RALF HOPPADIETZ AND KARIN REICHENBACH (ED.)

Staging the Pagan Past

Ethnicist History Conceptions
and Popular Culture in Central Europe

Visuelle Geschichtskultur

eine Reihe des Leibniz-Instituts
für Geschichte und Kultur
des östlichen Europa (GWZO)

herausgegeben von Arnold Bartetzky
und Maren Röger

begründet von Stefan Troebst

24 Staging the Pagan Past

Ethnicist History
Conceptions and Popular Culture
in Central Europe

ED. BY RALF HOPPADIETZ AND KARIN REICHENBACH

Contents

2 Perspectives from Poland

3 Perspectives from Hungary

Appendix

Introduction: Staging the Pagan Past

Ethnicist History Conceptions and Popular Culture in Central Europe

Ralf Hoppadietz and Karin Reichenbach

The Pagan past, as the prehistoric and early medieval time before Christianisation, appears to hold a great fascination. It is evoked in television series about Vikings and barbarians, in computer games transporting players to bygone empires, in comic books depicting adventures of great ancient heroes. This volume examines fields of popular history culture, in which the Pagan past obtains a significance that goes yet beyond that of entertaining leisure activities. The articles collected here centre on the three fields of historical reenactment, ethnic Neopaganism and the black metal music scene, which are framed by further practices and media of history appropriation. In historical reenactment, history enthusiasts simulate a specific event or period of the past, often warrior battles, but also historical ways of life. The reenactment of ancient spiritual life often coincides with Neopagan religiosity as part of Native Faith movements that seek to revive religious tradition from pre-Christian times. This spiritual sphere also finds expression in the often mythically obscured historical references made in black metal music, which has widely embraced Pagan themes and developed subgenres like Pagan, Viking or folk metal. These three strongly overlapping fields of reenactment, Neopaganism and black metal form a setting where we observe how the Pagan past can become a place of longing, a projection screen and an object of identification, a setting in which images of history can ultimately merge seamlessly with radical right-wing mindsets.

The volume was inspired by a workshop hosted at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) entitled "Neo-*völkisch* Conceptions of History in Popular Appropriations of the Past in Eastern Europe. Modern Paganism – Historical Reenactment – Music Scene".[1] The articles it contains are papers presented at the workshop, updated and expanded by their authors. They are accompanied by a number of additional texts to complement and enhance the volume. The workshop and this book build on previous attempts

to describe the politicised entanglement of historical reenactment and its multifarious links to Neopagan religious movements and the black metal music scene for the German context.[2] We aimed to explore them in greater depth and place them in a broader, transnational framework. The comparison with other countries shows that the Pagan past is pivotal for many radical right-wing identity projects in Europe, which makes popular cultural formats of its appropriation for political exploitation particularly significant.

Close links between circles of reenactors, Neopagans and black metal fans have been evident since the 1990s. It seems that the "Pagan element" not only unites them but feeds a specific understanding of history with a close affinity to far-right ideals, which we set out to examine more closely in this volume. Apart from individuals or groups who are actively involved in the reenactment scene as well as in metal bands or Neopagan groups, the tight-knit relationship between the three spheres is also reflected in the themes, symbols and general aesthetic that they adopt. Ideas about the Pagan past seem to flow through these fields, reinforce each other and find wide audiences at large-scale reenactment events or black metal shows.

Without question, there has already been a wealth of academic studies on and investigative research into individual elements of this scene, be this from the perspective of museum education, religious studies or music sociology, each focusing on individual characteristics, social roles and political traits. They are too fragmented and specialised to list them here and all contributions provide insight into the current state of research in their respective areas. Up until now, however, there have been few if any attempts to explore what popular history practices dealing with the Pagan past have in common, what links them, and what makes them appealing and useful for the far right. We therefore saw great promise in focusing on how history is dealt with here, how the past is understood. Hence, this volume

attempts to examine what images of history are created, what narratives are (re-)produced and to what extent these match up with radical right-wing ideals and how they are being harnessed by corresponding actors, organisations and movements. All the articles thus address the role that the Pagan past plays as a foil for populist to extreme right-wing identity projects and their exploitation for political ends. They demonstrate how reenactment events, black metal concerts and Neopagan discourse produce notions of a pre-Christian past and images of Pagan societies that are grounded in a biologistic and ancestral understanding of "people". It is this essentially *völkisch*, or – to use a more internationally compatible term – ethnicist thinking, that seems to lie at the core of their approach to the past, and that enables exclusionary practices of identity and prejudice. Moreover, by conjuring up a supposedly more natural and original way of life than the one we live in today, pre-Christian societies are staged and idealised as heroic ancestors, they thus not only serve as the starting point for the idea of an unbroken ethnic continuum stretching to the present but are also evoked as the antithesis of (post-)modernity. Although this kind of understanding history draws on the nationalist-romanticist and essentialist ideas of the 19th and early 20th centuries, they are often adapted and updated to meet personal convictions and the challenges of the present day. Accordingly, the considered fields of popular engagement with early history display an ambivalent and selective relationship to latest discourses and findings from academic archaeological and historical research.

As the individual articles show, the practices of history that are analysed here can and do fulfil political roles by conveying notions of "belonging" and "non-belonging", by marking conservative ideas of society out as being "original" and "natural" or romanticising violent behaviour and masculine warrior elites. However, the political force that such images of history can build up cannot always be recognised in the form of traditional political activism. Whereas sections of the described milieus openly maintained links with extreme right circles around the turn of the new millennium, they have since shed many of their more obvious political trappings. Whether this is linked to the overarching shift in strategy by the far right, to shun overt racist views and white supremacist fantasies and instead cloak them in concepts of cultural inequality such as ethnopluralism, is one of the questions addressed in

this volume. Notions of supposedly natural societies whose culture and way of life were adulterated firstly by Christianity – all too often regarded as a phenomenon with Jewish roots that was introduced "from outside" – and later by society's ideas of equality and diversity are created in order to lend legitimacy to anti-modern and anti-democratic concepts of life in the present day. In the guise of popular cultural approaches to history, such references to a long national historical tradition and ideals of a 'natural' way of life and culture combined with attempts to biologise cultural differences between human societies can be transported right into the midst of society. This is another reason why it is not sufficient to merely look at tangible links, activities or statements with extreme right-wing overtones. The way in which history is staged through public performance and popular media appears innocuous at first and sometimes even playful, so that it often escapes critical reflection due to its pop-cultural nature. However, it is these vivid images that can contribute to easily and unconsciously conveying an understanding of history that reinforces anti-democratic ideologies.

The terms "extreme right-wing", "far-right", "alt-right", etc. that are used in this volume cannot always be separated clearly from one another when zooming in on individual cases. "Far-right" generally refers to political beliefs that lie beyond the conservative right wing, although the boundaries are very blurred. The terms "extreme right" or "extreme right-wing" (in German *rechtsextrem*) are used in German criminal law as well as in many other contexts (including academic ones) where there are signs of a rejection of democratic principles and a willingness to employ or accept the use of violence to achieve political goals. All too often, however, it is impossible to make a clear assessment. This is because, even when corresponding attitudes are not voiced or explicitly demonstrated by other means, they can still appear as the ultimate consequence of adopting certain ideals. The "alt-right" (in German *Neue Rechte*, literally "New Right") generally refers to groupings or movements that set themselves apart from the "old" right, i.e. the traditional fascism of the 20th century in terms of their look and political practices but that preserve precisely its ideas of ethnic and racist exclusion and of radically heteronormative, hierarchical and autocratic models of society that the "old" right espoused. Many societal undertakings that are regarded as traditionally "left-wing", such as anti-globalisation, ecology

and even feminism are seized upon and ideologically transformed by the contemporary far right. This has created a situation where conventional classifications of "left" and "right" are becoming increasingly unreliable and traditionally right-wing thinking such as ethnonationalism, antisemitism, the "blood and soil" ideology and anti-queer agendas can only be identified through a closer look behind the scenes. With this in mind, especially here, in the land of mythologised images of history, no claim can be made to precision in distinguishing the meanings of the various dimensions and terminological concepts of "right-wing". Nevertheless, the authors of the articles offer sufficient context for their case studies to enable the reader to determine which flavour of far-right ideology is involved in their individual examples.

The volume aims to contribute to both research and education on the exploitation of early history for far-right ideological projects ranging from ultra-conservatism and populist ethnonationalism to extremist racism and antisemitism. In so doing, it hopes to join the various studies, events and publications that have recently addressed topics such as political mediaevalism and the (ab-)use of the Middle Ages[3] or those that have dealt in general terms with polarised pasts and contested heritage.[4] It wants to expand these approaches by including a perspective on the Pagan past in (broadly understood) popular culture.

Reflecting the main topics covered at the preceding workshop, this volume focuses on three countries by way of example – Germany, Poland and Hungary. The decision to concentrate on these countries was made based on the response to the workshop. While the texts on Germany and Poland included here cover broad swathes of the topic, we were only able to reflect some aspects of the situation in Hungary. Nonetheless, they provide an important dimension to the varying extents to which state authorities tolerate, embrace and even impose ethnicist historical narratives.

Ralf Hoppadietz's article opens proceedings for Germany by taking a look at the reenactment scene exploring the long tradition of *völkisch* Neopagan ideals in the imaginations of pre-Christian societies. It is followed by the 'folk pagans' in German black metal described by Niels Penke and their preoccupation with Germanic culture and mythology, which reflect anti-modernist and antisemitic world views.

The next contribution by Hermann Ritter shines a spotlight on the links between extreme right-wing fiction, fantasy role-playing and conspiracy narratives. The two final articles in this section dedicated to Germany take a look at books and other writings dealing with pre- and early history and Nordic mythology that reveal obsolete nationalist concepts of history and ideological ties with the German *Neue Rechte*: Whilst Anna-Lena Heckel and Heike Sahm explain how the legend of the Germanic peoples is being kept alive in children's and young adult books, Hannes Buchmann and Julius Roch highlight the connection between views of prehistory and *völkisch* ideology based on the example of the *Institut für Staatspolitik*.

The second section, which is devoted to Poland, starts with Philipp Schaab's article, that uses the example of selected Neopagan groups to highlight the significance of historical references in ethnonationalist identity construction. In the following contribution, Mariusz Filip explores the period of post-1989 transformation as a major formative phase for Polish far-right Neopaganism. While Filip focuses on the broad spectre of political activism and networking, Karin Reichenbach's paper discusses whether identifying with the Pagan Slavs influences popular performances of history and exerts a cultural effect in the metapolitical sense. Michał Pawleta then examines various aspects of the politicisation of historical reenactment in present-day Poland. The section on Poland concludes with an article by Ryan Buesnel, which explores antisemitism and radicalism in the growth of Polish right-wing black metal.

For Hungary, Katrin Kremmler's article offers insights not only into the role played by reenactment in the state-sponsored reframing of the country's early history but also into the re-ordering of archaeology and history within an illiberal system. As the final contribution to this volume, Áron Szele's article illustrates the importance of mythological ancestry in Hungarian rock music.

For the success of this publication, which involved a great deal of effort for us as editors due to occasionally unstable and uncertain academic contract situations, we would chiefly like to thank the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) for funding the preparation of this volume and including it in its *Visuelle Geschichtskultur* ("Visual Cultural History") series. The editors of this series, Maren Röger and

Arnold Bartetzky deserve our gratitude for their support in making this publication project a reality.

We are especially grateful to Anja Höfer, Engel Friederike Holst and Landolin Kleinmichel, to Peter Robbins for his extremely astute translation and proof-reading work, to Sabine Stach and Arnold Bartetzky for valuable improvements and to the publisher's team for the pleasant and proficient working relationship that we have enjoyed. Our biggest thanks, however, are reserved for all the authors for their eagerness to contribute to this volume and their patience in accompanying the process of its creation.

References

1   Cf. the workshop programme <https://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-87702> [accessed 8 August 2024].

2   Mölders, Doreen and Hoppadietz, Ralf, "'Odin statt Jesus!' Europäische Ur- und Frühgeschichte als Fundgrube für religiöse Mythen neugermanischen Heidentums?", *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Theorie in der Archäologie, Rundbrief*, 6/1 (2007), pp. 32–48; Banghard, Karl, "Unterm Häkelkreuz. Germanische Living History und rechte Affekte: Ein historischer Überblick in drei Schlaglichtern", in Killguss, Hans-Peter (ed.), *Die Erfindung der Deutschen. Rezeption der Varusschlacht und die Mystifizierung der Germanen*, Dokumentation zur Fachtagung vom 3. Juli 2009, Köln: NS-Dokumentationszentrum, 2009, pp. 29–35; Banghard, Karl, *Nazis im Wolfspelz. Germanen und der rechte Rand*, Wuppertal: Archäologisches Freilichtmuseum Oerlinghausen, 2016; Hoppadietz, Ralf, and Reichenbach, Karin, "Nationalist Appropriations of Open-air-Museums and Prehistory Re-enactment in Germany and Poland: Past and Current Trends of the Politicisation of Archaeological Heritage", in Kusek, Robert, and Purchla, Jacek (ed.), *Heritage and Society*. The Heritage Forum of Central Europe 4, Kraków: International Cultural Centre, 2019, pp. 207–232; Hoppadietz, Ralf, and Reichenbach, Karin, "In Honor of the Forefathers. Archaeological Reenactment between History Appropriation and Ideological Mission. The Case of Ulfhednar", in Agnew, Vanessa, Stach, Sabine, and Tomann, Juliane (eds.), *Reenactment Case Studies. Global Perspectives on Experiential History*, London, New York: Routledge, 2023, pp. 77–104.

3   Cf. e.g. the workshop "Ancient Kings – Contemporary Politics. Medievalism in Central and Eastern Europe" organised by the French Research Center in Humanities and Social Sciences Prague in March 2024, <https://cefres.cz/en/events/ancient-kings-contemporary-politics-2> [accessed 8 August 2024], or the German lecture series "The (Ab-)Use of the Medieval Past: Extremistische und nationalistische Mittelalternutzung" (full programme: <https://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-143356>), to be published as video series on L.I.S.A. Wissenschaftsportal der Gerda Henkel Stiftung (<https://lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/?language=en> [accessed 8 August 2024].

4   Cf. e.g. Bozoğlu, Gönül, Campbell, Gary; Smith, Laurajane and Whitehead, Christopher (eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Heritage and Politics*, London:Routledge, 2024; Niklasson, Elisabeth (ed.), *Polarized Pasts. Heritage and Belonging in Times of Political Polarization*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2023; Koranyi, James and Hanscam, Emily (eds.), *Digging Politics: The Ancient Past and Contested Present in East-Central Europe*. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023; Farrell-Banks, David, *Affect and Belonging in Political Uses of the Past*, London: Routledge 2022.

1

Perspectives from Germany

Of Gods and Ancestors

Historical Reenactment and the Long Shadow of Neo-Germanic Paganism

Ralf Hoppadietz

… The fog drifts ominously over the forest as a group of armed men on horseback gradually enter the scene. Accompanied by solemn cosmic music, the camera zooms in closer, and now we are looking into the grim and determined faces of the riders, whose weapons, kit and jewellery are adorned with numerous symbols … Two groups of well-equipped, heavily armed warriors face off in front of the museum visitors, their shields and standards emblazoned with markings from times gone by. A horn sounds, and the two sides charge fearlessly towards each other, bellowing warlike cries. Sword meets shield, axe clashes against helmet, and a steady stream of fighters fall to the ground while their comrades battle on fiercely …

Hardly any history documentary or archaeological museum nowadays can get by without presenting these kinds of performance, which are often put on or offered by what are known as reenactment troupes. Most museums – certainly, nearly all open-air ones – rely on these programmes of "living history", while a great many exhibitions open with live performances as a way of teaching history in order to stage events that are as memorable as possible. In addition, TV productions and other media relating to early historical themes regularly include reenactments and hence often contribute to the popularisation of images of the past that are highly specific and mostly one-dimensional (yet all the more impressive for it).[1] And the producers of these films benefit not least from the fact that these performers come fully equipped with clothing, weapons and, in some cases, even horses, obviating the need for expensive props. The authors and directors, meanwhile, are primarily concerned with using certain stylistic devices to give the viewer the sense that they are witnessing a reality that is spatially, temporally or socially distant from their own. Fictions of authenticity of this kind, which are key to commercial success, are achieved by aiming for the greatest possible degree of emotionalisation while harnessing the audience's existing viewing habits. These

viewing habits are shaped primarily by TV or streaming series, feature films and the major Hollywood blockbusters as well as by video games. Thus, it is often series such as *Vikings* or *Rome* as well as fantasy films like *The Lord of the Rings* that will determine how plausible depictions of history and prehistory will appear in viewers' eyes.[2] Performances in museums often differ from these film productions in that the reenactment troupes generally act autonomously in front of their audience and these performances are rarely moderated by a scholar. This is especially true of the many archaeological open-air museums out there, most of which get no outside funding and thus have to hold their own as a service provider in both the education and entertainment market.[3] As a result, the boundaries between scientifically based findings and pure entertainment are becoming increasingly blurred.

"Reenactment" in this context is not to be understood in the sense employed by the radical historicism of Robin George Collingwood within the field of the philosophy of history.[4] Rather, reenactment is nowadays generally understood to mean reproducing and recreating events from (pre-)history as faithfully as possible. The aim is to create an image of life at that time by presenting archaeological objects and finds in their original context (as far as possible). Members of these kinds of reenactment troupes appear to promise that the historical events that they portray will create an experience for both spectators and performers that neither archaeological exhibitions nor academic debates are capable of competing with. Most forms of historical reenactment are underpinned by a desire for historical authenticity that lies at the heart of the opportunity to experience history that they offer through their performance. This authenticity is understood as attempting to get as close as possible to a vision of the past that is comprehended as historical reality.[5] For the performers, this means striving for the most exact reproduction possible of historical equipment and a faithful imitation of certain

activities, usually drawing on recent findings from research into pre- and early history. By contrast, little if anything is usually said about how many imaginary additions – an inevitable part of any historical account – have been made. Many reenactment troupes even set out their own rules and regulations in order to back up their claim to offer authenticity through detailed, well-researched performances. For example, the charter of Pax Celtica, an association bringing together various Celt-themed reenactment troupes, had this to say:

> One important aim of historical representation is to reconstruct the past as faithfully as possible based on scientific findings. Representations based merely on fantasy and intuition run counter to this fundamental principle. Although it is rarely possible to offer a fully true-to-life and authentic historical representation, […] the unavoidable compromises made as a result must not be discernible […].[6]

In general, attempts like this to provide a true-to-life representation of ages in history through the performative media of reenactment and living history are seen as a legitimate way to present and communicate the past. Besides the abovementioned desire for objects that are "authentic" – perhaps "historically accurate" would be a better description – the notion of the authenticity of the subject also comes to the fore in these performances. This type of authenticity refers to the personal experience of the reenactors, i.e. the immersive, physical and sensual experiencing of historical reconstruction and simulation as the fiction of a precise reliving of the past.[7] Many reenactors believe that this can be a way of bridging or even eliminating the gap between past and present and thus, that the past can be simulated apparently seamlessly.[8]

One can distinguish between various forms of reenactment as a basic principle:[9]

■ Reenactment as representation of (pre-)historical military conflicts, markets and/or lifestyles without making reference to a specific event or spatial context. This form of representation is often associated with events run by museums.

