



The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke , Rohan Butler (Foreword)

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Nearly half a century after the defeat of the Third Reich, Nazism remains a subject of extensive historical inquiry, general interest, and, alarmingly, a source of inspiration for resurgent fascism in Europe. Goodrick-Clarke's powerful and timely book traces the intellectual roots of Nazism back to a number of influential occult and millenarian sects in the Habsburg Empire during its waning years. These sects combined notions of popular nationalism with an advocacy of Aryan racism and a proclaimed need for German world-rule.

This book provides the first serious account of the way in which Nazism was influenced by powerful millenarian and occult sects that thrived in Germany and Austria almost fifty years before the rise to power of Adolf Hitler.

These millenarian sects (principally the Ariosophists) espoused a mixture of popular nationalism, Aryan racism, and occultism to support their advocacy of German world-rule. Over time their ideas and symbols, filtered through nationalist-racist groups associated with the infant Nazi party, came to exert a strong influence on Himmler's SS.

The fantasies thus fueled were played out with terrifying consequences in the realities structured into the Third Reich: Auschwitz, Sobibor, and Treblinka, the hellish museums of Nazi apocalypse, had psychic roots reaching back to millenial visions of occult sects. Beyond what the Times Literary Supplement calls an intriguing study of apocalyptic fantasies, this bizarre and fascinating story contains lessons we cannot afford to ignore.

The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology Details


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From Reader Review The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology for online ebook

John says

Historical account of the most immediate influences on German nationalist occultism, with particular emphasis on ariosophy and Lanz von Liebenfels.

Oliver says

A bit dry but otherwise supremely informative if this is your research interest. It's thoughtful and well-researched. It's critical of people faking Nazi occult stuff and presents info in a factual way. I really liked this book. I borrowed it from the library and am debating buying my own copy so I can scribble notes in it.

Michael says

This is a detailed historical study of the ties between National Socialist ideology and esoteric groups operating in Germany, Austria, and the rest of Europe during the late-nineteenth century. The book clarifies many points which have been ill-handled by popular writers (no, links between beliefs does not equate to "secret control" by an occult organization), and also introduces many bizarre and fascinating groups which other historians have overlooked. Among the best sections of the book is that describing Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels and his theory of "theo-zoology, which states that Aryans were fallen angels who committed the sin of bestiality - thus creating the "lower" races as admixtures of animal and angel! His cranky ideas influenced few during his lifetime, but one of his biggest fans was Adolf Hitler, who apparently traveled to his home to meet the great man and purchase issues of "Ostara" to complete his collection. Also interesting, although more widely known, is the chapter on Rudolf von Sebottendorff, head of the Thule Society, which sponsored the first meetings of the future Nazi Party and ultimately sold it its newspaper. Sebottendorff comes off as an adventurer and maverick, whose experiences in the Middle East convinced him of the corruption of German Freemasonry by Jews and returned home determined to create a "true" Masonry on the Turkish model.

This is one of the only books with the word "occult" in the title which you can cite in papers written for graduate-level history courses.

AC says

informative -- on the outer limits of political psychology. A good follow up to Fritz' Stern's the Politics of Cultural Despair, which covers some of the same topics.

There is another good, and far briefer discussion of this material in an essay of George Mosse entitled, "The Mystical Origins of National Socialism", in Journal of History of Ideas 12 (1961), 83-96; it is reprinted in several of Mosse's collections.

No one goes further than Goodrick-Clarke, however, in developing the outer reaches of this racist theosophy -- a very clear echo of which can be found in certain radical writings in the US. This type of thinking, in other words, is not dead and buried.

Simon says

Contrary to the title, the bulk of the book is actually about the revivals of Paganism and general Occultism in the German-speaking countries from the late 19th century to the early 20th. The NSDAP's inspiration from these movements does not come up until halfway through.

