

THE NAZI OCCULT

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Introduction

The Nazi occult legend predates the war, coming into its own alongside the Nazis themselves. Various “Aryan mystics” claimed the Nazi Party was predestined, even mythic, but the theory of occult, conspiratorial forces intertwined with the rise of the Third Reich first explicitly appeared in a novel entitled *Les Sept Têtes du Dragon Vert* (The Seven Heads of the Green Dragon; 1933) by a French journalist (and possible French spy) named Pierre Mariel. A number of other French publications elaborated on this theme during the 1930s, culminating in Edouard Saby’s *Hitler et les Forces Occultes* (Hitler and the Occult Forces; 1939). That same year, the disenchanted German politician Hermann Rauschning published *Gespräche mit Hitler* (Conversations with Hitler; UK title *Hitler Speaks*) a book describing Hitler’s encounters with “the new man” of quasi-Theosophist lore, and his “bondage to ... evil spirits.” With the outbreak of war in September 1939, the “occult Reich” theory reached the English press in Lewis Spence’s *The Occult Causes of the Present War* (1941). The actual business of fighting slowed down such speculations, but the concept re-emerged in Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier’s *Le Matin des Magiciens* (The Morning of the Magicians; 1960) and Trevor Ravenscroft’s *The Spear of Destiny* (1972), both of which sold millions of copies and spawned hundreds of imitators, all of which reconstruct and emphasize each others’ larger claims while contradicting each others’ details. This pattern will be familiar to historians in other fields.

This book attempts to synthesize and systematize a history of the Nazi occult. It draws, as far as possible, on the work of serious historians both of the occult and of German intellectual and political history. Where documentation or firm evidence exists, this text does not depart from it. But as the great historian Sir Hugh Trevor-Roper (himself an authority on both Nazism and the occult) observed, writing history is inevitably an act of imaginative reconstruction. In this field, where so little has been uncovered by academic research, imagination – mine or other authors’ – is a necessity. Just as the history of some ancient land, where only one or two archaeologists have dug, must rely on myth, legend, and folktales, for now so too the history of the Nazi occult must incorporate those elements of its mythology most likely to reflect actual events. In some places I have resorted to extrapolation and interpolation; in almost all places I have been required to choose between divergent narratives.

[opposite]

The front page of *Hanussens Berliner Wochenschau* (July 8, 1932) depicts the horoscope of the Reichstag, showing dangers and mishaps after the end of July, and correctly predicting the Nazi percentage of the upcoming vote. Hanussen also predicted (correctly) that Hitler would not join the government, that the socialists and communists would fail to unite, and that Hitler would not marry the composer’s daughter-in-law Winifred Wagner. His final successful prediction in this issue: “The National Socialists will remain at the helm in the foreseeable future. Supported by a robust militia, which is blindly devoted to their leader and highly disciplined, they will continue to field a force of great power. Their commitment and toughness is something the uninitiated cannot imagine.” (Mel Gordon Archive)

One narrative I can reject. Hitler was not an occultist. He had little patience for Himmler's Ariosophist obsessions, repeatedly condemning them in private conversation and public speech. He despised astrology, although he was willing to use it as propaganda, and was suspicious of all secret societies. His conceptions of race and history were operative, even mystical at times, but he was no mystic. He was willing to accept Hörbiger's World Ice Theory as legitimate astrophysics, mostly on poetic grounds, but he mocked notions of Atlantis or giants. His beliefs were pragmatic, as befit a street-brawling politician. The Holocaust was not a sorcerous ritual. It was a political mass murder, driven by National Socialist ideology. That ideology was shaped by Ariosophy, but also by the trauma of World War I and by the theories of leading scientists like Haeckel and philosophers such as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. The occultists who surrounded Hitler, and who took advantage of the suspension of both morality and skepticism in his regime, used those killings for their own ends, but they did not engineer them. They did not have to.



ERIK JAN HANUSSEN

According to a 1943 US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) report, Hitler took "regular lessons in speaking and in mass psychology from a man named Hanussen, who was also a practicing astrologer and fortune-teller." Erik Jan Hanussen combined stage magic, mesmerism, séances, and the occult in varying degrees during his long career. By 1930, he was holding orgies and magical rituals in his "Palace of the Occult" with high-ranking members of the Sturmabteilung (Storm Detachment; SA). In 1932, he clairvoyantly predicted Hitler's rise to power, earning him at least one meeting with the then-sidelined politician. Various sources say that he trained Hitler in mesmerism, broke a curse put on Hitler by an unknown magical enemy, and

volunteered his own services as Director of the Occult in a Nazi government. When Hitler baffled onlookers by becoming chancellor in January 1933, Hanussen seemed on the verge of triumph.