■ Reenactment as representation of a specific (pre-)historical event, often a particular battle, with reference to a specific location. The spatial aspect is especially important here; a lack of accuracy or historical authenticity in terms of the equipment used will be tolerated provided that it is concealed.

■ Reenactment as representation of the lifestyle, culture and daily life of a particular age in history. The aim is to enable this long-gone world to be experienced by all the senses by handling and making clothes, tools and objects as authentically as possible and by using reconstructed buildings that are as faithful to the originals as possible. This kind of reenactment is often referred to as "living history", which the folklorist Jay Anderson has attempted to define as "the simulation of life in another time".[10]

Another reenactment-related development has been competitive armed combat (wearing armour), such as reenactment combat fighting (RCF), which is increasingly becoming a discipline in its own right as it builds on depictions of fighting moves and attempts to reconstruct historical combat techniques. This is leading to a situation where people are training and fighting according to all manner of different sets of rules (areas of the body where one is permitted to strike one's opponent, and so on). Invariably, this means that techniques and tactics are developed that will bring success in sporting contests played to these rules but that have no significance whatsoever for historical fights (for which these rules are irrelevant).

In view of the close links between the emergence of reenactment and living history on the one hand and that of the archaeological open-air museums on the other, this article sets out to trace this development with the aid of a few examples to serve as highlights, focusing particularly on Oerlinghausen – an example that still exists to this day.

Reenactment and open-air museums: a history

The earliest examples of reenactment are generally held to be representations of battles that were staged in the 1960s to mark the centenary of the US Civil War (1861–1865) in the US, where participants wore contemporary clothing and wielded corresponding equipment. During the decades that followed, these were supplemented by depictions of everyday life away from the battlefield in the form of living history.[11] As far as Central Europe is concerned, however, we have evidence dating back as far as the early 16th century of performances of events from proto-history. These include the Bavarian/Austrian *Fastnachtspiele* ("Shrovetide plays") about Dietrich von Bern and the Wild Huntsman, the show fights in Kriem-

hild's rose garden in Worms or the rural Hildebrand dramas.[12] The sheer scale that such representations could sometimes assume is illustrated by an example from the Munich area, where the Battle of the Milvian Bridge of 312 AD was reenacted by around 1,000 people in 1574.[13] In the 17th to 19th centuries, these kinds of staging of episodes from early history generally took place in public gardens, during pageants and in theatres. 1882, for instance, saw a reenactment of prehistoric pile-dwelling communities in the theatre in the Swiss town of Neuchâtel. What made this particular performance remarkable was the fact that it used tools that were exact replicas of original prehistoric finds. Similarly, the performances put on during pageants, such as in Rohrschach on the Swiss side of Lake Constance in 1889, are already being seen as an attempt to link historical presentations with architectural reconstructions.[14]

This period also witnessed the establishment of the first open-air museums virtually anywhere in Europe, with the oldest example considered to be the rural open-air museum founded in Skansen near Stockholm in 1891. Unlike the more recent archaeological open-air museums, these "farmhouse museums" were (and still are) not reconstruction museums in the true sense. Instead, they work with original or relocated buildings dating from the last three to four centuries under the guidance of ethnologists and experts in cultural and regional studies. These museums have been imbued with living history from their very early days.[15]

One of the earliest examples of extensive planning for an archaeological open-air park featuring living history was published in Graz in 1900 by Guido List,[16] but his design never came to fruition. List's proposal was to rebuild the Roman town of Carnuntum as it was in Late Antiquity together with its imaginary Germanic counterpart, a town called *Stillfried*. The entire complex was to be filled with both staff and visitors dressed in historical costumes.[17] With this complex, List – an Ariosophist – wanted to popularise his ideas of a Germanic way of life together with the Aryanist cosmology and racist "Germanic" religion that he developed (see below) by having it open to the public as well as during solstice celebrations and other large-scale events. Apart from a handful of individual precursors, the first open-air museums containing reconstructed pre- and proto-historic settlements were mainly built in the 1920s and 1930s. In Germany, apart from the famous pile-dweller settlements in Bad Buchau and Unteruhldingen, the first Germanic

open-air museums to have archaeological support were established in Oerlinghausen and Lübeck in 1936.[18]

The open-air museum in Oerlinghausen in North Rhine-Westphalia was founded to mark the town's 900th anniversary.[19] Inspired by archaeological excavations of burial grounds and traces of settlements dating back to different prehistoric and early mediaeval periods, two buildings were reconstructed and presented as Germanic huts. These buildings provided the settings for a theatre production entitled *Oerl Bark*. Depicting the Saxons as a Germanic tribe and its young leader named Oerl Bark, the play was intended to present a new image of the Germanic peoples, linking them to National Socialist "blood and soil" mythology. The open-air museum was expanded with additional reconstructions of Stone Age and mediaeval buildings in the following year, creating an alleged long-standing Germanic tradition and heritage. The educational programme offered at pre-war Oerlinghausen included a range of different performative and hands-on activities aimed at youngsters in particular. It gave a political fillip to the National Socialists in a region that had hitherto been dominated by the Social Democrats.

In the first few decades after 1945, open-air museums were no longer exploited as vehicles for official state policy in Germany given the experience of the preceding years, and, for some time at least, ethnic and historical narratives derived from archaeological data were displayed in a far more cautious manner. Given this restraint, life-size archaeological reconstructions and attempts to breathe new life into museums using historical reenactors did not reappear until the 1960s or 1970s. Having been destroyed towards the end of World War II, Oerlinghausen was thus not rebuilt until 1960, and again in 1978 after a devastating fire. Living history performances are now conducted here too in close consultation with museum staff. Ever since it re-opened, however, repeated attempts have been made by neo-fascist and far-right groups to exploit the museum for their own ends in an obvious attempt to revive pre-war activities there. In 1964, for example, the now-banned organisation Wiking-Jugend ("Viking Youth") hosted an event in Oerlinghausen at the summer solstice. In 1982, the far-right extremist Juergen Rieger from the organisation Die Artgemeinschaft – Glaubens-Gemeinschaft wesensgemäßer Lebensgestaltung ("Community of one's kind – faith community for way of life true to one's nature", likewise now banned; see below) tried in vain to estab-

lish his Nordisches Archiv ("Nordic Archive") in Oer-linghausen. During the 1995 Viking Festival, meanwhile, Harry "Radegeis" Schmidt, a "grandmaster" of the Arma-nen-Orden ("Armanen Order"; see below), appeared there together with other activists. Far-right extremists from political parties such as the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands ("Nationaldemocratic Party of Germany", NPD, now Die Heimat), Die Rechte ("The Right") and Der III. Weg ("The Third Path") still attempt to hijack the open-air museum to promote their ideology.[20]

Two other examples of post-war open-air museums in West Berlin and the former East Germany (GDR) show that experimental archaeology also provided significant impetus for the growth of ancient history reenactments, which became increasingly popular after 1990. In the Düppel district of Berlin, a museum village was founded in 1975 that involved reconstructing a 12th-century set-tlement that had been excavated by archaeologists. Vis-itors are shown the mediaeval lifestyle as well as old handicrafts and farming methods in order to create a living image of the Middle Ages.[21] Reconstruction work at the excavation site of a Slavic stronghold and putative religious shrine in Groß Raden in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania started in 1982. With the support of the local socialist party committee and the local collective farm, archaeologist Ewald Schuldt managed to rebuild much of the site and display it in an open-air museum despite the objections of the GDR Academy of Sciences. This museum was likewise revived later on with demonstra-tions of craftsmanship and the past way of life.[22] Since the 1980s, many open-air museums in Germany have also had strategies for using living history to present aspects of daily life and the relevant material culture. Open-air museums have more than doubled in number since 2000 and have been joined by countless historical theme parks. This development is often associated with a wave of commercialisation and "eventisation" prac-tices within history education that reflects changing ideas in museum didactics as well as the growing pop-ularity of role-playing games, historical reenactments, medieval markets and TV programmes about history.[23] Since the late 1990s, numerous places that are regarded as Germanic, Slavic or Viking as well as other villages and forts have been converted into archaeological re-serves or theme parks. Not all of these are publicly funded official institutions; some are private initiatives run by local historical societies, commercial companies or even reenactment troupes themselves.[24] Examples

include the complex known as Ukranenland – Historische Werkstätten Torgelow ("Land of Ukrani – Historical workshops Torgelow") in Mecklenburg-Western Pomer-ania and the Frühmittelalterlicher Königshof – Gervina ("Early mediaeval royal court – Gervina") in Breitungen in Thuringia as well as the Historisches Dorf – Ganna-hall ("Historical village – Gannahall") near Nauen in Brandenburg, which will be looked at in more detail be-low. At these complexes, visitors acquire knowledge largely by themselves as they go round, meaning that there is no academic "corrective" to counterbalance the representations presented. Yet visitors have the impres-sion that they are at an open-air museum that teaches its knowledge in an academically sound and scientifi-cally watertight way.

Criticism of the concept of reenactment

Measured against its massive contribution to the pro-duction and popularisation of images of history, the critical examination of reenactment as a method for picking up and communicating (ancient) history must be regarded as largely under-represented. As illustrated above, reenactment as a concept is considered capable of practically reliving historical events by replaying them and, in so doing, of gaining a better understanding of life in times past. However, such an assumption hinges on the belief that historical knowledge is based on a practical understanding of the past in the present, yet such an assumption has to be deemed to have been refuted by a series of fundamental insights from the the-ory of knowledge and the theory of history. Even as early as the 18th century, the historical theorists Johannes Martin Chladenius and Johann Christoph Gatterer high-lighted the locational constraints – in terms of space, time and everyday life – affecting the writers of history, which always have a relativising effect.[25]

The debate over the fiction of history intensified from the mid-20th century onwards. Apart from gener-ally critical viewpoints – which conceptualise percep-tion and knowledge as human constructs controlled by cognitive and social processes with, at most, condi-tional reference being made to an ontic reality – the main problem for any appropriation of history is that the past can no longer be perceived or physically experi-enced. Even though remnants from the past, whether

they be archaeological finds or historically preserved evidence of observations, seem to provide a direct connection to the past that can serve as the basis for generating specific ideas about past events, these remnants no longer belong to the past because they are being considered in the present.[26] Starting from the notion that any act of perception and cognition is in itself the result of a construct, statements and concepts about the past must be understood as part of the present right from the outset. Rather than the past *per se*, what they actually reflect is the results of a number of cognitive and social processes in the present concerning questions relating to the past. It must thus follow that, rather than one truth, the potential truth of many histories must be acknowledged. This means that the writing of history is only able to make more or less plausible statements about the past. Within the rational and methodological framework of the historical sciences, the degree of plausibility is determined primarily by the density and proximity of sources, which, when critically analysed, are granted a "right of veto" to rule out invalid concepts of history. This "veto right of the sources" is a concept in the theory of history that assigns the source-critical interpretation of historical remains the role of making historically untrue statements recognisable as such. For one thing, the veto right of the sources limits the number of potential partisan interpretations of history to those that cannot be proved untrue or incorrect through source criticism. For another, it runs counter to a naïve objectivism that holds that historical facts can be understood and presented over time without taking account of the perspectivity of the respective historian in their time.[27] This thus makes it impossible to relive the past, and claiming to present authentic historical reconstructions even harbours the risk that "military actions and wars are trivialised and heroised since the reenactment cannot depict the hardships, cruelties, fears, fatal wounds and deaths that are part and parcel of military conflict".[28]

In the field of pre- and proto-historic archaeology in particular, these underlying methodological problems are exacerbated by the general lack of both written testimonies and other written sources. It should therefore be obvious that, even if we presuppose the existence of ideal conditions for passing down the material remnants of a specific (past) age, it is still not possible to resolve the dilemma, which is that we in the present do not know how these objects fitted into the culture of

the past day to day and thus have no idea about the basic activities performed and routines followed by its people.[29] Logically, this must apply all the more to those areas of life that are not necessarily expressed in material terms, such as the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of the people belonging to these cultures.

It is precisely the idea of depicting a past era in an authentic fashion and the desire to put this into practice that prompts performances to go beyond merely presenting archaeological or historical sources in order to achieve narrative coherence. As the gaps that exist are filled in the process with narratives and personal convictions whose origins lie in other temporal and cultural contexts, this creates the appearance of totality, which in turn is deemed equal to the "historical truth".[30] Dense representations of this kind can thus easily become the conscious or unconscious expression of one's own ideological or religious beliefs.

This applies in particular to those areas of the reenactment scene that deal with the representation of Celts, Slavs, Vikings and the Germanic peoples,[31] where people's identification with the respective culture often goes well beyond presenting scientific findings in theatrical form. Instead, they attempt to link their own ethnic identity with the culture being portrayed by engineering a connection to their forefathers. It is from this imagined direct ancestry that they quite naturally derive as a matter of course their legitimate entitlement to make valid statements – that are understood as "authentic" – about these past societies. For example, as Heiko Gerull from the reenactment group Ulfhednar, which is related to the abovementioned project Gervina, explained with regard to the Germanic peoples: "I think and feel like my ancestors."[32]

Unlike when choosing and producing replicas of historical equipment or clothing, for which the reenactors tend to follow the illustrations and technical details from academic publications as closely as possible, often demonstrating an astonishing amount of knowledge in the process, they largely ignore the academic debate surrounding the cultural history and origin of these archaeological cultures. Instead of falling in line with current research, which argues in favour of a much more complex and nuanced understanding, they stick to academically outdated, oversimplified and romanticising images of ancient societies and the religions that they followed.[33] Onto this they project their ideas of an apparently "natural" and "unadulterated" way of life with

Fig. 1   Reenactor of Ulfhednar with their group flag at the Festival of Slavs and Vikings in Wolin, Poland in 2015.

clear social rules in terms of gender and age relationships, group hierarchies and concepts of loyalty and thus, as a contrast to the complexities of modern life.[34] They have a particular interest in the "faith of the forefathers", for which they feel a natural affinity – as another reenactor from Ulfhednar/Gervina, Thomas Ußfeller, explains:

> Nevertheless, we should respect our recent ancestors and not only our ancient forefathers, because they are the reason that I, we, exist and continue to carry their blood. We can't simply deny our archetypes and run after some strange thing [i.e. Christianity] that isn't connected to our homeland or its inhabitants.[35]

The reference to archetypes that is used here suggests a certain proximity to the ideas of neo-Germanic Paganism, which often draw on the ideas of Ariosophy to define its pantheon of gods or its own notion of polytheism. By analogy with C. G. Jung's theory of archetypes,[36] gods are understood as forms of expression corresponding to one's own culture or race and depicting higher spiritual beings whose presence is tied to nature or to specific natural monuments or places.[37] Statements of this kind illustrate how the ideas of some reenactors, and thus also the content of the pictures of pre- and proto-historic cultures that they paint, are based less on current research into archaeology and history, being fed instead from non-academic sources. Many of these have their origins in the beliefs held by *völkisch* movements

and neo-Germanic Paganism from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

A fierce debate erupted in 2008 over the problems of representation in the context of archaeological reenactment. It was triggered by accusations levelled against the Ulfhednar reenactment troupe, a firm fixture of museum-based demonstrations and TV productions. A performer from the group had displayed the SS motto "Meine Ehre heißt Treue" ("My Honour is Loyalty") in public during the opening of the exhibition entitled *Eine Welt in Bewegung* ("A World in Motion") in Paderborn. Ulfhednar was also accused of depicting a one-dimensional and romanticised view of history seen through the lens of the "ideal warrior" as well as making systematic and manipulative use of swastika depictions without any corresponding archaeological context (fig. 1).[38] Despite blatant errors of this kind, the group also found support from a number of archaeological museums and exerted a significant influence on some parts of the reenactment scene on account of its high profile and international links. Many of its reenactors were also members of various Pagan metal bands and used this channel to spread their views and beliefs.

This phenomenon is relatively widespread: since as long ago as the 1990s, several musical subcultures – especially metal and neofolk – have adopted a significant amount of neo-Germanic Pagan and *völkisch* content, causing distinct sub-scenes to spring up such as Pagan and Viking metal. There are large overlaps between the fields of reenactment, neo-Germanic Paganism and metal sub-cultures, and each exerts a marked influence on the other in terms of content. [39]

The Gannahall historical village

Work began in late 2014 to construct a historical village called Gannahall on the edge of the town of Nauen in Brandenburg. The aim is to reconstruct parts of the settlement known as "Nauen-Bärhorst" from the time between the second half of the 2nd century AD and the 4th century AD, which was excavated by the SS's Forschungsgemeinschaft Deutsches Ahnenerbe ("Research organisation German Ancestral Heritage) unit led by Wilhelm Unverzagt between 1935 and 1938.[40] The importance that Heinrich Himmler attached to these investigations in propaganda terms is reflected in the fact that

he arranged for a film – *Deutsche Vergangenheit wird lebendig* ("Bringing the German Past to Life") – to be made in 1936 about the SS's excavations at "Bärhorst" and provided a voiceover himself.[41]

The developer and future owner of the complex is Semnonenbund e.V., which was founded in 2000 under the auspices of the Berlin-based Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft e.V. (GGG e.V.; "Germanic Faith Community")[42] and which has held the legal status of an association under German law since 2002. Alongside its alternative-religion-driven purpose of "exploring the religion of our ancestors with emotional attachment and understanding",[43] Semnonenbund e.V. has also been active as a reenactment troupe. Even back then, the association gave talks, presentations and combat demonstrations in schools or at company parties. According to the association itself, the idea was born

> to create a suitable location for a permanent display. Since the historical representation was nevertheless to still be 'holistic', i.e. to include all the important aspects of everyday life 2,000 years ago, such as living conditions, handicrafts, culture, faith and warfare, a historical village was the only conceivable framework for this project.[44]

After the first planning steps required to establish the Historisches Dorf Gannahall had been completed in 2003, construction began in 2014 and has been ongoing ever since, accompanied on the site by events for children, annual parties for the local district and "historical competitions for armoured martial arts" known as Alls Wari Dags. The Semnonenbund has two "house teams" for sword-fighting and armed combat, called Tiuwari and Tiuteiva respectively.