I were aware of these already, but I had no idea how many of these Germanic Neo-Pagan movements had a very clear political agenda behind them connected to the unification of Germany and the need to find a common heritage for the German-speaking cultures. One thing I find amusing here is that the biggest Germanic neo-pagan movement in this era, the Armanenschaft formed by real-life Thomas Pynchon novel character Guido von List, owed at least as much to the syncretic occult movement of Theosophy as to what we actually know about historical Nordic paganism. For those who don't know, Theosophy supposedly reconstructs a lost primordial esoteric tradition all religions are derived from while actually drawing mostly upon Buddhism, Hinduism and Greco-Roman pantheism... not to mention that it was started by a Ukrainian! Anyway, the occult Thule Society from which much of the Nazi leadership came were strongly influenced by List's Armanenschaft.

The other of the occult movements covered in this book is the Theozology of Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, which must be the single strangest religion I've ever heard of. Basically, its central thesis is that humanity is the result of interbreeding between extraterrestrials with psychic powers and the early hominids, with the Germanic peoples being the closest modern day relatives of the alien gods thus necessitating eugenics programs to create a new race of Nordic star gods. The really weird part of Theozology is that Liebenfels, a former Cistercian monk, tried to reconcile all of that with traditionalist Roman Catholicism! More importantly, Liebenfels also served as editor of an occult newsletter titled "Ostara" which a young Adolf Hitler subscribed to... even though he later in his life would be the least mystically-minded of the Nazi leaders.

As you can guess, this book was a very dense read. A lot of different personalities and movements are covered in its pages. More importantly, Goodrick-Clarke also takes time to dispel some of the myths regarding the NSDAP's connections to the occult. It could actually have been quite a bit longer if you ask me, since some of the topics covered are gone through in a somewhat superficial manner for one of the few sober books on the general subject. On occasion its tone also gets a bit more "The Nazis were CRAZY!" than it should, while there's no doubt that someone like Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels must have had a few screws loose I don't think it is a good idea to attribute too much of extremist ideologies' appeal to their followers' neuroses. (were the Italian Fascists or the Bolsheviks also "crazy"?)

Nonetheless, while "The Occult Roots of Nazism" is far from a perfect book on the subject it's probably the best introduction I've found. It still does a mostly good job at putting the late-19th/early-20th century Germanic occult movements in their proper historical context. Goodrick-Clarke's central point in the book also remains quite relevant during an era as globalized as this one: When does a positive desire to preserve local traditions and culture become negative by turning into violent xenophobia? That line is demonstrated within its pages to be much more blurry than many people think.

Owlseyes says

**Denn es kommt ein Reicher zum Ringe der Rater
Ein Starke von Oben beendet den Streit
Mit Schlichtenden Schlüssen entscheidet er alles,
Bleiben soll ewig, was er gebeut [gebot].**

(from the Norse legend, in the Voluspa, Guido von List found a "messianic figure")

(Tacitus' Germania)

(Guido von List)

Drawing heavily on the analysis of the Theosophical work of Blavatsky (namely, about earth's several root races) the author concentrates then on one of the main precursors of the Nazi philosophy: the Austrian Guido von List, a believer in the Pan-German sentiment and philosophy, which were based on a "search for the ancient religion" and on the belief in the "wisdom of the runes, mantic sciences, The Edda and Teutonic astrology". The work of Guido von List is seen as a combination of "völkish" ideology with Occultism and Theosophy; he lectured on "Wotanist priesthood". Guido von List died in 1919, but, as the author points: "Although List never lived to see the Nazi party, he was honored by its nascent spirit". In the long run, his work would gather groups such as The Templars, Renaissance humanists, Kabbalists, and Rosicrucians.

(Karl Maria Wiligut, the Private Magus of Heinrich Himmler)

Next to Guido, the author focus on Adolph Joseph Lanz (alias Jörg Lanz Liebenfels), one of the main proponents of Ariosophy, and who wrote some papers on the issue, some of them (Das Buch Des Psalmen Teutsh, 1920) found in Hitler's 2,000 books library. Lanz wanted a Pan-Aryan state, under the Vienna Hapsburgs, yet Hitler dispensed with the Austrian dynasty.

Another character, still with that "ancestral clairvoyant memory", and under analysis, is Karl Maria Wiligut: he's sure about a "secret line" in the German royalty.