Then, the night before the Reichstag Fire, Hanussen clairvoyantly predicted "a Great House consumed by flames." Suddenly, The Man Who Was Never Wrong became The Man Who Knew Too Much. Hanussen's real name came out: Hermann Steinschneider. The Danish magus was a Jewish fraud! He vanished on the way to a performance; his bullet-ridden body turned up in a shallow grave. On trial, the Reichstag fire arsonist, a simple-minded communist named Martin van der Lubbe, showed every sign of mesmeric control.

'The Secret of the Runes

“Only today, now that almost the whole world has succumbed to ape-nature – right up to the Germanic countries which have not been fully spared either – does the truth begin to dawn on us, that we are lacking a certain divine humanity in a general flood of ape-men. But it will not be long before a new priestly race will rise up in the land of the electron and the Holy Graal ...”

– Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, 1905

On Christmas Day, 1907, the defrocked monk Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels hoisted a swastika flag over Castle Werfenstein in Upper Austria. By this symbolic birth-ritual, Lanz raised up powerful energies that would either recreate the primordial Aryan empire of Thule or leave Germany a blasted ruin. Although a practicing mystic, and an assiduous student of the occult, Lanz may not have known just what forces he was unleashing. At the time, his action seemed indistinguishable from the rituals, symbolic concerts, poetic evocations, and other seemingly petty activities common all across Germany and Austria in the three decades before World War I.

Although German nationalism awakened during the Napoleonic period, the German nation spent most of the 19th century in frustrated fragmentation. Following the creation of the German Empire in 1871, romantic German nationalists relieved these frustrations in paroxysms of heroic myth-making about the pre-Roman, “purely Teutonic” past. All over Europe, anthropologists, linguists, archaeologists, and other scholars were piecing together new national histories using the newest tools in their field. Their findings became national propaganda, providing a glorious past and proving their ancestral rights to any disputed territory. Poets, mystics, and politicians alike used these histories to create epics, rituals, and pretexts for national expansion. Again, thanks to the delayed realization of an “authentic” unified German nation, the German expression of these trends was more extreme than most. Also, since German nationalism defined itself in opposition to the invading French revolutionaries, it took on a strongly anti-modern, anti-Enlightenment character, seeking instead the pure, untainted wisdom of the *Volk*.

By the 1880s, scores of *völkisch* societies existed in Austria and Germany. The word *völkisch* has no specific translation in English: depending on context, the words “folkloric,” “populist,” and “ethnic” could equally apply. These societies studied Germanic mythology, celebrated heroes and legends, and tried to imbue everything from forestry to sing-alongs with nationalistic significance. As Germany and Austria urbanized, and as rival nations began to ally against them, the *völkisch* societies rejected “cosmopolitan” influences and valorized the “eternal struggle” of the German people against Latin and Slavic influence. Their publications and poetry contrasted the glorious fantasy of Germany’s pagan past with the uncertain, dirty reality of Germany’s Christian present. Some sought a renewal of pagan nature-worship, while others merely wanted to purify Germany of all foreign influences.

Guido von List

Guido List came to the forefront of Vienna’s *völkisch* community with the publication of his novel *Carnuntum* in 1888. Fond of long nature walks and an avid sportsman, List wrote primarily travel journalism, spangling his narratives with lore about the pagan past and folk traditions of the countryside. *Carnuntum* was different: a rousing historical novel about heroic Germans smashing the decadent Roman state and building a pagan utopia. Best of all, List vouched for its accuracy since its events came to him in a clairvoyant vision! The novel’s success caught the eye of the pan-German and anti-Semitic publishers Georg von Schönerer and Karl Wolf, who commissioned more fiery works from List.

In the 1890s, List wrote novels, poems, and plays, and lectured about the ancient German religion of Wotanism and its elite and holy priesthood. Searching for details about this hidden and suppressed belief, List began to read more deeply in the occult. He encountered theosophy during this time, and it fundamentally reshaped his views. Founded by the Russian adventuress Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, theosophy blended the Hindu cosmology of cyclic time with a sort of Darwinian notion of competing and changing “root-races.” In her books *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), Blavatsky explained that theosophy was a scientific truth expressed in religious terms. Hidden for millennia, Secret Masters in Tibet had revealed “the Occult Science” to her now that mankind was capable of comprehending it.



Guido von List (1848–1919), founding father of the *völkisch* movement, is shown here in 1913. By this point, List was devoting his energies to further deepening the connection between Teutonic lore and theosophy in a series of ‘Ario-Germanic research reports,’ and passing on his wisdom to a secret order of initiates called the *Hoher Armanen-Orden* (High Armanen Order, HAO). His primary disciple after 1911 was a fellow reincarnated clairvoyant calling himself Tarnhari, who later became a key member of Dietrich Eckart’s circle. [Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-2005-0814-501, photo: Schiffer, Conrad H.]