To help fund the Gannahall project, the Semnonenbund launched the annual Rock for Roots festival in 2003, which, alongside various metal and neofolk bands, also featured a wide range of stalls providing information and selling products. The event attracted fierce criticism in 2005 because its programme included the neofolk band Belborn – widely regarded as far-right – as well as a large stall selling records from the notorious extreme right-wing label Barbarosse Record (from Sangerhausen in Saxony-Anhalt).[45] Also performing was a member of the Semnonenbund together with his black-metal band Mordorn, whose song *Raping* described rapes as "sexual fascination".[46] In addition, the festival featured

a stall run by Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft e.V., while a not insignificant proportion of visitors are believed to have displayed symbols and merchandise of far-right organisations and bands quite openly. Interestingly, the public criticism levelled at this event also came from universalistically minded neo-Germanic Pagan groups such as Eldaring and Nornirs Aett.[47] The festival series continued to be held every year until 2018, albeit under the condition – imposed by the town authorities – that no extremist statements or manifestations would be permitted in future. Among the bands performing here in 2010 were Menhir, Gernotshagen and XIV Dark Centuries, which all included a number of reenactors from Ulfhednar.

According to its website, the name "Gannahall" refers to the prophetess Ganna, who was mentioned by Cassius Dio and to whom the project is said to be dedicated.[48] In this passage from Dio (Cass. Dio 67,5,3), a prophetess named Ganna is indeed mentioned, who stayed in Rome together with Masyos, king of the Semnones, towards the end of the reign of Emperor Domitian (i.e. between c. 92 and 96 AD – in other words, around 150 years before "Nauen-Bärhorst" was built). Nevertheless, it is impossible to say for certain whether this Ganna was herself one of the Semnones.[49]

Semnonenbund e.V. devised new articles of association in 2021 that, somewhat cryptically, define its purpose as

> […] promoting cultural aims to look after the cultural heritage handed down to it and to foster and cultivate local history and culture. This purpose as enshrined in these articles of association is to be achieved by cultivating, studying and publishing on all aspects of the history of the town and region: cultural history, folklore, the preservation of historical and natural monuments, historical aspects of the natural sciences in the region, preservation and expansion of the 'Historisches Dorf Gannahall' project in accordance with archaeological, historical and cultural history guidelines for the museum village as well as related guided tours, events, talks and trips.[50]

On a technical level, this highly ambitious venture – to put it mildly – is to be realised by constructing 16 buildings as well as wells, workspaces, clay ovens and fortifications around the entire perimeter consisting of a ditch, a rampart and a palisade. All of this is to be based on the original documents by "Doppelfeld/Behm".[51] One of several noteworthy aspects of the plans is that "six Germanic longhouses with a length of over 20 m to 40 m"[52] are to be built – even though the latest research suggests that the longhouses that have hitherto been able to be scoped out completely were only between 13.75 m and a maximum of 29.00 m long.[53] What is more, current scholarship has established that the documented findings do not permit the conclusion to be drawn that the settlement was surrounded by any form of "fencing", let alone a full-blown rampart-and-ditch system.[54] Even these few examples cast doubt on the idea that the archaeologically proven architectural and structural features will be reconstructed in line with contemporary research.

Ample scope is being provided for planning educational and other experiences for children and young people as well as for families and tourists. As well as plans to use the complex for seminars, for example, the individual houses and even the entire complex are to be made available for hire for celebrations of all kinds.[55] These activities are intended to make the region more attractive to tourists. To this end, Semnonenbund e.V. is aiming to establish links "with other public, commercial and nonprofit entities, companies and associations such as the tourism association, the hospitality industry, transport firms, etc.".[56] The association is being supported, including financially in some cases, by these sectors as well as by the town of Nauen itself, represented by its mayor Manuel Meger.[57]

The museum village is also to become a destination for school trips from local primary and secondary schools in order to teach specific history topics and "communicate the region's rich history vividly and 'on the ground', so to speak".[58] At this point, however, it must be expressly pointed out that the historical excursuses published on the association's website in no way align with the state of modern archaeological and historical research. Rather, the argument presented here draws on the tradition of Gustaf Kossinna, who wanted to hunt for the "primordial Germanic peoples" using his nationalistically minded "settlement archaeology method" and who laid the foundations for the politically influenced research that went on during the National Socialist era. For example, claims that the Semnones' historical presence can be dated back to the time of the Iron Age Jastorf culture[59] are not scientifically tenable.

Instead, the statements made must be seen as an attempt to exaggerate the story of the Semnones as imaginary "ancestors" and "create a [fictitious] 1,000-year history for this tribe".

However, younger school and preschool classes are to be given the chance to use the complex in order to "access the history and nature of their homeland in a fun way in a kind of 'local history and culture lesson'".[60] There are also plans to use the village for holiday camps supervised by trained educators and, as mentioned above, it is already offering childcare during the school holidays. Sascha Rosengart, the deputy chair of Semnonenbund e.V., put it in slightly more practical terms when he said: "We could see ourselves working with children in particular, partly because we have a number of teachers in our association and partly because this kind of service is quite hard to come by in Brandenburg."[61]

However, the cultural aspects that, according to the museum's own understanding, are to be conveyed to children, young people and adults alongside "ongoing museum [!] operations" are enough to make one sit up and take notice: the Gannahall complex is to serve as a framework for communicating a 'concept of the eight festive days'. "This is based […] on the idea of incorporating the mythological and spiritual world of the pre-Christian Central Europeans that was dominated by a polytheistic natural religion."[62] And there would seem to be little doubt in this:

> all […] processes in nature were associated with supernatural beings such as gods and spirits, whose significance for the faith of the pre-Christian Germanic peoples cannot be ignored in a representation that is as 'holistic' and authentic as possible.[63]

It is clear that these certainties derive from the religious, or perhaps ideological, context of Semnonenbund e.V. rather than from academic research into the religion and rites practised by "the Germanic peoples" (see below). The idea that the neo-Germanic Pagan religion is more in tune with nature, and therefore more environmentally compatible, than Christianity and other monotheistic religions – which, in contrast, are accused of adopting a destructive attitude towards nature – often stems from one's self-identification as a Pagan.[64] Such constructs always necessitate specific exclusions and, undoubtedly, give rise to concepts of "the enemy" (see

below). This is also the case with Semnonenbund e.V., as the aforementioned Rosengart explains:

> Of course, if you embrace this faith, or if you have a particular interest in this Pagan faith, you'll undoubtedly have a degree of difficulty connecting with Christianity, simply because you'll always have in the back of your mind what 'Christianity', to generalise for a moment, has done to the faith. […] After all, you have a different view of nature or humanity than I'd ascribe to Christianity at this moment in time. Essentially, you can say that folk religions, if they really are actively embraced, are, in my opinion, much more tolerant, accepting and respectful of people and the environment.[65]

These beliefs are expressed in visual form in burning wheel crosses (also known as sun or solar crosses) during the solemn "Ostara" festival[66] or in the imaginative design of an altar that uses not one but two questionable symbols (fig. 2 and 3).[67] Atop a wooden pillar is a depiction that dates back to the *völkisch* amateur researcher Wilhelm Teudt,[68] who interpreted a detail from the relief of the removal of the cross on the Externsteine as a pictorial representation of Irminsul (fig. 4 and 5).[69] This depiction was then adopted as the symbol for the mentioned SS-Ahnenerbe (fig. 6) as well as being used by the Neopagan groups Nordische Glaubensgemeinschaft ("Nordic faith community") and Nordisch-Religiöse Arbeitsgemeinschaft ("Nordic religious working group").[70] Rico Krüger, the first chairman of Semnonenbund e.V., also displays this highly ideologically charged symbol in public in the form of a tattoo on his back, alongside a swastika and a number of runes, at least one of which is from the *Armanen-Futhark*, a set of runes invented by the Ariosophist Guido List (see fig. 7).[71] However, the mediaeval manuscripts and other sources that have told us about the existence of an early mediaeval Saxon sanctuary called Irminsul or Erminsul do not provide any reliable information whatsoever about its appearance or function.

The other symbol in the middle of the construction and decorated with feathers is probably an original invention. It shows eight arms shaped like s-runes placed concentri- cally between two circular rings. The effect resembles a hybrid between the motif of the mosaic on the floor of the north tower of Wewelsburg Castle (cf. Ritter in this volume) and a specific swastika type called "kolovrat".[72]

Fig. 2 and 3   Altar in Gannahall and detail of its rune and swastika decorations as published on Facebook.

Besides the activities already mentioned, the depiction of martial aspects is also very important at Gannahall. To this end, "annual competitions are to be held between the various living history and reenactment groups in Germany, e.g. in the various disciplines of full-contact fencing", which are known as the "Alls Wari Dags-Kriegerwettstreit" ("Alls Wari Dags Warrior Competition").[73] At these events, billed as "Germany's first-ever historical competition for armed martial arts", individuals or groups from all over Germany as well as from Poland bring their own kit and compete against each other with blunt weapons in accordance with an elaborate set of rules.[74] One long-standing participant has this to say on the dangers of competing in these fights:

> The risk of getting injured with us isn't any higher than on the football pitch. You might twist your ankle or get a cut or bruise. However, we're all really good friends and like to go out for a beer in the evenings. We're a big community, so the fights are played out very fairly.[75]

This throws into sharp relief the contradiction between the armed conflicts that are purportedly being reenacted and their sheer brutality that threatens the very existence of the community involved. The idea that using representations of this kind to communicate historical events and the realities of life in times past delivers any social benefit must therefore be taken with a pinch of salt. Rather, these events serve to strengthen the participants' self-affirmation as fearless warriors and fuel the fiction of a romanticised past.

This example clearly demonstrates the extremely high proportion of ideas and knowledge drawn from ideological planes that flows into the depiction of supposedly historical realities and that is often fed by people's religious beliefs. The following section thus contains a very brief presentation of the available historical sources on Germanic religion and traces the emergence and growth of *völkisch* religious concepts and of neo-Germanic Paganism in particular.

Sources for Germanic religion

Compared with the vibrant images of a pre-Christian, Germanic or Norse religion that are widespread in the public sphere but also amongst neo-Germanic Pagans, the situation regarding available sources is extremely challenging.[76] Aside from the scant detail provided in the excursus on the Germanic peoples in *De bello Gallico* (6, 11–28) written by Gaius Julius Caesar (after 51/50 BC) and in *Germania* by Publius Cornelius Tacitus (after 98 AD), which has been critically discussed in more recent research, there are almost exclusively archaeological sources for the early period in particular, leaving us with the same methodological problems here that have already been discussed above. Whilst at least some written accounts of pre-Christian Germanic/Norse life in the later phases by ancient writers and Christian missionaries have been preserved, texts on religion are more or less completely absent. In terms of literary sources from Scandinavia and Iceland, the earliest surviving texts date from the Middle Ages. Despite some religious and historical content, they are not religious texts *per se*, although they have already taken on a Christian character.[77] The most important sources for Norse mythology are the two major literary works known as the *Edda*. The *Poetic Edda* (also called the *Elder Edda*) is a collection of mythological poems and heroic lays that was passed down in the *Codex Regius* manuscript (ca. 1270). The mythological poems in this manuscript contain a wide range of narrative material about the Norse gods such as the prophecy poem *Völuspá*, the rules for living (*Hávamál*), knowledge poetry and farces involving the gods. The second work, known as the *Prose Edda* (also *Younger Edda* or *Snorri's Edda*), was compiled in the 13th century by the Icelandic scholar, Christian priest and lawspeaker Snorri Sturluson. It is a textbook for writers of skaldic poetry, designed to teach them the mythological principles underlying the language of their poetry.[78] The *Prose Edda* also contains additional skaldic poems from Norway and Iceland as well as texts from the Icelandic sagas. However, modern research has rightly drawn attention to the difference in time between when these texts were written and when the events being described actually happened as well as to the marked Christian overtones left by the mostly Christian authors.[79] Critics have also pointed out that these methodological difficulties affect not only the informative value of the primary sources of the literature but also the research literature from the first half of the 20th century, which in Germany was shaped significantly by *völkisch* and Germanic ideology.[80]

Comparing the historical sources relating to pre-Christian Norse and Germanic religion, which have only survived in fragments, with the statements, publica-
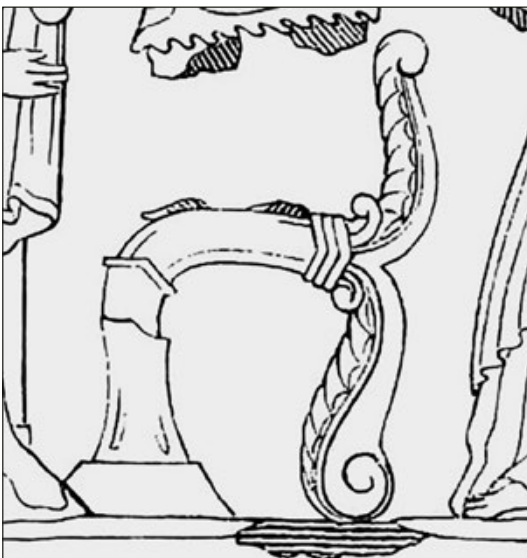
Fig. 4 and 5   Externsteine near Detmold, Germany. Relief of the so-called "Descent from the Cross" and drawing of alleged Irminsul detail.

tions and practices of neo-Germanic Pagans reveals just how unconnected the neo-Germanic ideas of today are from the historical evidence. Rather, it is clear that the existing gaps are being deliberately filled by narrative means by making reference to the historical sources, be this through bold (re-)constructions, new fictional creations or borrowings, in order to fit them to the proponents' own needs or ideologies of the present. From a Neopagan perspective, however, this does not constitute a problem of logic. Instead, it presents the legitimate opportunity to draw "collective and individual inspiration" to supplement the sources. Preconceptions like these are based on the *völkisch* and racially and ideologically motivated assumption of one's capacity for "inherited memory" (in German *Erberinnern*) as List would understand it (see below). This holds that there are forms of memory that reach far back into prehistoric times via a chain of ancestors and that can trigger a mythical experience.[81]

The historical context for neo-German Paganism

Although a Neopaganism that makes reference to Germanic religious culture is rooted in 19th century Romanticism, precursors of this development go back even further. During the Early Modern period, humanists used Tacitus' *Germania*, which had been rediscovered and republished in 1470, to create an origin myth that, in contrast to Roman culture, made the Germanic peoples the origin of their own collective identity.[82] During the nationalist and Romantic efforts at revaluation made in the 18th and early 19th centuries, two powerful constructs were developed that provided the basis for the subsequent development of biologistically charged *völkisch* notions and that, merely by virtue of their linguistic anchoring, continue to have an impact on everyday culture. The first construct equated the term *deutsch* ("German") with the term *germanisch* ("Germanic"). It was put forward by Johann Gottfried Herder in his 1796 essay *Iduna, oder der Apfel der Verjüngung* ("Iduna, or the Apple of Rejuvenation") and completed by Jacob Grimm with the adoption of Norse mythology as a historical testimony of "Germanic" heritage.

In his concept of the *Volksgeist* ("spirit of the people"), Herder positioned the ordinary people as the bearers of cultural memory and as a new aesthetic point of refer-

ence,[83] while in his aforementioned essay he argued for Norse mythology to be studied owing to the German people lacking a Germanic/German tradition of their own. Assuming their origins in a common "tribe", he explained that these myths were "more appropriate to our Norse feeling" than Christian mythology.[84] Amongst others who followed Herder's lead, Grimm also interpreted Norse mythology in his *Deutsche Mythologie* ("German Mythology", 1835) as a component of German folk culture.[85] As a general principle, a mythology appropriate to the German people was to be found that was deemed necessary to "reawaken" a national heritage and create a national identity.

This led to the two 13th-century collections of the *Edda* being adopted as the main source of "Germanic mythology".[86] A pan-Germanic point of view was thus established, and the corresponding frame of reference was extended from German-speaking Central Europe to Scandinavian Northern Europe.[87] This led to the reception of Germanic heroic sagas, the *Nibelungen* material, Arminius and the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest reaching its pinnacle for the first time alongside motifs from Norse mythology such as Odin, Thor the thunder god and Valhalla. The related literature, art, and music came to be perceived as areas of national tradition, and works such as Wagner's *Ring* cycle used material from Norse mythology as a constitutive element while generating the "native blood" as a source of salvation and revelation.[88] The influence of Wagner's adaptations of these myths on the popularisation of ideas of "Germanicness" and Germanic religion cannot be ignored either.[89] Although (or precisely because) the powerful imagery and dramatic realisation of a "Germanic world of gods" deviated considerably from Norse tradition, it shaped and continues to mould the romantic notion of the heroic prehistoric times and is, according to Heiner Möller, regarded as the "most German of all German materials".[90]

As racial theories were developed, most notably by Arthur de Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, relationships were increasingly forged between race, history, culture and religion. It was from this that the equation "people = race = nation" was derived. Orientalist and *völkisch* propagandist Paul de Lagarde first expressed demands for a "German national religion" at the end of the 19th century.[91] The religion "of the Germanic peoples" was an obvious choice for Lagarde: not only could it be considered pre-modern, it also met *völkisch*

requirements, as it was believed to draw its full force entirely from the "wellsprings of its own people". This concept of an "indigenous religiosity" was an explosive mix of nationalism, *völkisch* ideology, racism, antisemitism, hostility to Christianity and criticism of civilisation.[92]

Besides Eugen Diederichs, these ideas were also popularised at the turn of the 20th century by the two Austrians Guido Karl Anton List and Adolph Joseph Lanz in particular. They are still important points of reference for many neo-Germanic Pagans. List, alias Guido von List, is regarded as the founder of Ariosophy, an occult version of *völkisch* religion that represents an openly racist, Germanised form of theosophy.[93] List's main aim was to represent an esoteric Aryan cosmology and Germanic religion that he devised, known as the "Ario-Germanic religion". As its supreme principle, List emphasised the racial purity embodied by an Aryan elite, the *Armanen*, to whom the unconscious preservation and release of traditional but forgotten knowledge from their Germanic past was transmitted by means of "inherited memory" (*Erberinnern*) through the "voice of blood." Drawing on the idea of reincarnation, therefore, these *Armanen* claim to be able to "remember" Germanic rituals and ancient priestly knowledge across the ages. List himself allegedly drew from this source too, when he "found" the meaning of the runes while suffering temporary blindness. In fact, List's *Armanen Futhark*, in which he created some runes from scratch while assigning completely new meanings and sounds to existing ones, is pure invention. His publications on rune magic and rune oracles are also worthy of mention in this regard. Polytheism and monotheism coexist in the minds of the "Ario-Germanic" peoples, because human beings and the natural world are held to be composed of the same pluralities (atoms, particles, molecules) as make up the divine forces. However, this is deemed only to apply to the Germanic racial spirit and "spirit of the people" (*Volksgeist*), with this "indigenous racial religion" being passed on through incarnation.