"In the places of our princes of Germanic blood rules our deadly enemy: Judah! (...) I am determined to pledge the Thule to this struggle. Our Order is a Germanic Order. Loyalty is also Germanic. Our god is Walvater, his rune is the Ar-rune. And the Trinity: Wotan, Wili, We is the unity of the trinity. The Ar-rune signifies Aryan, primal fire, the sun and the eagle."

That was part of the speech by Rudolph von Sebottendorff to the Thule Society, in response to the traumatic events of a bloodless revolution in November, 1918, in Bavaria; led by socialist Jews. Sebottendorff read a lot about List. Thule people would be the first ones Hitler would turn to.

One should never forget about the Nazi link to the East. Maybe due to the Blavatsky writings (The Secret doctrine), the notion of "hidden sacred centers" inside the earth, was known to the Nazi people*.

It is said that Hitler was influenced by these two men (1) Dietrich Eckhart who attended the Thule Society meetings, and was "violently antisemitic" and (2) Karl Haushofer who served as military attaché in Japan and was an admirer of oriental culture. Haushofer was also member of the Luminous Lodge, a secret

Japanese society, and the Thule society; he defended the colonization of central Asia, so that Germany would have access to the "hidden centers of powers in the East".

(German expedition to Tibet led by Ernst Schäfer, 1938-1939)

Author Trevor Ravenscroft ventured into saying that those two aforementioned men "initiated Hitler into black rituals designed to establish contact with evil powers "

Conclusion

As for the "black rituals", it just didn't work. The Third Reich just crumbled under its own evil.

The Goodrick-Clarke work is well-researched and fascinating. It offers appendixes on the blood lineages of some of the Nazi "initiates".

*Nazis on the Roof of the World
A Bizarre SS Expedition to Tibet
in: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/z...>

<https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/germ...>

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/2017/06/d...>

r says

The title of the book is misleading. A root denotes both an origin and a lasting foundation (i.e. remove the root and the plant withers) but Goodrick-Clarke's own contention is that neither is really applicable. Instead, he views the proliferation of *völkisch* theosophical/Ariosophical/occult sectarian communities in Austria as a symptom of its social and political crises (related to the multi-ethnic tensions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), and he suggests that it is mostly this manner in which it anticipates the emergence of the Nazi party in the interbellum. W.r.t. these (heterogeneous) communities the main conclusions are roughly that (1) Hitler shares the Manichaeic apocalyptic world-vision of a cosmic conflict between the Aryan god-man and the non-Aryan subhuman (which results in the stances on purity of blood, racial intermixing, etc.) and the coming of a great new Empire (the Third Reich) after the Aryan victory, (2) Hitler denounces their pseudo-science and their wild fantasies about the past (there is reasonable evidence that he collected and avidly read Lanz von Liebenfels's *Ostara* pamphlets in the past, but Hitler never acknowledged him in any recorded documents or conversations) and instead focused his interest on mass control and *activism*, (3) while the DAP (as well as the swastika) did have its origins in the German sectarian Thule Society, it soon became a separate populist, anti-Semitic movement even before Hitler had joined it, and finally that (4) the SS did in fact have a thoroughly occult character, in large part under the influence of Karl Maria Wiligut, who is described by Goodrick-Clarke as 'Himmler's Rasputin'.

All in all, this book also provides a good perspective on the decline of the Habsburg empire, which actually had my main interest. The occult doctrines themselves seem ridiculous almost without exception. They are amalgams of traditions, based on far-fetched interpretations of history which were often fuelled by 'clairvoyant visions', and spearheaded by men who stressed the importance of lineage while inventing their own, so that they could feign nobility and make claim to the 'von' they inserted between their first and last name.

Very academic. Certainly preferable to sensationalist trash, but the huge number of historical references (people, places, dates, events, etc.) can overwhelm the layman (that's me). Do not expect light reading.

Maureen says

This was somewhat difficult reading, particularly the primary sources, not necessarily because the ideas were complex, but because I struggled to find the frame of mind that would consider these ideas compelling, internally consistent, and socially useful.

