism, Himmler decided at this time to transform the old Wirth-society into a scientific brain trust. For that purpose he engaged the young Munich professor of Indian and Iranian studies Walther Wüst (1901–93). Wüst was charged with the reorganisation of the Ahnenerbe and took over Wirth's position. Himmler moreover instructed the ambitious university professor to supervise Wirth's work and writing to avoid further problems. In particular, Wüst was to correct Wirth's Odal manuscript – probably the intended book on *The Great God's Oldest Runes* – that even from Himmler's perspective had to be revised comprehensively.¹⁰ Before this, in March 1936, the old name of the “Studiengesellschaft für Geistesgeschichte Deutsches Ahnenerbe” had been abbreviated into “Das Ahnenerbe” to announce the dissociation from Wirth. In February 1937, Wüst became the new president and in December 1938 Wirth resigned from the Ahnenerbe entirely.

Quite understandably, Wirth experienced this development as a disaster. At the very moment when he felt his deepest wishes were coming true, everything was lost. Being on the edge of despair he sent Curman the excerpt from his treatise on *The Great God's Oldest Runes* in January 1939 with the hope that it might open the door for a teaching or other position in Sweden. And again he was deeply disappointed by the negative reaction of the national antiquarian in Stockholm. The list of refusals continued when Wirth futilely tried to resume his habilitation plans in Germany in the 1940s. Instead of the anticipated breakthrough he had to realise that even those who would profit most from his insights failed to respond favourably. Wirth remained the *völkisch* outsider with weird ideas even beyond the downfall of National Socialism until the end of his life.

3. Closing Remarks

The occupation with European Nordicism and its various sub-themes has come into fashion in recent years. Vis-à-vis the problems of Europe developing a sentiment of common identity, it should be no surprise that parallel to the European unification process scholars of different disciplines have reflected on what holds people together and what divides them. It is equally understandable that the elitism of Europe's political leadership provokes opposition and the discontent of certain segments of the population with regard to European norms and values set up and represented by a class of privileged politicians. Growing antipathies against Europe fuel not only the efforts of parties connected with radical right-wing populism but also of ideological countercurrents among which some take refuge in alternative models of religious allegiance. This is the context for this volume.

¹⁰ Junginger, “From Buddha to Adolf Hitler”, p. 122.

Most articles of these proceedings are concerned with how, under the pressure of economic and political crises, mythological narratives run high and seek to explain the otherwise inexplicable by way of a religious 'rationalisation'. The central focus of the book is directed towards the meta level of theoretical conceptualisations of the "North", although concrete attempts to realise their principles in practice are inextricably linked with them. Particular emphasis has been put on the overlap of religion, ideology, science and politics and their mutual penetration. Worldviews are generally composed of inseparable sets of different elements deriving from these four and other fields. On closer inspection, even the agendas of political programmes, established religions and seemingly fixed ideologies turn out to be more a patchwork of ideas than a well-structured and deliberately canonised scheme. It is a typical misunderstanding of scholars that their particular disciplinary approach would be able to "explain things" and enlighten more than a small part of the problem. For obvious reasons, the scholarly engagement with Nordic ideas and ideologies has to be based on interdisciplinary oriented research methods in order to assess their meaning and outcome convincingly.

Our conference plans started from the insight that in spite of a deeply entrenched antagonism between the two religions, Paganism as well as Christianity played a significant role in the shaping of European Nordicism. Tackling the religious justification of a Nordic outlook on life with their inherent criteria, does not bear much validity. Things are much more complicated and cannot be clarified with a dichotic model that itself is based on acknowledged or unacknowledged religious premises. What became clear from our common discussions was that the *völkisch* or Nordic movement that came forward in the first half of the twentieth century depended essentially on the combination of religious and scientific elements, or more accurately on the wish of their followers to catch up with the requirements of a modern understanding of the world. Neither religion nor science alone was deemed capable of coping with the needs of modern man. Such holism is particularly characteristic of people who argue against the negative corollaries of intellectualism and who accuse abstract knowledge of its inability to answer the great questions of life. It is quite interesting to see here how religion and science are esteemed irreconcilable and mutually dependent on each other at the same time.

These kinds of repugnancies are unconscious reactions to conflicting circumstances with which they try to cope. Their inner contradictions signify the failure to manage and integrate inconsistent experiences. If such problems grow to an overwhelming seize, solving strategies tend to go beyond the ordinary, referring to agents and agencies of an extramundane type. In the same way ancient traditions from time immemorial help to stabilise unstable situations and promise security in insecure times. Once accepted, Nordic or *völkisch* worldviews develop their own dynamics. If they succeed and are generally accepted, criticism from within falls under the suspicion of betrayal. Disapproval from outside is, on the other hand, not only unable to get through the ideological armour, its persuasiveness may easily

be turned into the counterargument that the strength of the enemy makes it necessary to stand together as one. For any difficulties arising, anti-Nordic and anti-*völkisch* forces are held responsible in a mode of thought that comes close to a conventional conspiracy theory.

In order to understand the significance of European Nordicism in our days, one should recall the opposite standpoints addressed. They all originate from the context of the Enlightenment: first and foremost the political doctrine of egalitarianism. All other isms in this vein (liberalism, materialism, secularism, feminism, anti-authoritarianism, cosmopolitanism, universalism, multiculturalism, Europeanism and so forth) contribute to the antithesis that has to be fought against by means of a national enlightenment and, eventually, by openly violent activities. In positive regards, very few items can be found that distinguish Nordacist views from traditional conservative agendas. Probably Europe belongs to them. At any rate, it would be necessary to better explain on what basis the idea of Europe rests upon in order to prevent it from scaling up to the top of the Nordic enemy image.

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