The *List-Gesellschaft* ("List Society") established in 1908 promoted the distribution of its master's writings.[94] List founded the *Hohen-Armanen-Orden* ("High Arman Order") as a kind of inner circle of this society in 1911. He can be regarded as the central figure of the Germanic-religion-influenced wing of the *völkisch* movement. His construction of "inherited memory", in particular, became key to *völkisch* Paganism as well as paving the way for representatives of an "inherent" (*arteigen*) religion of the Germanic peoples.[95]

List was in close touch with Lanz, who called himself Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels. Lanz also devoted himself to the development of Ariosophy and wrote numerous racist, eugenic, anti-socialist and antisemitic articles and monographs.[96] As a former Cistercian monk, he founded the Ariosophist Ordo Novi Templi (ONT) in 1900. Modelled on the Knights Templar, it is regarded as the first *völkisch* religious community. The "Ario-Christian racial culture religion" followed by the ONT drew on mediaeval mysticism and the legend of the Holy Grail, linking it with mythical, esoteric and occult elements as well as with *völkisch* teachings on race.

All advanced cultures in history and all esoteric-cum-religious knowledge systems were believed to stem from the original "Aryan" race, whose ethnic homogeneity made it superior to all others. ONT's mission was to breathe new life into this primordial racial religion and operate a "sacred pure-breeding programme for human beings" designed to help the "blond race" of "Arian heroes" to triumph over the "dark races", which it referred to as *Tschandalen* ("Chandala").[97] Lanz also published the highly popular magazine *Ostara* from 1905 to 1917. In these works, he developed a bizarre model of history which countered the illusion of a Jewish (and also socialist and Masonic) global conspiracy with a supposed universal "racial struggle" being fought by Aryans and *Arioheroiker* ("Aryan heroes").[98] Lanz made less reference to the pre-Christian Germanic peoples than List did and can instead be regarded as being on the German Christian wing of the *völkisch* movement, whose representatives developed – by way of an indigenous religion – various ideas for how Christianity could be "Aryanised" or "Germanicised". This involved freeing Christianity from its Jewish elements. The *völkisch* dogma of the inseparability of religion and race led inevitably to antisemitism, which was of crucial importance for the German Christian movement as well as for the *völkisch* religious movement in general.[99] A number of other societies – the Germanen-Orden ("Order of Germanics"), the Gesellschaft Wodan ("Wodan Association") and the Nornen-Loge ("Lodge of Norns") – also sprang up in the circle around List and Lanz.

Neo-Germanic Paganism in the early 20th century

A series of Neopagan groups were founded in the early 20th century and especially following World War I. The two most significant of these were the Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft (GGG), which was established by Ludwig Fahrenkrog in 1907/1912, and the Deutsch-gläubige Gemeinschaft ("Community of German faith", DG), set up by Otto Sigfried Reuter in 1911 and still active to this day. Reuter also founded the Deutscher Orden ("German Order").[100] Both the GGG and DG professed in their creeds that the "German religion" was defined by the unity of "a community of blood and religion", the claim to be a chosen people, a willingness to act and be sacrificed, a constant readiness to fight, the ability to shape their own destiny and a world-affirming attitude as well as their "harbouring of the divine in the Germanic race" in the sense of a spiritual and physical attachment to the religion.

This *völkisch* religious Germanic faith was supplemented by religious practices in that, although the usual Christian festivals and feast days were re-interpreted through a "Germanic lens", the community retained Christian-influenced practice in principle.[101] Sunday was made a weekly feast day and featured readings from the *Edda* or from the *Germanen-Bibel* ("Bible of the Germanic Peoples") published by GGG member Wilhelm Schwaner. The annual festivals were also merely cast in a new light, so that the cyclical nature of life was now reflected in celebrations such as the winter solstice, Easter (resurrection of nature), Whitsun (God's presence in nature) and the summer solstice. In 1918, towards the end of World War I, Rudolf von Sebottendorf founded the Thule Society (to study German history and promote the German race). It is seen as the nucleus of what would go on to become the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), as major figures of the later Nazi regime such as Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, Alfred Rosenberg, Rudolph Hess and Julius Streicher attended its lectures. The Nordische Glaubensgemeinschaft was set up in 1927 by representatives of groups espousing Germanic faith that were centred around Wilhelm Kusserow.

Across the board, the ideas of Ariosophy grew to exert a significant impact within the Lebensreform and *völkisch* movements as well as influencing a number of National Socialist circles, their symbolism and their teachings on race.[102] Thus, they also made a major contribution to the enduring notion of a "Germanic religion". However, the extent of the religious influence exerted on society as a whole by the German Christian and, in particular, the Germanic-faith groups was fairly limited.

Neo-Germanic Pagan societies 1933–1945

Besides the groups mentioned here, there were numerous others, many of which, in 1933, joined the collective Deutsche Glaubensbewegung ("German Faith movement") founded by Jakob Wilhelm Hauer. Around 1935 or 1936, this grouping of various non- and anti-Christian, youth-movement and *völkisch* organisations and individuals broke up and was largely absorbed by National Socialist organisations.[103] Even though the Neopagan movements were not officially recognised under the Third Reich, Ariosophist and German Faith ideas continued to be spread in institutions that were ideologically and culturally significant, such as the circle that formed around Heinrich Himmler's SS-Ahnenerbe unit and in Amt Rosenberg.[104] Even though many proponents of the "indigenous religion" and followers of the Neopagan associations came from the educated middle classes, there were strikingly few Germanists, prehistorians or experts on Scandinavian or cultural and regional studies amongst them. Rather, representatives of these disciplines attempted to contribute to the creation of a *völkisch* image of "Germanicness" and to the equation "Germanic = German" in the sense of how the Germans viewed themselves as a people. This also included (re-)constructing "ways of life inspired by Germanic religion", although there was a general effort to establish clear blue water between them and *völkisch*-cum-religious Germanomania. German prehistory and early history research was also only too happy to ride on the wave generated by the generally *völkisch* ideology of the time.[105] As it did not become academically established until relatively late on, however, it had little, if anything, more to add to the public image of the "German(ic) ancestors" during this time.[106]

Fig. 6 Emblem of the SS research and teaching association "Das Ahnenerbe".

Neo-Germanic Paganism post-1945

Several of the aforementioned German Faith and Ariosophist groups re-formed not long after World War II. In 1950, parts of a number of Ariosophist communities led by Herrman Musfeld came together to form the Goden-Orden ("Order of Gothar", GO) (renamed Die Goden e.V., "the Gothar", in 1957), from which the Bund der Goden ("League of Gothar") split off in 1990. The GO has a hierarchical, initiation-based structure and is inspired by the idea of a mediaeval aristocracy. Its mission was defined as the renewal of a race-appropriate faith in the sense of a cosmic religion.[107] Kusserow revived the Nordische Glaubensgemeinschaft (NGG) in 1951 as a *völkisch* organisation made up of former members of various German- and Germanic-faith groups, renaming it Artgemeinschaft e.V. – Glaubensbund wesengemässer Daseinsgestaltung (AG) in 1955. Unlike Ariosophy with its esoteric undertones, the AG's "racial-faith" ideas are characterised by a desire to see a rural farming culture restored by an ethnically homogeneous collective in a way that draws heavily on custom and tradition.[108] Inspired by a "race-specific" monotheism, its strictly racially and biologically oriented beliefs are geared to-

wards preserving cultural and biological heritage as a "race-specific ethnicity".[109] After splitting from the AG, the Deutschgläubige Gemeinschaft (DG) was also re-founded in 1957, while Norbert Seibertz's Nordisch-Religiöse-Gemeinschaft merged with the AG in 1965. After the Nordungen group joined in the 1980s,[110] the AG attempted to position itself as the legal successor to the GGG, which had been dissolved in 1964, and in 1989 expanded its name to the Artgemeinschaft – Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft wesensgemäßer Lebensgestaltung (AG GGG).[111] Until it was banned by the German Federal Ministry of the Interior in 2023, the AG GGG was one of the most important links between neo-Germanic Paganism and organised right-wing extremism. The far-right terrorist Stephan Ernst was in the AG GGG, for instance, while the NSU terrorist Beate Zschäpe as well as NSU supporters André Eminger and Ralf Wohlleben also moved in these circles.[112]

As early as 1951, Mathilde Ludendorff founded the Bund für Gotterkenntnis ("Union for the Knowledge of God"), whose precursor is to be regarded as the Third Reich-era Deutschvolk association. The group, nicknamed the "Ludendorffer", was banned in many German states between 1961 and 1977 over allegations of disseminating antisemitic propaganda.

Whereas most groups were only able to attract a handful of new followers in the early years, this all changed dramatically during the 1970s, when the New Age movement, esotericism and alternative religions in general enjoyed growing popularity across Europe and the US. This trend also saw disciples flock to existing Neopagan groups. Alongside countless new small and minuscule groups, the Ariosophist Guido von List-Gesellschaft was also founded in 1970.

At the same time as these groups were being (re-) formed, developments during this period were shaped by the growing influence coming from the US, most notably from the circle that formed around Else Christensen and Stephen McNallen. In the early 1970s, the pair drew primarily from the writings of the founder of the German Faith Anglecyn Church of Odin (founded in the 1930s/1940s), the Australian Alexander Rud Mills. Some significant momentum also carried over to Germany, especially via the Asatru Free Assembly – set up by McNallen in 1979 – and the Asatru Folk Assembly, which he later led and which set great store by "racial origin".[113] Stephen Flowers, alias Edred Thorsson, the

founder of The Troth, would also appear to have come from this milieu, although he did later come out with decidedly anti-racist statements.[114]

1976 saw the foundation of the Armanen-Orden (AO) by Adolf Schleipfer, the head of the Guido von List-Gesellschaft, and his wife Sigrun Schleipfer (later Sigrun Freifrau von Schlichting) from the Goden-Orden. Both came from an extreme right-wing environment and acted as "grandmasters".[115] The Armanen-Orden continued List's *völkisch* and antisemitic Ariosophy, imbuing it with a "blood-gnostic" esotericism. Although the idea of "racial purity" was retained, it was now re-interpreted through a filter of "reincarnation pathology", so that its embodiment in the "white race" is seen as a sign of the soul's advanced state of development.[116] The Armanen-Orden has a hierarchical and dual structure under which there is both a polytheistic "religion of the people" (Odinism) for members with lower degrees of initiation and a cosmic, esoteric monotheism (Armanism), which serves as a "mystery school" for the more highly initiated.[117] In this capacity as a mystery cult, the Armanen-Orden served primarily as a forum for leaders and members of various neo-Germanic groups that led to numerous new societies being set up.[118] Until it was banned, the Armanen-Orden maintained close contact with the Artgemeinschaft (AG GGG) and is also alleged to have had close links to neo-Nazi organisations such as the Nationalist Front, which is likewise now proscribed.

Another group with strong ties to the Armanen-Orden was the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Naturreligiöser Stammesverbände Europas ("Working Group of Natural Religious Tribal Associations of Europe", ANSE), which was established in 1990 – again by Sigrun Schleipfer. The Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft was likewise revived after World War II only to be absorbed by the Nordische Glaubensgemeinschaft (NGG) and the newly founded Artgemeinschaft e.V. following a series of internal disputes. In 1982, Ludwig Dessel formed the Freundeskreis Ludwig Fahrenkrog. Three years later, the Heidnische Gemeinschaft e.V. was also founded by, amongst others, Géza von Neményi, who was an active member of the Armanen-Orden at the same time. Neményi merged the two groups into Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft e.V. in 1991, which – as previously mentioned – sees itself as the successor to the former GGG, whose archives it also inherited from Dessel, the last person to serve as chair.[119] GGG e.V. de-

scribed itself as an "association for inherited Germanic Paganism – 'Asatru'".[120] Unlike most of the associations mentioned above, GGG e.V. does not have a set creed or profession of faith. Consciously setting itself apart from other Neopagan communities, it refers to its religion as "ancient Paganism" and points out that, unlike them, it has a detailed, uniform doctrine complete with priests and shrines.[121] The religion is based on a polytheistic worldview. During its services, an attempt is made to make contact with the "gods" through prayers and offerings of plants and food as well as by means of rune oracles. If possible, celebrations should be held outdoors, preferably at "places of power", which are also regarded as places that were sacred to the ancestors in times past.[122] According to its own statements, its services and celebrations draw on the "ancient traditions", i.e. the "*Elder* and *Younger Edda*". However, other literary sources from the High Middle Ages such as sagas, fairy tales, folk songs and popular customs should be harnessed in an effort to "reconstruct and recreate the Pagan world of the gods as faithfully as possible".[123] Even if Géza von Neményi does not express any racist views himself, he nevertheless makes reference to some decidedly racist thinkers and protagonists from German- and Germanic-faith groups of the interwar period such as Ernst Wachler and Ludwig Fahrenkrog.[124]

Since about the 1980s, there has been a noticeable pluralisation within the Neopagan communities that has also had an impact on the scene occupied by the neo-Germanic Pagans discussed in this article. As well as the Ariosophist and "racial-faith" groups, whose accumulated knowledge was fed by the *völkisch* groups of the early 20th century, new groups now emerged that proclaimed ecological and regionalist links to a pre-Christian Germanic religion. Termed "eco-spiritual", these groups saw their faith as an attempt to "reconstruct a nativist religion of the Germanic peoples as the 'native Indians' of Europe".[125] This caused the range of political opinions within the scene to expand enormously: alongside openly racist and antisemitic groups, universalist groups also emerged that were critical of modern culture, embraced environmentalism and, in some cases, took a decidedly anti-racist stance as well.[126] This also led, for example, to German offshoots of English and American groups being established. As von Schnurbein rightly points out, this represents a remarkable re-importing of German *völkisch* ideas from post-

Fig. 7   Photo of Rico Krüger, 1st chair of Semnonenbund e.V., at the Festival of Slavs and Vikings in Wolin, Poland published on Facebook.

war America.[127] These groups include Eldaring e.V., an offshoot of the US-based The Troth, and Verein für Germanisches Heidentum e.V. ("Association for Germanic Heathenism", formerly Odinic Rite Deutschland).[128]

In the late 1980s, fierce disputes erupted amongst the neo-Germanic Pagan groups that made up the US-based Asatru Free Assembly over how significant the issue of "race" was for membership of one of these communities. This caused the assembly to split into three wings, each with its own separate organisations, termed "folkish", "tribalist" and "universalist".[129] A similar trend towards greater differentiation has also been observable in Germany since the 1990s, due not least to the influence being exerted from the US on younger organisations in particular.[130]

Three main strands can thus be distinguished in the field as it stands. Firstly, there are the *völkisch* groups, who tend to adhere to a racist understanding of religion that restricts access to their Germanic Paganism – which they understand as a folk religion – to biological descendants of "Germanic" ethnic groups. These include Armanen Orden e.V. (AO), the Goden-Orden (GO), Artgemeinschaft – GGG e.V. (AG GGG),[131] the German Heathen Front (Deutsche Heidnische Front, DHF),[132] Arbeitskreis Naudhiz e.V. ("Working Group Naudiz", AN), the Gemeinschaft ODING Deutschland ("Community Oding Germany", GOD), the Arbeitsgemeinschaft

naturreligiöser Stammesverbände (ANSE), the Mythologiekreis Urdbrunnen ("Mythology Circle Wellspring of Urðr") and the Gemeinschaft Deutscher Frauen ("Community of German Women").

Secondly, there are the "eco-spiritual" groups, who maintain a tribalistic concept of religion and position religious attitudes in accordance with transcendent forces in the biosphere of a concrete landscape. Their symbol of reference is thus more so "soil" than "blood." This field is represented by Verein für Germanisches Heidentum e.V. ("Association for Germanic Heathenism", VfGH), Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft e.V. (GGG e.V.), Heidnische Gemeinschaft e.V. ("Heathen Community") and the Yggdrasil-Kreis ("Yggradsil Circle").

The third strand comprises the universalist Pagan groups, who place the source of their religiousness in the self and its world experience. Neither geographical references nor ethnic origin are considered exclusive elements amongst these groups. These could be said to include Eldaring – The Troth Deutschland e.V., Nornirs Aett (part of Rabenclan e.V. until 2005), Asatru-Ring-Frankfurt and the Freiburger Heiden-Hain.[133]

It is therefore becoming clear that the current neo-Germanic Pagan scene is an extremely heterogeneous one and is fragmenting into various different forms and sets of beliefs, ranging from the "blood-gnostic" esotericism of the Ariosophists and racist *völkisch* organisations through to groups that pursue an explicitly anti-*völkisch* agenda. For instance, the scattered members of Nornirs Aett follow a written code of ethics that attracts punishment if it is breached and that calls for active engagement against extreme right-wing manifestations on the Neopagan scene and in society.[134] It would therefore be entirely inappropriate to the subject matter under consideration to assume that all the various organisations and communities espouse the same message and worldview.

As different as some of these groups might be in terms of their individual makeup, however, there are some attributes that apply more or less throughout this sphere of alternative religion. By way of illustration and an introduction, here are two quotes from Géza von Neményi taken from the website of Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft e.V. (GGG e.V.):

Our Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft (GGG) is an ancient Pagan community that follows a folk religion and that studies and practises the polytheis-

tic faith and rites of our Pagan forefathers from Central and Northern Europe. The GGG was founded by Professor Ludwig Fahrenkrog in 1907, making it Europe's oldest Pagan religious community still in existence. Our community is governed by the ancient Pagan traditions handed down from the Germanic peoples [...][135].