What I found most interesting from Goodrick-Clarke's piece was his chronology of how the effort to make this occultist movement take roots within a wider context (in its shifting names and forms) kept failing. As I was reading, I kept wondering how these ideas were distributed and accepted in a wider context among the masses of Germans who eventually bought in to Nazi rituals and practices, and I think the answer is that they only did so in a fragmented, echoing manner.

Goodrick-Clarke chronicles occult societies with failing budgets and dwindling members, rituals with only a half-dozen attenders and lodges split by internal, petty conflict. On the other hand, we learn of ariosophist publications that eventually become the journalistic arm of the Nazi party and that Hitler himself tried to exert the force of will that would transform the DAP from a small conspiracy group to a large, national party. While I understand how some of these ideas floating in the cultural ether and fed by anti-Catholicism and a general anxiety about the strength of German identity could be taken as the basis for a leader's platform, I don't have the sense of how these ideas took root in more mainstream associations (beyond volkisch movements, which themselves only bear a weak connection, I think, to more bizarre occult ideas), like civic organizations, the army, youth groups, workers' guilds or unions, or protestant churches.

Andrea Hickman Walker says

Interesting, but very difficult to read.

John says

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Acknowledgements

I hesitated before reading this book fearing it might be some wacky neo nazi treatise that tends to froth and then bore. I found it to be nothing of the sort. It was grounded, very factual, meticulously researched (too much detail for some I guess) and hugely interesting. For me it brilliantly put into European context the rise of Hitler and the Third Reich. Goodrick-Clarke's conclusion is fairly emphatic: that the various movements and cults detailed here did not bring about and influence the rise of National Socialism to any great extent: rather, it pointed to its increasing inevitability. The conditions were right for it: a defeated, demoralised people fearing an uncertain future amidst social and economic chaos. The old familiar world was dying (be that the age old and stolid Habsburg Empire or the placid pastoral idyll of the many German Princedoms). Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation made the change inevitable. Life was now more materialistic, it felt out of control; worse still, it was feared control was in the hands of alien forces, non Aryan ones. Cue German Romanticism. It all sounds so familiar – today we talk of the perils of globalisation, mass migration, loss of individual and national identity.

Some of the esoteric writers, movers and shakers featured here verged on the wacky to say the least and Goodrick-Clarke argues that Hitler did not have too much time for them. (This contrasted with Himmler, who had his personal and high ranking SS magus, Karl Maria Wiligut. The latter heavily influenced ceremonial and SS ritual at their special castle). For Hitler they had their uses though, further fomenting ever present anti-semitism, ever present in Austria and Germany and helping to make it feel more acceptable?

I read this on Kindle which had mistakes on every page and some words appeared merely as a set of symbols...One of the more readily translated mistakes was "Hider" for Hitler. Notwithstanding this extra challenge I persevered and it did not dampen my interest unduly; I have ordered a paperback copy and will look at it in more depth. That should be a doddle after the cryptic ordeal on kindle.

The author's penultimate conclusion:

" Semi-religious beliefs in a race of Aryan god-men, the needful extermination of inferiors, and a wonderful millennial future of German world-domination obsessed Hitler, Himmler, and many other

high-ranking Nazi leaders. When the endless columns of steel-helmeted legionaries marched beneath the swastika...Germany was effectively saluting the founder-emperor of a new One Thousand Year Reich. But all this...was matched by a hellish vision. The shining new order was sustained by the wretched slave-cities where the Jewish demons were immolated as a burnt sacrifice or holocaust. The Nazi crusade was indeed essentially religious in its adoption of apocalyptic beliefs and fantasies including a New Jerusalem (cf. Hitler's plans for a magnificent new capital at Berlin) and the destruction of the Satanic hosts in a lake of fire. Auschwitz, Sobibor and Treblinka are the terrible museums of twentieth century Nazi apocalyptic".

PS I HAVEN'T READ THIS TWICE. FOR SOME REASON ANY REVIEWS I NOW POST SHOW THIS.

Paul Fox says

A wonderful book for those interested in the ideological roots of A. Hitler and Nazism.

T. Frohock says

I used this book as research for my novel Where Oblivion Lives, and I have referred to Goodrick-Clark's research several times.