Rather than a doctrine of faith that has been created artificially, our folk religion is an ancient form of faith that has evolved naturally over time and that is not limited to individual acts of consecration but encompasses the entirety of human existence, including culture.[136]

What can be considered to form the basis of most communities and forms of organisation for neo-Germanic Paganism is clear from just these few lines: as it was even in the early 20th century, people's main motive for embracing neo-Germanic Paganism lies in criticising certain manifestations of modernity, such as the destruction of the environment, the dissolution of traditional social structures and a reality that they increasingly perceive as being artificial, ruptured and alienated from them. This is juxtaposed with the hope of spiritual renewal through one's "own tradition" and a "heritage that has grown naturally over time". Unlike foreign sets of beliefs, this heritage – which is deemed authentic because it is considered native – is felt to bring its adherents closer to nature and make them more deeply rooted within their own people, or even their own "race". Depending on the key tenets of a member's beliefs, therefore, they will either focus more on the bond that they share with their own country and nature or on a connection with their ancestors, their own people or their own race. The idea of one's "own" religion is thus founded on two elements: "blood" in the sense of heritage and "soil" in the sense of indigenous nature.[137] What is more, the possibility of obtaining intuitive or mythical access to the very foundations of "Germanic religiosity" is derived from the idea that "we are followers of the religion of our forefathers, to whom we are connected through the chain of our ancestors".[138]

Across the board, therefore, constructs of one's "own", "earthbound", "natural" religion are always based on excluding "the others" and thus on presupposing and defining certain concepts of "the enemy" in the sense of groups and individuals who are identified as not belonging. In the case of neo-Germanic Paganism, this applies squarely to Christianity and Judaism but also to all forms of monotheism.[139]

These ideas are particularly prevalent amongst groups and organisations that would call themselves eco-spiritual and/or tribalistic and even amongst some groups on the universalistic spectrum. In content terms, this indicates a degree of proximity and mixing between the sphere of neo-Germanic alternative religion and culture-critical, *völkisch* and racist ideas, which contradicts the occasionally adamant manner in which the groups distance themselves from *völkisch* ideas. In contrast to how many neo-Germanic Pagans see themselves as being part of the tradition of a religion that has been reconstructed or passed down through the generations, studies conducted to date actually show that we are dealing here with selective, biased interpretations of various source texts and archaeological finds that are grouped together in a new combination and treated as historical fact. Neo-pagan concepts of this kind, which are aimed at reconstructing pre-Christian forms of faith, must therefore be regarded as ahistorical and modern.[140] Indeed, these reconstructions are ideologically dominated 19th-century constructs in the sense of the "invented traditions"[141] that ultimately stretch back to the attempts made by Herder and Grimm to awaken a purported national heritage with the help of a mythology appropriate to the German people and to forge a national identity.[142]

Conclusions

Performances staged to help people learn and teach history are very popular, whether they are held at museums or feature in TV productions or similar. Yet there has also been an increasing debate over the didactic difficulties and methodological problems associated with this way of portraying history since the mid-2000s.[143] At archaeological open-air museums in particular, for example, specialist conferences attended by reenactors have been held in order to devise ways to engineer close academic and organisational supervision of the reenactment and living history groups by experts and museum-based educators in order to ensure the necessary professionalism and quality of the presentations staged in and at the museums. One key strand of this approach to mediation consists in making the "acted history" clearly recognisable as "theatre" and thus consciously shattering the illusion that the audience is watching a supposedly truthful representation of past events. The

archaeological open-air museum at Oehrlinghausen and the Wikinger Museum Haithabu are two positive examples of how the subject of reenactment is being handled sensibly and critically in Germany. In addition, conferences were held here to debate the ideologically charged representation of the past.

By contrast, the example of Gannahall discussed above shows how reenactment can serve to paint pictures of historical ways of life (and present them to an audience) that, far from being the product of the latest academic research, actually contradict it. Instead, the underlying preconceptions about historical developments and the state of (pre-)historical societies are fuelled by a number of religious and ideological spheres that are closely intertwined with one another.

One key factor in all of this is the romanticising way in which many reenactors make reference to "the forefathers", hinting at a supposed (unbroken) line of descent stretching right back to the days of the historical societies that they portray. Values and attributes with positive connotations are often ascribed to these "ancestors" and serve as a contrast to modern life. Instead of representing the latest scientific findings, reenactment is actually a way of appropriating the identity of "the forefathers" while also demonstrating this appropriation to the outside world. This imagined membership of a (pre-)historic group, usually understood as an ethnic group, is believed to unlock a deeper understanding of the past. This is why many reenactors claim to have the authority and legitimacy required to make "authentic" claims about the cultures that they portray.

Closely related to this problem is the field of (alternative) religious beliefs. Especially in the area of reenactments of prehistory and the early Middle Ages outlined here, many performers self-identify as Pagans, which makes them feel closer on an emotional level to the people of pre-Christian eras – something else that makes them feel more qualified to make reliable statements. And Gannahall is a case in point. It shows how groups and individuals from the alternative-religion scene of neo-German Paganism find their way to reenactment via attempt to "rediscover" a "Germanic religion".[144] Rather than a desire to share scientific insights, they are motivated by a striving for emotional closeness, which they seek by drawing on Neopagan knowledge passed down through the centuries. Whether consciously or not, this leads them to adopt beliefs shared by *völkisch* religious groups of the early 20th century and

reproduce them 1:1 across broad swathes of society. The portrayals presented in reenactments thus serve merely as a vehicle for conveying ideological and religious beliefs that are held to be more meaningful and significant because of how they are allegedly deep-rooted in history. Notions of belonging to an ancestral line and affiliations to peoples, clans and tribes that are understood in a biologistic sense and as "organic, natural structures" as well as ideologemes of an essentialist connection between human culture and certain ethnic groups (understood in the structural sense) feed directly into racist or "ethno-cultural" ideologies. This is why neo-Germanic Paganism is viewed as a major link to right-wing extremism. The uncritical way in which content is (or: is to be) communicated at places such as Gannahall is thus all the more alarming. At the very least, elements of this kind of religious and ideological knowledge and images of history are to be embedded directly into education via school projects and holiday childcare.

This makes it clear that efforts to teach people how current images of history come about need to be redoubled. In particular, communicating how academics go about their work and how this has changed over time should be accorded a higher priority in the public-relations efforts of museums and research institutions. What assumptions old images of history are based on needs to be explained much more clearly, as must why these images have to be regarded as obsolete nowadays. This could succeed in raising public awareness of current methodological approaches while also debunking oversimplified, explanations based merely on a single cause. However, this will require the courage to identify clearly the gaps that exist in our sources and, potentially, to discuss different narratives.

References

1   Hoppadietz, Ralf, and Reichenbach, Karin, "In Honor of the Forefathers. Archaeological Reenactment between History Appropriation and Ideological Mission. The Case of Ulfhednar", in Agnew, Vanessa, Stach, Sabine, and Tomann, Juliane (eds.), *Reenactment Case Studies. Global Perspectives on Experiential History*, London, New York: Routledge, 2023, pp. 77–104 (pp. 79–80).

2   Gedigk, Marvin, "Die Geschichte einer Lüge - Authentizität in TV-Dokumentationen", 2024 <https://media-bubble.de/die-geschichte-einer-luege-authentizitaet-in-tv-dokumentationen/> [accessed 20 June 2024].

3   Nevertheless, the museum associations and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) have a clear definition of what constitutes an archaeological open-air museum: unlike a "histotainment" park, it must perform a scientific or academic role, be supported by scientists and academics, and always prioritise its mission to educate and communicate over making a profit (Zippelius, Adelhart, *Der Aufgabenkatalog der Freilichtmuseen im Zugriff der Freizeitgestalter,* in *Museumsblatt Baden-Württemberg*, 1 (1990), pp. 16–22 (p. 16); Schöbel, Gunter, "On the responsibilities of accurately interpreting prehistoric life in full scale", *EuroREA 1*, 2004, pp. 150–160 (p. 156); Schöbel, Gunter, "Entstehung und Situation der archäologischen Freilichtmuseen in Europa – ein Überblick", in Espinosa, Tobias (ed.), *Vermittlung von Vergangenheit. Gelebte Geschichte als Dialog von Wissenschaft, Darstellung und Rezeption. Tagung vom 3.–5. Juli 2009 in Bonn*, Weinstadt: Bernhard Albert Greiner, 2011, pp. 21–34 (pp. 21–22).

4   Cf. Mölders, Doreen, "Archäologie als Edutainment. Können Reenactment und Living History historische Lebenswelten erklären?", in Benková, Irena, and Guichard, Vincent (eds.), *Gestion et présentation des oppida. Un panorama européen. Actes de la table ronde organisée par l'ÚAPPSC Béroun, République tchèque, le 26 septembre 2007*, Collection Bibracte 15, Glux-en-Glenne, Prague: Bibracte – Centre archéologique européen and Institut archéologique de Bohême centrale, 2008, pp. 155–164 (p. 157).

5   Agnew, Vanessa, and Tomann, Juliane, "Authenticity", in Agnew, Vanessa, Lamb, Jonathan, and Tomann, Juliane (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field*, London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 20–24; Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "In Honor of the Forefathers", pp. 78–79.

6   Cited after Mölders, "Archäologie als Edutainment", p. 158: "Ein wichtiges Ziel der Geschichtsdarstellung ist die möglichst detailgetreue Rekonstruktion der Vergangenheit auf der Basis wissenschaftlicher Erkenntnisse. Auf Fantasie und Intuition beruhende Darstellungen widersprechen diesem Grundgedanken. Absolut detailgetreue und authentische Geschichtsdarstellung [...] ist oft nicht möglich. Die daraus resultierenden unvermeidbaren Kompromisse dürfen jedoch nicht erkennbar sein [...]".

7   Samida, Stefanie, "Inszenierte Authentizität: Zum Umgang mit Vergangenheit im Kontext der Living History", in Fitzenreiter, Martin (ed.), *Authentizität. Artefakt und Versprechen in der Archäologie*, IBEAS – Internetbeiträge zur Ägyptologie und Sudanarchäologie, XV, London: Golden House Publications, 2014, pp. 139–150 (p. 146); Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "In Honor of the Forefathers", p. 79

8   Handler, Richard and Saxton, William, "Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in 'Living History'", *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1988), pp. 242–260; Mölders, "Archäologie als Edutainment", p. 158.

9   Mölders, "Archäologie als Edutainment", pp. 157–158.

10   Anderson, Jay, *Time Machines: The World of Living History*, Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984, p. 11.

11   Mölders, "Archäologie als Edutainment", p. 157.

12   Banghard, Karl, "Unterm Häkelkreuz. Germanische Living History und rechte Affekte: Ein historischer Überblick in drei Schlaglichtern", in Killguss, Hans-Peter (ed.), *Die Erfindung der Deutschen. Rezeption der Varusschlacht und die Mystifizierung der Germanen. Dokumentation zur Fachtagung vom 03. Juli 2009*, Cologne: NS-Dokumentationszentrum, 2009, pp. 29–35 (p. 29).

13   Banghard, "Unterm Häkelkreuz", p. 29.

14   Schöbel, "Entstehung und Situation", p. 23.

15   Schöbel, "Entstehung und Situation", p. 22.

16   List, Guido, *Der Wiederaufbau von Carnuntum*, Graz: Ed. Geheimes Wissen, 1900.

17   Cf. Banghard, "Unterm Häkelkreuz", pp. 29–31; Hoppadietz, Ralf, and Reichenbach, Karin, "Nationalist Appropriations of Open-air-Museums and Prehistory Re-enactment in Germany and Poland: Past and Current Trends of the Politicisation of Archaeological Heritage", in Kusek, Robert, and Purchla, Jacek (ed.), *Heritage and Society. The Heritage Forum of Central Europe 4*, Kraków: International Cultural Centre, 2019, pp. 207–232 (p. 208).

18   Banghard, "Unterm Häkelkreuz", p. 31; Schöbel, Gunter, "Museums Exhibitions, open-air museums, and hands-on archaeology", in Menotti, Francesco, and O'Sullivan, Aidan (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Wetland Archaeology*, Oxford: University Press, 2013, pp. 859–874.

19   Following Banghard, Karl, *Nazis im Wolfspelz. Germanen und der rechte Rand*, Wuppertal: Archäologisches Freilichtmuseum Oerlinghausen, 2016, pp. 24–30; Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "Nationalist Appropriations", pp. 210–212.

20   I am greatly indebted to Karl Banghard from the Archäologisches Freilichtmuseum Oerlinghausen for the information provided.

21   Andraschko, Frank, "Wikinger, Römer und Co.: Living History in archäologischen Freilichtmuseen und ihrem weiteren Umfeld", in Duisberg, Heike (ed.), *Living History in Freilichtmuseen: Neue Wege der Geschichtsvermittlung. Schriften des Freilichtmuseums am Kiekeberg 59*, Rosengarten-Ehestorf: Förderverein des Freilichtmuseums am Kiekeberg, 2008, pp. 37–55 (pp. 41–42); Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "Nationalist Appropriations", pp. 211–212.

22   Sommer, Ulrike, "Burgwälle und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit", in Rieckhoff, Sabine, and Grunwald, Susanne, and Reichenbach, Karin (eds.), *Burgwälle im akademischen und öffentlichen Diskurs des 20. Jahrhunderts. Leipziger Forschungen zur Ur- und Frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie*, 5 (2009), pp. 165–180 (pp. 171–172).

23   Sénécheau, Miriam, and Samida, Stefanie, *Living History als Gegenstand Historischen Lernens: Begriffe – Problemfelder – Materialien*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2015, pp. 38–47.

24   Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "Nationalist Appropriations", p. 214.

25   Koselleck, Reinhart, "Standortbindung und Zeitlichkeit. Ein Beitrag zur historischen Erschließung der geschichtlichen Welt", in Koselleck, Reinhart, Mommsen, Wolfgang J., and Rüsen, Jörn (ed.), *Objektivität und Parteilichkeit. Theorie der Geschichte. Beiträge zur Historik 1*, Munich: DTV, 1977, pp. 17–46; Rusch, Gebhard, "Konstruktivismus und die Traditionen der Historik", *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften*, 1 (1997), pp. 45–75 (p. 45); Mölders, "Archäologie als Edutainment", p. 159.

26   Goertz, Hans-Jürgen, *Unsichere Geschichte. Zur Theorie historischer Referentialität*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001, p. 95; Landwehr, Achim, *Die anwesende Abwesenheit der Vergangenheit. Essay zur Geschichtstheorie*, Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2016, p. 77.

27   Koselleck, "Standortbindung und Zeitlichkeit", p. 45; Mölders, "Archäologie als Edutainment", p. 159; Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "In Honor of the Forefathers", p. 79.

28   Mölders, "Archäologie als Edutainment", p. 161.

29   Jung, Matthias, "Fernsehdispositiv und dokumentarischer Anspruch. Das Fallbeispiel der SWR-Produktion 'Steinzeit. Das Experiment'", in Heinze, Carsten, and Weber, Thomas (eds.), *Medienkulturen des Dokumentarischen*, Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2017, pp. 375–387 (p. 378).

30   Groschwitz, Helmut: "Authentizität, Unterhaltung, Sicherheit. Zum Umgang mit Geschichte in Living History und Reenact", *Bayerisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde*, 2010, pp. 141–155 (p. 153); Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "In Honor of the Forefathers", p. 80.

31   Academically speaking, these are technical terms for describing complex and nuanced social orders that are grouped according to their chronological and geographical location rather than as self-contained societies in the sense of ethnic groups. Most of these terms come from 19th-century philology.

32   Fischer, Jan: "Menhir. Heiden auf dem Weg zum Erfolg", *Legacy*, vol. 2 (2001), <http://www.ziuwari.de/HP/Interviews/2.html> [accessed 27 November 2008].

33   This is also reflected in the fact that most reenactments of this type depict male warrior elites and focus primarily on showcasing their kit and weapons and on the live demonstration of combat methods. Other aspects of the societies' everyday life such as agriculture, trade, crafts, domestic labour, transport, music and art are largely ignored in the depiction, despite the wealth of research on the subject.

34   Hunt, Stephen J., "Acting the Part: 'Living History' as a Serious Leisure Pursuit", *Leisure Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2004), pp. 387–403 (pp. 395–98); Drieschner, Carsten, "Living History als Freizeitbeschäftigung – Der Wikingerverein 'Opinn Skjold e.V.' in Schleswig", *Kieler Blätter für Volkskunde 37* (2005), pp. 31–61 (pp. 51–60); Samida, Stefanie, "Re-Enactors in archäologischen Freilichtmuseen: Motive und didaktische Konzepte", *Archäologische Informationen*, vol. 35 (2012), pp. 209–218 (pp. 212–15); Samida, Stefanie, "Inszenierte Authentizität: Zum Umgang mit Vergangenheit im Kontext der Living History", in Fitzenreiter, Martin (ed.), *Authentizität. Artefakt und Versprechen in der Archäologie*, IBAES – Internetbeiträge zur Ägyptologie und Sudanarchäologie, XV, London: Golden House Publications, 2014, pp. 139–150 (pp. 142–43); Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "In Honor oft the Forefathers", pp. 80–81.

35   Odroerir, "Odroerir Interview", *Magacinum Ab Ovo*, 6 (2001), <www.odroerir.com/Deutsch/Interviews/Interviews5.html> [accessed 17 June 2008]: "Trotzdem sollte man seinen Ahnen, nicht nur den Urahnen, Respekt zollen, da sie ja der Grund sind das ich, wir existieren und ihr Blut weiter tragen. Man kann nicht einfach seinen Archetypen leugnen und irgendwelchem fremden Zeug hinterher rennen, was nicht mit seiner Heimat und dessen Einwohnern im Zusammenhang steht".

36   Jung had close links to Theosophist and Ariosophist circles and their ideas, cf. Noll, Richard, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement*, Princeton: University Press, 1994.

37   Cf. Jung, Carl G., *Über die Archetypen des kollektiven Unbewussten*, Zürich: Rhein Verlag, 1935; Schnurbein, Stefanie von, "Neugermanisches Heidentum. Kontext – Ideologie – Weltanschauung", in Pöhlmann, Matthias (ed.), *Odins Erben. Neugermanisches Heidentum: Analysen und Kritik*, Berlin: EZW, 2006, pp. 51–67 (p. 57).

38   More details are given in Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "In Honor of the Forefathers".

39   This also produces a considerable (politico-religious) influence on the content of reenactments. A number of decidedly racist *völkisch* organisations – the German Heathen Front (Deutsche Heidnische Front, DHF) and the international associations Allgermanic Heathen Front (AHF) and Pagan Front – were especially active in the field of musical sub-culture. As this aspect is not covered in this article, please see Dornbusch, Christian, and Killguss, Hans-Peter, *Unheilige Allianzen. Black Metal zwischen Satanismus, Heidentum und Neonazismus*, Hamburg and Münster: Unrast, 2005; Langebach, Martin, *Die Black-Metal-Szene. Eine qualitative Studie*, Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2007; Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "Nationalist Appropriations"; Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "In Honor of the Forefathers"; Penke, Niels, and Teichert, Matthias (ed.), *Zwischen Germanomanie und Antisemitismus. Transformationen altnordischer Mythologie in den Metal-Subkulturen*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016. See also Niels Penke's contribution in this volume.