This is one of the the best researched books I've ever seen; however, it is neither an easy or a quick read.

Simon says

This is an extremely thorough scholarly run down of the topic, meticulously researched with around 75 pages of references, which was quite impressive for a book of this nature.

It is primarily concerned with providing a run-down of the volkisch occult movement in Germany in the 50 or so years leading up to the second world war. Charting the history of some of the players and thinkers behind the movement, which was mostly organised along ethnic and religious grounds, providing a framework for thinking that the German Aryan nation was superior to the 'non-human races', which included... basically everybody who wasn't a pure-blooded German.

It was a movement that grew out of the increasing panic brought on by the approach of the modern world, globalism, the rising threat of equal rights, and was essentially the efforts of rich white men to hold on to the good old days where aristocrats ruled the roost and everybody else did as they were told.

These were pretty small organisations and secret societies though, really more gentlemen's clubs than anything else, the largest had maybe a couple of hundred members, so really fairly insignificant in the grand scheme of things.

It's very noticeable that the first 90% of the book is concerned with talking about these early Volkisch movements, and then only right at the very end do we get to the bit where the author tries to link them with the Nazis, and this is really where things fall apart, because honestly? There is virtually no evidence that any of these occult groups really had any influence with the Nazis at all, indeed some of the groups that people

try and argue had lots of influence with the Nazis were in fact banned by the Nazis, and their members chucked in jails for subversive activities.

There is some evidence that one minor volkish occultist was employed by Himmler, and may have exchanged some letters, but given the tens of thousands of rich white men Himmler employed in the SS, it stands to reason that at least one of them might have had an occult background. And of course once the mental instability of this guy was recognised by Himmler, he was forcibly retired to Austria in case he became an embaessment to the party.

So, yeah, this is not a strong case for the Nazi movement being grounded in the occult. If anything, it demonstrates that in the years leading up to the Nazis gaining power, there was a great raft of extremist thought that created lots of weird belief systems designed to demonstrate the superiority of the White Aryan Man over all other forms of life, which was a wave of thought that clearly the Nazis were on the crest of the wave of. But was it the occult? No, not really.

One of the appendices also contains an excellent overview of the Nazi Occult literature, most of which is based on a handful of books that came out in the 70s in the wake of the Holy Blood Holy Grail scam, and was basically all just a bunch of lies made up to sell books because Nazi Occultism is cool and sell books.

Basically? Not a shred of good evidence for any of it.

Arnost Stedry says

Tak to bylo zajímavé. Autor nejprve představí velmi podrobný exkurs do historie německého a rakouského okultismu se zvláštní zřetelou na dílo Guido von Lista a Jorga Lanze s podrobným popisem všech jejich mašblovských názorů a představ, následně vyšvihne velmi erudovaný pohled německé okultní scény včetně společnosti Thule, pak přejde k osobě Karla Maria Wiliguta, tedy osobního mága Heinricha Himmlera, a zažne se vztahu Adolfa Hitlera k okultním vědám, zvláště pak ariosofie, aby zjistil, že Hitler pravděpodobně znal některé názory Lanze i Lista, ale jeho zájem o okultismus byl pramalý a z 2000 svazků dochovaných z Hitlerovy knihovny je jen kniha od von Lista.

Pak už následuje jen mlýnek na maso, ve kterém autor přesvědčivě rozemele romantické a pobloudilé představy o pangermánském okultismu jako hybné síle nacismu a druhé světové války včetně.

Velmi zábavná je rozhodně první část, zvláště pokud oblubujete pošahané vize. Škoda, že není zasazena do širšího kontextu, neboť z knihy není patrné, jestli všichni vyznavaři okultních nauk byli elitářští rasisté s ultrapravicovými názory, nebo tento dojem pramení pouze z úzkého zaměření autora. Závěr knihy je velmi překvapivý, jak už jsem byl pravil.

Pokud by vám této radosti nebylo dost, kniha disponuje rozsáhlým aparátem včetně desítek stran bibliografie.

Robert says

Yes, read this one. Vrtil/Thule/Nazi... you'll understand today's politics (which are based on the covert Nazi usurpation of US).