40   Doppelfeld, Otto, and Behm, Günter, "Das germanische Dorf auf dem Bärenhorst bei Nauen", *Prähistorische* Zeitschrift, 28/29 (1937/1938), pp. 284–335; May, Jens, "Die germanische Siedlung auf dem Bärhorst bei Nauen", in Aufleger, Michaela (ed.), *Potsdam, Brandenburg und das Havelland. Führer zu archäologischen Denkmälern in Deutschland 37*, Stuttgart: Theiss, 2000, pp. 193–195; May, Jens, "Nauen", in Beck, Heinrich, and Geuenich, Dieter, and Steuer, Heiko (ed.), *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 21*, Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2002, pp. 1–4.

41   Cf. Klein, Julian, "Hans Schleif – Stationen der Biographie eines Bauforschers im Nationalsozialismus", *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, 31 (2016), pp. 273–421 (p. 282); Eickhoff, Martijn, and Schlegelmilch, Dana, "Das SS-Ahnenerbe und die Rassifizierung der transnationalen Strukturen in der europäischen Ur- und Frühgeschichtsforschung", in *Archäologie in Österreich 1938–1945. Beiträge zum internationalen Symposium vom 27. bis 29. April 2015 am Universalmuseum in Graz. Forschungen zur Geschichtlichen Landeskunde der Steiermark 79*, 2020, pp. 48–71 (p. 50).

42   GGG e.V. is a neo-Germanic Pagan religious community founded in Berlin in 1991 by Géza von Neményi, who was previously an active member of Heidnische Gemeinschaft e.V. and the Armanen-Orden. GGG regards itself as the successor to Ludwig Fahrenkrog's Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft, which was established in 1907 (cf. Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft e.V. <https://altheidentum.beepworld.de> [accessed 10 April 2024]). Besides various Neopagan publications, Neményi is also the author of *Der Slawen-Mythos* ("The Legend of the Slavs"). Going against the current historical and archaeological debate, the book argues that the Slavs should be seen as an "East Germanic people" (cf. Nahodyl Neményi, Árpád von, *Der Slawen-Mythos. Wie aus Ostgermanen ein Volk der "Slawen" mit fremder Sprache und Mythologie wurde*, Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2015). Alongside his duties as "Allsherjargode" (chief priest) of the GGG, Neményi has also been an active member of the AfD political party since 2013, for which he has been a local councillor in Bad Belzig in Brandenburg since 2019 under the name Árpád von Nahodyl Neményi. These were not Neményi's first forays into politics: he was also a member of the executive committee of the Berlin-based Alternative Liste für Demokratie und Umweltschutz (a precursor to Die Grünen), in which role he faced proceedings in the mid-1980s to eject him from the party amidst allegations of right-wing extremism (see Anon., "Mythos der Edda", *Der Spiegel*, 2 (1985) <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/mythos-der-edda-a-ae96093f-0002-0001-0000-000013510856?context=issue> [accessed 24 June 2024]). Von Schnurbein states that several members of the Armanen-Orden were involved in the infiltration of the local Berlin association of Die Grünen in 1984 (Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", p. 61).

43   Cantzen, Rolf, "Germanen, Götter und Gelehrte", 2008 <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/germanen-goetter-und-gelehrte-100.html> [accessed 10 April 2024]; Cantzen, Rolf, "Germanen, Götter und Gelehrte. Zu völkischen Denkmustern und Deutungsschemata vom Deutschen Kaiserreich bis heute", in Attia, Iman, and Köbsell, Swantje, and Prasad, Nivedita (ed.), Dominanzkultur reloaded. Neue Texte zu gesellschaftlichen Machtverhältnissen und ihren Wechselwirkungen, Bielefeld: transcript, 2015, pp. 59–72 (pp. 69–70); cf. Semnonenbund <https://web.archive.org/web/20040812020240/http://www.semnonenbund.de/Hauptseite/index.php?module=ganhall&module_id=01> [accessed 30 October 2024].

44   Semnonenbund e.V. <https://www.gannahall.de/semnonenbund-verein/> [accessed 24 June 2024]: "Immer starker kristallierte sich die Idee heraus, sich einen passenden Ort für eine dauerhafte Darstellung zu schaffen. Da die historische Darstellung trotzdem auch weiterhin 'ganzheitlich' sein sollte, also alle wichtigen Aspekte des Alltags vor 2000 Jahren, wie Lebensumstände, Handwerk, Kultur, Glaube und Kriegertum gleichermaßen beinhalten sollte, kam als Rahmen für dieses Projekt nur ein historisches Dorf in Frage".

45   Cf. Dornbusch and Killguss, *Unheilige Allianzen*, p. 179; 183, 286; 316.

46   Schulze, Christoph, "'Heimatforschung' am braunen Rand. Rechte Szene etabliert sich im Havelland in der Black-Metal-Szene, bei Heiden und Germanenfans", *ND-aktuell*, 2006 <https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/88290.heimatforschung-am-braunen-rand.html> [accessed 14 June 2017].

47   Nornirs Aett, "Braunstichiges 'germanisches' Freilichtmuseum in Nauen", 2005 <http://www.nornirsaett.de/doc/horn/2005/08/gesellschaft-geschichte-kultur.html> [accessed 12 July 2010].

48   Gannahall, "Das historische Dorf Gannahall" <https://www.gannahall.de/gannahall-dorf/> [accessed 24 June 2024].

49   Castritius, Helmut, "Semnonen § 2, Historisch", in Beck, Heinrich, and Geuenich, Dieter, and Steuer, Heiko (ed.), *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 28*, Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2005, pp. 154–158 (p. 155); Wolters, Reinhard, *Römische Eroberung und Herrschaftsorganisation in Gallien und Germanien. Zur Entstehung und Bedeutung der sogenannten Klientel-Randstaaten. Bochumer historische Studien: Alte Geschichte 8*, Bochum: Brockmayer, 1990, p. 261.

50   Semnonenbund e.V., "Die Vereins-Satzung des Semnonenbund e.V." <https://www.gannahall.de/semnonenbund-verein/semnonenbund-vereinssatzung/> [accessed 24 June 2024]: "Aufgabe des Vereins ist die Förderung kultureller Zwecke, das überlieferte Kulturgut zu pflegen sowie die Förderung der Heimatpflege und Heimatkunde. Der Satzungszweck wird verwirklicht durch die Pflege, Erforschung und Publizierung der Stadt- und Regionalgeschichte in ihrer gedamten Breite: Kulturgeschichte, Volkskunde, Denkmalpflege, Bodendenkmalpflege, und historische Aspekte der Naturwissenschaften im regionalen Bereich, Erhaltung und Ausbau des Projektes 'Historisches Dorf Gannahall' nach archäologischen, historischen und kulturhistorischen Vorgaben zum Museumsdorf sowie diesbezügliche Führungen, Veranstaltungen, Vorträge und Exkursionen".

51   presumably Doppelfeld and Behm, "Das germanische Dorf", Gannahall, "Das Projekt" <https://www.gannahall.de/gannahall-dorf/gannahall-projekt/> [accessed 24 June 2024].

52   Gannahall, "Das Projekt".

53   May, "Nauen", p. 2.

54   May, "Nauen", p. 2.

55   Gannahall, "Betrieb und Bedeutung" <https://www.gannahall.de/gannahall-dorf/gannahall-betrieb-und-bedeutung/> [accessed 24 June 2024].

56   Gannahall, "Betrieb und Bedeutung".

57   Cf. Stadt Nauen, "Spende und Zuwendungen für das germanische Musterdorf 'Gannahall'", 2021 <https://web.archive.org/web/20230605235651/https://www.nauen.de/meta/lokale-nachrichten/spende-und-zuwendungen-fuer-das-germanische-musterdorf-gannahall/> [accessed 30 October 2024]; Stadt Nauen, "Spende für Nauener Verein 'Semnonenbund' und dessen germanisches Musterdorf 'Gannahall'", 2022 <https://web.archive.org/web/20230604001653/https://www.nauen.de/meta/lokale-nachrichten/spende-fuer-nauener-verein-semnonenbund-und-dessen-germanisches-musterdorf-gannahall/> [accessed 30 October 2024].

58   Gannahall, "Betrieb und Bedeutung".

59   Krüger, Rico, "Die Semnonen" <https://www.gannahall.de/wissen/semnonen/> [accessed 24 June 2024].

60   Krüger, "Die Semnonen".

61   Cantzen, "Germanen, Götter und Gelehrte", p. 16.

62   Gannahall, "Betrieb und Bedeutung".

63   Gannahall, "Betrieb und Bedeutung".

64   Cf. Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", p. 60.

65   Cantzen, "Germanen, Götter und Gelehrte", pp. 7–8: "Es ist natürlich so, dass wenn man diesen Glaubenlebt oder wenn man ein besonderes Interesse an diesem heidnischen Glauben hat, dass dann natürlich gewisse Kontaktschwierigkeiten zum Christentum bestehen, einfach aus dem Grund, weil man natürlich immer im Hinterkopf hat, was 'das Christentum', will man es jetzt einmal verallgemeinern, dem Glauben angetan hat [...] Man hat doch ein anderes Natur- oder Menschenempfinden, als ich es jetzt dem Christentum unterstellen würde. Man kann grundsätzlich sagen, dass

Naturreligionen, wenn sie wirklich ernsthaft ausgelebt werden, nach meinem Verständnis sehr viel Menschen- und umwelttoleranter, -akzeptierender, -respektierender sind".

66   Gannahall, "Veranstaltungen: Ostara", 2024 <https://www.gannahall.de/veranstaltungen/ostara-24/> [accessed 24 June 2024].

67   Historisches Dorf Gannahall, Facebook.com/gannahall, 17 January 2017 <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=956206411177201&set=a.956205544510621> [accessed 24 June 2024] ; Krüger, Rico, Facebook.com/elrico.kruger, 9 May 2016 <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1016184015123834&set=pb.100001967344205.-2207520000&type=3> [accessed 24 June 2024].

68   Teudt, Wilhelm, *Germanische Heiligtümer: Beiträge zur Aufdeckung d. Vorgeschichte, ausgehend von d. Externsteinen d. Lippenquellen u. d. Teutoburg*, Jena: Diederichs, 1929.

69   Cf. Halle, Uta,*"Die Externsteine sind bis auf weiteres germanisch!". Prähistorische Archäologie im Dritten Reich*, Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2002.

70   Cf. e.g. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Artgemeinschaft_Symbol.jpg>.

71   See below; Krüger, Rico, Facebook.com/elrico.kruger, 14 January 2016 <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=947407768668126&set=pb.100001967344205.-2207520000&type=3> [accessed 24 June 2024]; Krüger, Rico, Facebook.com/elrico.kruger, 24 June 2013 <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?bid=490849087657332&set=pb.100001967344205.-2207520000&type=3> [accessed 24 June 2024].

72   Cf. Reichenbach, Karin, "Spurensuche Kolovrat", *Mitropa*, 10 (2018), pp. 21–23.

73   Gannahall, "Betrieb und Bedeutung"; Gannahall, "Veranstaltungen: Alls Wari Dags", 2024 <https://www.gannahall.de/veranstaltungen/alls-wari-dags-24/> [accessed 24 June 2024].

74   Gannahall, "Veranstaltungen: Alls Wari Dags"; Anon., "Brückenkampf im historischen Dorf Gannahall in Nauen!", in *Unser Havelland*, 15 May 2022 <https://unserhavelland.de/2022/05/15/brueckenkampf-im-historischen-dorf-gannahall-in-nauen/> [accessed 24 June 2024].

75   Anon., "Brückenkampf im historischen Dorf": "Das Verletzungsrisiko ist bei uns nicht höher als beim Fußball. Man verdreht sich mal das Bein, es gibt eine Platzwunde, man bekommt blaue Flecken. Wir kennen uns aber alle untereinander sehr gut und möchten abends noch zusammen ein Bier trinken. Wir sind eine große Gemeinschaft, es geht bei den Kämpfen deswegen sehr fair zu".

76   Cf. Beck, Heinrich, and Ellmers, Detlev, and Schier, Kurz (ed.), *Germanische Religionsgeschichte. Quellen und Quellenprobleme. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 5*, Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1992.

77   Cf. Uecker, Heiko, *Geschichte der altnordischen Literatur*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2004; Dusse, Debora, "'Eine moderne Religion aus alten Zeiten'. Germanische Religionsgeschichte und Neuheidentum", in Pöhlmann, Matthias (ed.), *Odins Erben. Neugermanisches Heidentum: Analysen und Kritik*, Berlin: Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen, 2006, pp. 37–51 (p. 41).

78   Dusse, "Eine moderne Religion aus alten Zeiten", p. 42.

79   Dusse, "Eine moderne Religion aus alten Zeiten", p. 42., cf. also the contribution by Anna-Lena Heckel and Heike Sahm in this volume.

80   Zernack, Julia, "Germanische Altertumskunde, Skandinavistik und völkische Religiosität", in Schnurbein, Stefanie von, and Ulbricht, Justus H. (ed.), *Völkische Religion und Krisen der Moderne. Entwürfe "arteigener" Glaubenssysteme seit der Jahrhundertwende*, Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2001, pp. 227–253; see below.

81   Dusse, "Eine moderne Religion aus alten Zeiten", p. 50.

82   Hirschi, Caspar, "Germanenmythos", in Jaeger, Friedrich (ed.), *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit 4*, Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2006, pp. 551–555; Poliakov, Léon, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalistic Ideas in Europe*, New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1993 [1974].

83   Steuer, Heiko, "Das 'völkisch' Germanische in der deutschen Ur- und Frühgeschichtsforschung. Zeitgeist und Kontinuitäten", in Beck, Heinrich, and Geuenich, Dieter, and Steuer, Heiko, and Hakelberg, Dietrich (eds.), *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung "germanisch – Deutsch": Sprache und Namen, Geschichte und Institutionen*, Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde – Ergänzungsbände 34, Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2004, pp. 357–502 (pp. 395–98).

84   Herder, Johann, Gottfried, "Iduna, oder der Apfel der Verjüngung", in Irmscher, Hans Dietrich (ed.), *Johann Gottfried Herder, Werke in 10 Bänden. Band 8: Schriften zu Literatur und Philosophie 1792–1800*, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker-Verlag, 1998 [1796], pp. 155–172 (pp. 167–69); Heesch, Florian, "Nordisch – germanisch – deutsch? Zur Mythenrezeption im Heavy Metal" in Helms, Dietrich, and Phleps, Thomas (eds.), *Typisch deutsch. (Eigen-)Sichten auf populäre Musik in diesem unserem Land. Beiträge zur Popularmusikforschung 41*, Bielefeld: Transkript, 2014, pp. 127–151 (p. 129).

85   Trümpy, Hans, "Einleitung", in Trümpy, Hans (ed.), *Kontinuität, Diskontinuität in den Geisteswissenschaften*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973, pp. 1–10 (p. 3).

86   Heesch, "Nordisch – germanisch – deutsch?", p. 129.

87   Steuer, "Das 'völkisch' Germanische", pp. 395–398; Wiwjorra, Ingo, *Der Germanenmythos: Konstruktion einer Weltanschauung in der Altertumsforschung des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Darmstadt: WBG, 2006; Penke, Niels and Teichert, Matthias, "Über die Geburt der Germanomanie aus dem (Un-)Geist des Antisemitismus", in Penke and Teichert, *Zwischen Germanomanie und Antisemitismus*, pp. 9–37 (p. 18).

88   Mölders, Doreen and Hoppadietz, Ralf, "'Odin statt Jesus!': Europäische Ur- und Frühgeschichte als Fundgrube für religiöse Mythen neugermanisches Heidentums?", *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Theorie in der Archäologie, Rundbrief,* vol. 6, no.1 (2007), pp. 32–48 (p. 33).

89   Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", p. 53.

90   Jenny, Urs, "Deutschland spielt noch immer die Nibelungen. DDR-Dramatiker Heiner Möller über seine Theaterarbeit zwischen Ost und West", *Der Spiegel*, 19 (1983), p. 205.

91   Lagarde, Paul de, "Über die gegenwärtige Lage des deutschen Reiches", in Lagarde, Paul de, *Deutsche Schriften*, Göttingen: Becker und Eidner, 1920 [1875].

92   Zernack, Julia, "Germanische Restauration und Edda-Frömmigkeit", in Faber, Richard (ed.), *Politische Religion – religiöse Politik*, Würzburg: Könighausen und Neumann, 1997, pp. 143–160 (pp. 154–55); Mölders and Hoppadietz, "Odin statt Jesus!", p. 34; Wiedemann, Felix, "Von arischen Ursprüngen und rassischer Wiedergeburt. Themen und Figuren völkischer Geschichtskonstruktionen", in Yousefi, Hamid Reza, and Scheidgen, Hermann J., and Fischer, Klaus, and Kimmerle, Heinz (eds.), *Wege zur Geschichte: Konvergenzen – Divergenzen – Interdisziplinäre Dimensionen*, Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, 2010, pp. 103.133.

93   Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, *The Occult Roots of Nazism. The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany 1890–1935*, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, 1985; Siewert, Sylvia, *Germanische Religion und neugermanisches Heidentum. Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte germanischer Religionen und zum Problem der Kontinuitätsfrage aus religionswissenschaftlicher Sicht*, Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2002, p. 141; Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", p. 53.

94   For example List, Guido, *Das Geheimnis der Runen*, Berlin-Lichterfelde: Tillmann, 1908; List, Guido, *Die Armanenschaft der Ario-Germanen. Erster Teil*, Vienna: Guido-von-List-Gesellschaft, 1908; List, Guido, *Die Bilderschrift der Ario-Germanen (Ario-Germanische Hieroglyphik)*, Vienna: Selbstverlag, 1910; List, Guido, *Die der Ario-Germanen in ihrer Esoterik und Exoterik*, Berlin-Lichterfelde: Guido-von-List-Verlag, 1910; List, Guido, *Die Armanenschaft der Ario-Germanen. Zweiter Teil*, Vienna: Guido-von-List-Gesellschaft, 1911; List, Guido, *Der Übergang vom Wuotanismus zum Christentum*, Leipzig: Bürdeke 1911.

95   Puschner, Uwe, "Grundlagen und Formen völkischer Religion im ersten Drittel des 20. Jahrhunderts", in Pöhlmann, Matthias (ed.), *Odins Erben. Neugermanisches Heidentum: Analyse und Kritik*, Berlin: Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen, 2006, pp. 5–25 (p. 21).

96   For example Lanz-Liebenfels, Jörg von, *Theozoologie oder die Kunde von den Sodoms-Äfflingen und dem Götter-Elektron*, Vienne and Leipzig and Budapest: Moderner Verlag, 1904; Lanz von Liebenfels, *Rasse und äussere Politik*, Mödling-Wien: Ostara, 1913; Lanz-von Liebenfels, Jörg, *Der Wiederaufstieg der Blonden zu Reichtum und Macht, eine Einführung in die Rassensoziologie*, Wien: Ostara, 1913; Lanz von Liebenfels, Jörg, *Der heilige Gral als das Mysterium der arisch-christlichen Rassenkultreligion*, Mödling-Wien: Ostara, 1913; Lanz von Liebenfels, Jörg, *Rassenmystik, eine Einführung in die ariochristliche Geheimlehre*, Mödling-Wien: Ostara 1915.

97   Wachler, Ernst, "Union der protestantischen und katholischen Kultur", *Ideal und Leben. Deutsche Monatsschrift für den geistigen Adel der deutschen Nation*, 5 (1917), pp. 661–662; Puschner, "Grundlagen und Formen", p. 23.

98   Penke and Teichert, "Über die Geburt", p. 21.

99   Puschner, "Grundlagen und Formen", p. 14.

100   After Mölders and Hoppadietz, "Odin statt Jesus!", pp. 35–36.

101   Siewert, *Germanische Religion und neugermanisches Heidentum*, pp. 153–155.

102   Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*; Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", p. 53.

103   Nanko, Ulrich, "Das Spektrum völkisch-religiöser Organisationen von der Jahrhundertwende bis ins 'Dritte Reich'", in Schnurbein, Stefanie von, and Ulbricht, Justus H. (eds.), *Völkische Religion und Krisen der Moderne. Entwürfe "arteigener" Glaubenssysteme seit der Jahrhundertwende*, Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2001, pp. 208–226 (p. 209).

104   Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", p. 54.

105   Cf. Beck et al., *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung*; Grunwald, Susanne, "Die Wechselwirkung zwischen ethnischer Deutung und archäologischer Methode am Beispiel der ur- und frühgeschichtlichen Wallanlagen in Sachsen. Eine rezeptionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung", *Leipziger Forschungen zur Ur- und Frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie*, 4 (2004); Halle, *Die Externsteine*; Leube, Achim (ed.), *Prähistorie und Nationalsozialismus. Die mittel- und osteuropäische Ur- und Frühgeschichtsforschung in den Jahren 1933–1945*, Heidelberg: Synchron, 2002; Steuer, Heiko (ed.), *Eine hervorragend nationale Wissenschaft. Deutsche Prähistoriker zwischen 1900 und 1995. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 29*, Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2001.

106   Steuer, Heiko; "Vorwort Ur- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie", in Beck et. al, *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung*, XV.

107   Hundseder, Franziska, "Neugermanisches Heidentum zwischen Esoterik und Rechtsextremismus", in Pöhlmann, Matthias (ed.), *Odins Erben. Neugermanisches Heidentum: Analysen und Kritik*, Berlin: EZW, 2006, pp. 26–36 (p. 31).

108   Nanko, Ulrich, *Die Deutsche Glaubensbewegung. Eine historische und soziologische Untersuchung*, Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 1993.

109   Schnurbein, Stefanie von, *Göttertrost in Wendezeiten: Neugermanisches Heidentum zwischen New Age und Rechtsradikalismus*, Munich: Claudius Verlag, 1993, p. 46.

110 Eschebach, Insa, and Thye, Elke, *Die Religion der Rechten: Völkische Religionsgemeinschaften*, Dortmund: Humanitas, 1995.

111 Siewert, *Germanische Religion und neugermanisches Heidentum*, p. 164.

112 Litschko, Konrad, "Einer der besten Kameraden", *TAZ*, 30 June 2019 <https://taz.de/Mordfall-Walter-Luebcke/!5603834/> [accessed 10 May 2023].

113 Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", p. 55; cf. Kaplan, Jeffrey, *Radical Religion in America. Millenarian Movements from the Far Right tot he Children of Noah*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997; Gardell, Mattias, *Gods of the Blood. The Pagan Revival and White Separatism*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003.

114 Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", p. 55.

115 Schnurbein, Stefanie von, *Religion als Kulturkritik. Neugermanisches Heidentum im 20. Jahrhundert*, Heidelberg: Winter, 1992, pp. 26–28.

116 Cantzen, "Germanen, Götter und Gelehrte", p. 66; Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", p. 58.

117 Siewert, *Germanische Religion und neugermanisches Heidentum*, p. 169.

118 Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", p. 55.

119 Schnurbein, *Göttertrost in Wendezeiten*, p. 44.

120 Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft e.V. <http://www.germanische-glaubens-gemeinschaft.de/index.htm> [accessed 19 March 2007].

121 Schnurbein, *Göttertrost in Wendezeiten*, p. 41.

122 Mölders and Hoppadietz, "Odin statt Jesus!", pp. 40–41.

123 Neményi, Géza von, *Götter, Mythen, Jahresfeste. Heidnische Naturreligion*, Holdenstedt: Kersken-Canbaz, 2004; Neményi, Géza von, *Die Wurzeln von Weihnacht und Ostern: heidnische Feste und Bräuche*, Holdenstedt: Kersken-Canbaz, 2006.

124 Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft e.V. <http://www.gggev.com> [accessed 11 March 2005] cited after Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", p. 62; cf. Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft e.V. <https://web.archive.org/web/20041022215242/http://www.beepworld.de/members62/allsherjargode/index.htm> [accessed 30 October 2024].

125 Gründer, René, *Germanisches (Neu-)Heidentum in Deutschland. Entstehung, Struktur und Symbolsystem eines alternativreligiösen Feldes*, Berlin: Logos, 2009, p. 50.

126 Cf. Penke and Teichert, "Über die Geburt", p. 22.

127 Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", pp. 64–65.

128 Eldaring e.V. <https://eldaring.de/> [accessed 24 June 2024]; Verein für Germanisches Heidentum e.V. <https://www.vfgh.de/der-vfgh/> [accessed 24 June 2024].

129 Kaplan, Jeffrey, "The Reconstruction of the Ásatrú ans Odinist Tradition", in Lewis, James R. (ed.), *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996, pp. 193–236 (pp. 203–206); Strmiska, Michael F. and Sigurvinsson, Baldur A., "Asatru: Nordic Pagansim in Iceland and America", in Strmiska, Michael F. (ed.), *Modern Paganism in World Cultures. Comparative Perspectives*, Santa Barbara and Denver and Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2005, pp. 127–180.

130 Gründer, *Germanisches (Neu-)Heidentum in Deutschland*, pp. 19–20.

131 Banned by the German Federal Ministry of the Interior in 2023.

132 Dissolved in 2005, according to its own statement. See Gründer, *Germanisches (Neu-)Heidentum in Deutschland*, p. 53.

133 Gründer, *Germanisches (Neu-)Heidentum in Deutschland*, p. 70.

134 Cf. Gründer, *Germanisches (Neu-)Heidentum in Deutschland*, p. 75.

135 Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft e.V. <https://altheidentum.beepworld.de> [accessed 10 April 2024]: "Unsere Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft (GGG) ist eine naturreligiöse altheidnische Gemeinschaft, die den polytheistischen Glauben und Kultus unserer heidnischen Ahnen in Mittel- und Nordeuropa erforscht und praktiziert. Die GGG wurde im Jahre 1907 durch Professor Ludwig Fahrenkrog gegründet; damit ist sie die älteste noch bestehende heidnische Religionsgemeinschaft in Europa. In unserer Gemeinschaft gelten die altheidnischen Überlieferungen der Germanen".

136 Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft e.V. <https://web.archive.org/web/20040928034430/http://www.germanische-glaubens-gemeinschaft.de/> [accessed 30 October 2024]: "Bei unserer Naturreligion handelt es sich um eine uralte, natürlich gewachsene Glaubensform, nicht um eine künstlich gestiftete Glaubenslehre, und diese Glaubensform beschränkt sich nicht auf einzelne Weihehandlungen, sondern bezieht das gesamte Dasein des Menschen, auch die Kultur, mit ein".

137 Schnurbein and Ulbricht, *Völkische Religion und Krisen der Moderne*, pp. 51–52.

138 Dusse, "Eine modern Religion aus alten Zeiten", p. 39.

139 For more on the content and worldview of neo-Germanic Paganism cf. Schnurbein, *Religion als Kulturkritik*, pp. 21–78 and 125–303; Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum"; Siewert, *Germanische Religion und neugermanisches Heidentum*, pp. 165–186.

140 Wiwjorra, Ingo, "Zwischen Spurensuche und Fiktion. Was wissen wir über die Religion 'unserer Ahnen'?", *Materialdienst der EZW*, 8 (2008), pp. 283–293 (p. 291).

141 Cf. Hobbsbawn, Eric, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914", in Hobsbawn, Eric, and Ranger, Terence (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: University Press, 2005 [1983], pp. 263–307.

142 Cf. Schnurbein, "Neugermanisches Heidentum", pp. 65–66.

143 Cf. Duisberg, Heike (ed.), *Living History in Freilichtmuseen. Neue Wege der Geschichtsvermittlung. Schriften des Freilichtmuseums am Kiekeberg 59*, Rosengarten-Ehestorf: Förderverein des Freilichtmuseums am Kiekeberg, 2008; Schlehe, Judith, and Uike-Bormann, Michiko, and Oesterle, Carolyn, and Hochbruck, Wolfgang (ed.), *Staging the Past. Themed Environments in Transcultural Perspectives*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2014.

144 However, this is a two-way process. For instance, men in particular find their way to neo-Germanic Pagan groups via youth scenes that look favourably on all things Germanic (skinheads, black metal, neofolk, role-playing games, reenactment), cf. Gründer, *Germanisches (Neu-)Heidentum in Deutschland*, p. 25.

Popular Pagans

Germanic[1] Culture and Mythology in (Heavy) Metal

Niels Penke

Besides the "hellish" elements of Christianity, no other set of themes is as omnipresent in the various genres of heavy metal as the pandaemonium of "Germanic" or Nordic mythology. Odin, Thor, Fenrir the wolf and the World Serpent, the Valkyries and Einherjar, Yggdrasil, Asgard, or the end of the world in Ragnarök – these are all names and images that appear in numerous band names, in songs or album titles, in lyrics, on record covers or on t-shirts. Metal without all this imagery is hard if not impossible to imagine.

The variety and breadth of references to "Germanic" culture and myth is large, as is the scale of the political semantics: from apolitical adaptations and implicit or hidden political semantics through to overt political framings. In her fundamental study of heavy metal, the sociologist Deena Weinstein identified the important role played by "Paganism", i.e. the entire aggregate of pre-Christian religions in Northern Europe, in the emergence of a list of themes specific to metal.[2] It is a long way, historically as well as aesthetically, from the first bands, which initially referred to gods, heroes and artifacts of the "Nordic-Germanic" pantheon only occasionally in their lyrics, to the establishment of dedicated subgenres such as Pagan metal and Viking metal, which define themselves through their exclusive reference to "Pagan" and "Viking".

The procedure that Eric Hobsbawm described as an "invention of tradition"[3] would appear to be decisive here: the narrative design of one's own past, connected to pictures, symbols, slogans and practices. Where collective memory no longer reaches back to ancient times, and where tradition has broken off and ended a continuum of vivid traditions, imagination sets in, and the narrative begins. Its function is to reconstruct a whole picture from the written records and to enrich the fragmentary patterns by inventing the requisite elements that are missing. In connection with the Germanic tribes in particular, this is a phenomenon that can be traced back to early modern times (the 16th century) and

that became most prominent in the Romantic period (early 19th century) but also to the *Völkische Bewegung* ("Folkist movement") after 1900 and to National Socialism between the 1920s and 1945. All these kinds of cultural heritage are still being maintained in one context or another. They go together in many of the neo-*völkisch* attempts to shape a "whole" Germanic culture and to identify themselves as Germanic people or tribes.

The main problems facing the proponents remain the same and are what all their ancestors throughout the centuries have experienced: the fundamental problem of "reviving" non-literary cultures whose earliest traditions can only be made accessible through archaeological finds – in the form of objects that are dug up and pictorial monuments that are preserved – and through descriptions penned by others, especially Roman authors. Thus the primary, "authentic", historical phase can only be reconstructed via foreign descriptions, while the first written testimonies come in the 8th century in the Old High German period – after Christianisation, in other words.

This means that alternative strategies are needed. One of them is to make the at-once tangible and abstract appeal to the "common blood" of all Germanic tribes and their ancestors, which is supported by the assumption of a "spiritual" kinship, a kind of eternal *Volksgeist* in the tradition of Herder.[4] Another strategy involves accentuating the "realness" and "trueness" of those identity designs that have to be confirmed repeatedly through performance and rhetoric. Tacking "Germanic", i.e. the supposedly "own" stories and traditions, enables a completely different personal reference to be made to the material than in the case of Satanism or mere fantasy. What "Vikings" and "Teutons" offer is significantly broader due to the number of diffuse historical references involved. In addition to the idealistic identification with allegorical figures representing "good" and "evil", there is one that enables people to make the historical and ethnic connection at the same time, i.e. to

fantasise about the geographical reference as "blood-based" descendants in a line of tradition understood as a community of descent shared with one's ancestors. And, with the aim of updating one's former enemies and counter-images at the same time in the positive identity designs for one's own people (*Volk*).

This kind of *Volk*, as an idealised and idealising concept, is always connected with origin, with the roots of tribes that inhabit particular areas – in contrast to the unspecified identities of "modern" life that are linked to urban living, mobility and multi-culturalism, plurality and hybridity. *Volk* opposes the centres of modern society by placing emphasis on the "periphery", on rural areas – in both space and time. The contemporary world is juxtaposed with past periods in history: pre-mediaeval, mediaeval or (at the very least) the Romantic era. This premise means that *Volk* always describes an interrelationship between certain spaces, people and the cultural matrices inscribed in all of them. This triad is what constitutes a *Volk* and, in the aggressive notion of a *völkisch* conception, a complex of racism and antisemitism.

Three main patterns can be discerned in the metal subcultures when one deals with Norse mythology and Germanic history. The naïve staging of – or as – Vikings for purely entertainment purposes that comes with the retelling of the old stories of gods and heroes and a politically unintentional use of these "cultural icons" can be interpreted under the heading of "Carnival" as understood by Mikhail Bakhtin.[5] The more ambitious appropriations that care about authenticity and seek out historical lines of tradition can be understood as "neo-Romantic". There are also bands and musicians who convey content that goes beyond the merely aesthetic and that voices political claims and demands with many elements in common with (neo-)Nazism. Metal is not the only domain where these modes of appropriation are part of the usual practices, however; they can be observed in literature or new-religious movements too.[6]

In all of these categorisations, falling back on one's "own" history and a "true", "un-alienated" culture has strong identity-forming powers, which always creates a positive self-image of the actors. Attributes of strength and health go hand in hand with a stereotypical imagery that consistently serves to elevate the "Siegfried type", the blond beast, to the ideal (and certainly does not always intend or desire the implications). In combination with a diffuse sense of anti-modernism, hostility to-wards civilisation and praise of a rural, subsistence-based way of life, some foes are always implied and are portrayed as being close at hand. What, then, is the counterpart to the supposedly "Germanic" virtues, their healthy people and their martial spirit?

Vikings and the Germanic peoples in the history of heavy metal

It all starts with Led Zeppelin's *Immigrant Song* (1970) from their album *Led Zeppelin III*.[7] This song deals with the Norman invasion of Britain and enjoyed relative popularity throughout the history of heavy metal, even though the band made no claim to be Vikings themselves. But it was a start nonetheless and, a few years later, the Canadian Jon Mikl Thor appeared with his "carnivalesque" portrayals of the eponymous Norse god of thunder (from 1973 onwards). Thor is further proof that Northern European history and mythology were already points of reference during metal's formative phase. Compared to later appropriations, their discussion remained superficial and was merely one theme amongst many. Moving into the 1980s, when the internationally established genre of heavy metal was entering a crucial process of differentiation into various sub-genres and national scenes with their own structures and traditions, a whole host of bands were making reference to the Norse pantheon.

Several bands named after Wotan, Odin, Thor or Asgard appeared. The first person to identify himself as a Viking was Swedish guitarist Yngwie Malmsteen, who released the song *I'm A Viking* in 1985.[8] This song features a Viking's fantasies of looting and murder in a kind of role-playing poetry. The American band Manowar can be cited as a prime example of no less prominence, not least due to the lyrics of their songs *Gates of Valhalla* (1983), *Blood of My Enemies* (1984) and *Thor (The Powerhead)* (1984, from the album *Sign of the Hammer*, whose title also references the god Thor or, more accurately, the hammer Mjolnir that he wielded), which draw from the stock of Norse mythology. Unlike most of the other bands mentioned, Manowar's prominence and influence on the entire metal culture gives it a relevance that surpasses that of the others. This can also be seen in the band's martial aesthetic, which is expressed in its lyrics and on its album covers. This subtly varies constantly recurring motifs of massive battles and mighty warriors.

The members of Manowar themselves adapted these roles as virile warriors in strong forms of self-portrayal, which place themselves somewhere between the Siegfried of Wagnerian opera and the imagery of Conan the Barbarian in visual terms based on their chosen outfits and weapons. One of the fundamental constants is a hypertrophic ideal of masculinity that is modelled on the archaic images of heroes and warriors in films and fantasy novels and that makes repeated reference to "northern" stereotypes that have become style-defining and ever-present. An increased focus on Norse themes can be found in Manowar's 2007 concept album *Gods of War*[9] and its collaboration with fantasy author Wolfgang Hohlbein. Despite this "advanced" collaboration and the constant reference to themes and motifs from Norse mythology, however, Manowar's approach can in fact be considered as a kind of "carnivalisation" and "spectacularisation". The naïve staging of – or as – Vikings for mainly entertainment purposes, the retelling of stories of gods and heroes, and the unintentional use of related cultural icons do not go any further. This "carnivalisation" is not intended to pass judgment on the aesthetic value and the seriousness of what is presented; I am using the term merely to describe a mode of presentation that chooses its specific referentialisation and costuming as one of other possible purposes for the show and the amusement, without interfering with further interests – philosophical claims, historical connections or identity-forming functions. What one sees is the major part; no cultural tradition is generated, and no political claims are made.

Towards the end of the 1980s, the Swedish band Bathory attempted a more serious approach. The album *Blood Fire Death*[10] (1988) can be seen as the founding document of Viking metal, a subgenre whose thematic focus is exclusively on Vikings and Norse myths. After three style-defining albums with mostly Satanic content, the leader of the band, Thomas "Quorthon" Forsberg, attempted a reorientation with reference to Norse mythology. This mission was expressed in a sophisticated concept that was something of a novelty at the time. For the album's cover, he used the painting Åsgårdsreien ("The Wild Hunt of Odin", 1872) by the Norwegian artist Peter Nicolai Arbo, a well-known example of Norwegian national Romanticism (fig. 1). Besides the cover, some of the song titles also make reference to mythology: the album opens with an instrumental, *Oden's Ride Over Northland*, and ends with the title track, which

Fig. 1   Album Cover of Bathory, using the picture *Åsgårdsreien* by Norwegian painter Peter Nicolai Arbo. Bathory: *Blood Fire Death*. Under One Flag, 1988.

describes an epic battle and invokes imagery from the doomsday vision of Ragnarök from the *Edda*. It concludes by evoking a state where the "souls of the ancients" reign. Using polyphonic vocals, acoustic guitars and the sounds of neighing horses and thunderstorms, *Blood Fire Death* not only introduced new stylistic elements into (black) metal but also served to create a unique atmosphere that was the first of its kind and that set traditional metal apart. These efforts to find other suitable moods and atmospheres and their integration into a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* were stepped up further in the follow-up albums *Hammerheart*[11] (1990) and *Twilight of the Gods*[12] (1991), which explored Norse themes from every angle.

However, the first band to actually describe their music as Viking metal was Norway's Enslaved, who made their debut in 1994 with the album *Vikingligr Veldi*.[13] For the first time, Enslaved presented a concept that combined all the various aspects – the cover, the song titles, the lyrics in Icelandic and the portrayal of the musicians as Vikings in allegedly historical costumes. Their music and appearance are clearly serious; there are no recognisable carnivalesque moments in their concept. Enslaved thus defined a whole style and brought numerous bands in their wake (Einherjer, Amon Amarth, Thyrfing and many others) who helped

to establish Viking metal as a metal subgenre in its own right. However, this does not mean that Vikings or the gods and heroes of the Norse pantheon have disappeared from other subgenres. Rather, they have remained one popular set of motifs amongst many, e.g. in power metal, the various flavours of which range from carnivalisation through to extreme politicisation.

No explicit political content can be found in the metal bands and genres discussed so far. A link between Viking/Germanic culture and a political agenda is first identifiable in the case of the Norwegian band Burzum and echoed in terms of its ideological alignment by the German band Absurd. Both tackled the twin ideas of Germanic heritage and Viking culture with more seriousness. The two are rarely distinguished and the imagery used often blends one with the other – Germanic appears as the "general" entity while Vikings refer to a specific representation. Thus, this amplification is less about self-portrayal with historical costumes and weapons than it is about being inscribed in specific lines of tradition, which aims to create deeper connections than the superficial phenomena of the masquerade. While Burzum's Varg Vikernes has described himself as an agent of Wotan and his philosophy as "Wodanism", which combines heathen imagery and National Socialist thought under the emblem of Wotan/Odin, Absurd came up with the "Asgardsrei" as a mythical association of spirit-driven warriors. The CD booklet accompanying their album *Asgardsrei*[14] draws a genealogical line from Norse warriors of the Middle Ages through to the SS of Nazi Germany and beyond to the black metal musicians of the 21st century. They call for a cultural war and are certain of victory. "Der Sieg ist unser"[15] ("Victory is ours"), says one of their song titles.

There is also a close connection here with the *völkisch* movement, whose neo-Romantic Germanism paved the way for various racist and antisemitic movements at the turn of the 20th century that also bundled National Socialism in with them in order to achieve maximum impact. The affirmation of National Socialism and the Holocaust can also be explained by the *völkisch* element that Burzum and Absurd have emphasised.[16]

Against the background of metal themes and such implied ideals as masculinity, warriorship, bravery and sincerity that are widespread in metal in general, the radical formulation of a *völkisch*-fuelled antisemitism, especially in black metal of the 1990s, can be seen as a possible logical consequence. There is no attempt to find new images, either musically or in terms of the overall aesthetic. Instead, much of what was there before is amalgamated into a new and harsher concept in which certain moments are radically thought through to the end and combined with a martial seriousness that goes beyond the aesthetic and wants to have a real impact on culture and politics. What makes these approaches fundamentally different from the many others out there is the unconditional seriousness and – something that is often exhibited and attested to by prominent statements (such as murder, arson – both Vikernes/Burzum and the Absurd musicians went to jail for murder) – the will to act against everything deemed to be "false". As previous studies have shown,[17] the notion of "falseness" is closely linked to Judaism as the polar opposite of Germanic/Viking Paganism and people.

The "true" and its "other"

The question of why radical antisemitic statements frequently occur in metal contexts in particular can be answered by looking at the connections between some of metal's constitutive ideologemes. Antisemitism is presented in emphatic references to what is "real", "true" and "authentic" as opposed to what is "false" and "treacherous", which by contrast is associated with a widespread unease with capitalist modernity in order to have the responsibility for a global system converge in an image of the "Jew" as enemy, against whom the antimodern "corrective measures" are directed.[18]

One of the key lines of thought is the idea of "Germanomania".[19] This pathological overemphasis of the "Germanic" precursors of modern Germanness has developed a particularly radical and aggressive variety of the "German Teutonic myth".[20] It begins with the "rediscovery" of Tacitus's *Germania* by Humanist scholars in the 15th century, meaning that the images of what constitutes their "own", i.e. the Germanic and mythical, are always accompanied by ideas of an "other" with negative connotations that is (sometimes clearly, sometimes not) marked as "Jewish". Vikernes in particular, as well as other proponents of the National Socialist black metal (NSBM) subgenre – a form of extreme metal that is mainly defined by its positive references to National Socialism – in general may represent extreme cases but are not isolated phenomena. Rather, they appear in comparison to other references to "Germanicness" and similar conceptual self-designs only as the most radical and

most consistent representations of widespread narratives. This can be seen as a continuation of some traditional lines, and not only in metal: demarcation and the effort for authenticity, "genuineness" and originality as well as an affinity for verbal and real violence. If this constellation also includes a reference to the "Germanic", which is usually presented as one's "own" in cultural terms, about which certain relationships of origin are claimed, then an external reference to tradition is also established, which integrates the corresponding bands and actors into a historical timeline and makes them politically apparent. A vehement anti-modernism is also an integral part of all "escapist" mediaeval fantasies, which are opposed to the – obviously hated – living conditions currently being suffered in the modern world.

Names, motifs and figures from "Germanic" mythology are very important here, and their appropriation in the form of idealised images and identification templates for artistic self-dramatisation pursues specific interests that, even if they appear diffuse or remain nebulous, reveal a great deal about the effects intended by their users. In the triad formed by 1) self-representation – i.e. a positive self-image against which one or more negative images of the "other" as the enemy are set; 2) cultural reassurance – via constructions such as tradition, culture and "race", which are also contrasted with the "foreign" or the enemy; and 3) the consistently repeated anti-modernist argumentation employed by structures of antisemitism. The (supposed) ideals and images of a pre-modern Northern Europe and of simpler, manageable power, moral and social conditions delegate everything that is complicated about modernity or that may be incomprehensible or unpleasant, confusing, overwhelming, destructive, disillusioning and unsettling to the guilty parties who, depending on the "theory" being followed, are held responsible for capitalism and its underlying concepts of liberalism. Criticism in general and all the changes in social and family structures are therefore understood as a form of decay, as part of a cultural "war" and the disasters it brings. In short: from a lack of understanding modernity and all of its impersonal, abstract and complex manifestations, antisemitism opens up an avenue for interpreting any unpleasant experience in a particular way and singling Jews out as being accountable for it as the supposed "authors" of this "misery".[21]

The antisemitic thrust can be implicit, as part of a general anti-modernism that chooses its images without reflection, can take the form of antisemitic codes, i.e. when talking about "ZOG" or "USrael" or in supposedly "neutral" speech about a so-called "Judeo-Christianity", or can be manifested in statements as done by Varg Vikernes, in his essays and his early writing *Vårgsmal* (1997). A shift in the discourse can also be seen here, moving away from the initially subtle Germanic self-mystifications that often went unnoticed by the audience towards drastically worded pamphlets that omit none of the stereotypes from antisemitic conspiracy theory and threats of annihilation.

Whilst most bands that use mythological elements in their imagery and texts are "unspoilt" by nationalist ideology and aesthetics, it is only a small step from blanket "Teutonism" to the open antisemitism of the bands labelled as NSBM. And it is not only in the brazen annihilation fantasies espoused by bands such as Absurd or Der Stürmer that "the Jew" is portrayed as the embodiment of all evil and the ultimate enemy. In many of the supposedly inexperienced uses of Old Norse mythology and heroic self-portrayals as Vikings, the "other" – as something alien and hostile – is often already implied as "the Jew", as one of the possible candidates to fill the gap as the missing counterpart (besides Christians or Romans) to the brave and noble Pagans. From clumsy carnivalisation to committed neo-Romanticism to clear neo-Nazism, a differentiating and radicalised antisemitism as understood by Samuel Salzborn can certainly be identified as a "negative guiding principle"[22] of black and Pagan metal, whose forms of expression and contexts are explored also in other articles in this volume.

The quest for "authenticity" and "genuineness" dominates metal more than any other scene. Whereas it emerged in the 1970s as a contrast to the increasingly artistically ambitious developments in progressive rock (which were thus condemned to artificiality), "trueness" has been relevant ever since the 1980s. Proponents use it to describe themselves and set themselves apart from those who are not fully committed to the cause. Bands such as Manowar have claimed to represent unconditionally true metal, but fans also borrow this description to distinguish themselves from those who do not throw themselves fully into the metal lifestyle. The ostentatious masculinity and martialness exhibited by many bands of the 1980s was intended to emphasise this gesture, which has been honed further by later bands and their more radical styles.[23]

Fig. 2   Norwegian Viking metal band Enslaved performing at Roadburn Festival, April 2015.

By necessity, every thesis is accompanied by its antithesis – anyone who defines what is true and genuine also determines what is to be considered false and inauthentic. This binary, culture-critical code provides a way of connecting up antisemitic interpretations of the world, which only found a tangible resonance in metal music as late as the 1990s. This in turn can be explained in part historically via the radicalisation of aesthetic forms of expression. In the 1980s, metal was characterised by a strong distinction between musical and overall aesthetic forms of expression and staging. With genre designations such as thrash, death and black metal, not only were ever-finer distinctions being established, but increasingly extreme forms of playing were also being elevated to the avant-garde of metal. Musicians playing in these styles repeatedly set themselves up as an elite, looking down with contempt and derision – at best from a nostalgic perspective – on the other, previous "evolutionary" stages of the genre's de-

velopment. These developments culminated in the early 1990s in (primarily Norwegian) black metal, which saw not only the exploration of musical extremes that were still unsurpassed three decades later[24] but also a new kind of interweaving of art and life that no longer knew any remainder or outside in its self-representation.[25]

"Real" and "true" are problematic terms under the conditions of modernity, since everything that is communicated is always doubled: whether in writing, in datafication or in the mode of second-order observation (Luhmann), a difference is always there. "Everything that exists", writes sociologist Niklas Luhmann, "can, if need be, be understood as a double of itself. Identity, authenticity, genuineness, originality in the sense of uniqueness and incomparability become problem terms."[26] Everything that can be interpreted in these terms is thus characterised by "contingency" – namely, the fact that everything could be different in each case – and com-

plexity, because there are always more options than possible decisions: "For society, these are forms of contrast in which it hides *its hopelessness, its desperation, its reality from itself. Because none of this – identity, authenticity, genuineness, originality, uniqueness – can be communicated.* Any attempt to do so fails, because the constative component of communication is rebutted by its performative component, information by its dissemination."[27]

Those who advocate the genuine and natural against this background state that these designated things are no longer genuine and natural per se but are constructed as such. They are expressions of a "sentimental" consciousness[28] that longs to return to the "naivety" of first-order observation, to an "unbroken" reality without reflection. This manufacturedness of the "real" and "natural", however, must be negated (and delegated) in order to be able to present itself in all its unbroken authenticity. For the "genuine" and the "true", that is always oneself in the staging logic of (not only) metal, while the falseness, the "poserism" and the betrayal always lies with the others. Comparison places this opposition under the "semantics of culture"; in other words, it "coats" it with the taint of "contingency".[29] Contingency is by necessity an expression of a non-transcendent existence in which there are no fixed values or absolute truth – this state of modern "metaphysical homelessness" must therefore be fought against, along with those who are deemed responsible for it. To conceive life as a permanent struggle and the aim to order the world with the help of an inexorable "friend vs. foe" distinction that recognises no third party also prepares a logical basis for the violent resolution of dissent, hence the unconditional seriousness with which art and life are intertwined in some strands of extreme metal in order to negate contingency as far as possible.

Anti-modern cultural criticism appears in various degrees in metal. Although the fantasy-like escapism in power metal or the anti-civilisation regression fantasies voiced in folk and Pagan metal are not all antisemitic, they do share some crucial premises that could give rise to such interpretations. Besides the seriousness and the unconditionality that (black) metal claims to possess, it is above all the emphasis on the "tangible", in which the "real", the "authentic" and the "natural" can together as synonyms, that offers a special connectivity for antisemitic arguments levelled against the "abstract". If one accepts that antisemitism, as Moishe

Postone writes, is primarily characterised by a "hatred of the abstract",[30] then not only is the fundamental conflict with the processes of modern socialisation foreshadowed, but at the same time the culprits, the people responsible for this depraved situation, are identified. Functional and thus apersonal practices of domination and administration, general datafication and the growing tendency towards the numerical recording and processing of the world can be made tangible via the "thought-form"[31] of antisemitism by imputing intentions, accountability, and utility (the treacherous *cui bono*?) back to a single point of departure. Via the general culpability of Jews associated with the "abstract", antisemitic thinking can attribute all disagreeable social processes and historical events to them. This form of thinking always contains the assumption of "false" but real existing power relations, which assigns extraordinary power to the Jews, while one's own collective identity (nation, "people", "race" or similar) is imagined as being subject to it. A small elite dominates the equalised and subjugated masses. In the hatred of the abstraction of the number, which gained increased importance with the egalitarian "spirit" of 1789 (as expressed in the triad of *liberté, egalité, fraternité*), there is also one of the basic tenets of fascist thought, one that cannot be equated completely with antisemitic interpretations of the world, even if there are major similarities between them. These lie above all in the tendency for both to try to eliminate principles (and the people associated with them) that are considered hostile to them. Antisemitism and its "hypostasis of what is existing and tangible" therefore culminates "in a unanimous, cruel, but not necessarily hateful mission: the redemption of the world from the source of all evil in the form of the Jews".[32] Here, the antisemitic interpretation of the world falls back on scapegoating stereotypes of old and once again identifies Jews as the origin of all historical transgressions.[33]

People's interest in portraying "Vikings" and "Teutons" – and constructing them as collective subjects in the first place – may be diverse. However, these imaginations always contain something more than just scientifically tenable representations: they tend to be more colourful and more sensual. Because they have only a limited interest in staying true to the facts, they are also without gaps. Almost all website operators and commentators "know" who their Germanic ancestors were and how their culture, customs and "way of thinking"

were determined. In this way, they meet a need for historical reassurance much more than with what science (irrespective of its disciplinary structure) has to offer, because there is no easily adaptable answer to the controversial questions of who the Germanic peoples really are – or better, were – and what the Vikings are or were.

This might be the big problem from an academic perspective: Vikings and Teutons or other Germanic tribes cannot be matched to easily adaptable definitions and images. This dilemma produces one hypothesis for explaining this need for popular representations and templates for identification: because academics do not produce enough images, others do it instead. This discrepancy between the exclusive academic community and their "non-sensual" knowledge products on the one hand and the people "in need" on the other, is already evident in the early reflections on the popularisation of Norse and/or Germanic mythology. When Johann Gottfried Herder was disputing with the philologist Friedrich David Gräter in the late 18th century, he stated that Gräter made an "unspeakable" but nevertheless "unrewarded effort" in his editions of Scandinavian poetry of the Middle Ages and their publication.[34] But Gräter was seldomly read, though his subject matter would have been of interest to a wider audience. Herder puts Gräter's lack of success down to the fact that he did not use any engravings and offered his audience only the "naked" mediaeval texts without any "sensual" supplements. In Herder's view, sharing knowledge purely in text form was only suitable for a few (as it is today), i.e. for the educated people. By contrast, popularisation through "sensualisation" in the form of visible representations enables larger audiences to be addressed (and Herder was indeed hoping to include them). The underlying eclectic forms of adaptation can be found in Herder[35] as well as the "effect on life"[36], with which Herder concludes his dialogue *Iduna*. In Herder's writings the "popular" mode of publication thus produced competes with the one that appears as a "specialist" science and, I fear, continues to do so to this very day.

From a research perspective, the tenacity of the Germanic legend is astonishing and calls for a consistently new search for justifications. Certainly, the claim to be descended from the so-called Germanic tribes in some way is a "simple story" compared to the representation of the multiplicity of "simultaneous events of ethnogenesis"[37] in early mediaeval Europe. But reducing complexity is not the only reason for this persistence; the reactivation of the Germanic legend is often linked to political interests too. On the extreme right of the political spectrum, the narrative of the origins of the "Germanic tribes", especially in combination with the mythology, is put forward as an integral part of the culture of remembrance and of identity politics and thus is clearly politically motivated. In order to recognise that these narratives do not serve entertainment or information but the purpose of creating meaning and "belonging", and to detect the implicit racist thinking and anti-semitism, one has to read texts carefully and differentiate between the "carnivalesque" and the political. Camouflage may well be a strategy pursued by the political right in a game of "hide and seek". The crucial point may be one of lineage, where people claim the so-called Germanic tribes as their ancestors in spirit and "blood". Sharing knowledge and reflecting on the various possibilities for transmitting media and the potential each offers are to be considered as the basis for a future in which a better understanding of the different agencies is possible and may even become the general consensus.

References

1 Discussing *Germanen* in English throws up numerous problems. The term "Germans" might come close, but it refers more properly to the people of what Germany (*Deutsche*) nowadays. It is not uncommon to speak of "Teutons" (*Teutonen* in German), but this, precisely speaking, only refers to *one single* Germanic tribe. I mainly speak of "Germanic" tribes (*germanisch*) in relation to concepts of a common pre-Christian culture – which, of course, has never existed in this proclaimed unity. Also cf. Penke, Niels, and Heike Sahm, "Die sogenannten Germanen. Fragen zum Umgang mit einem Faszinosum", *Demokratie-Dialog* 2 (2018), pp. 87–95.

2 Cf. Weinstein, Deena, *Heavy metal. The music and its culture*, Cambridge/Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2000, p. 39.

3 Cf. Hobsbawm, Eric, and Ranger, Terence (ed.), *The invention of tradition* [1980], Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

4 Herder writes "Geist des Volkes"; cf. Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* [1784]. Ed. by Bollacher, Martin (*Werke,* Band 6), Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 794.

5 Cf. Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky, Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1968.

6 Cf. Von Schnurbein, Stefanie, *Norse revival. Transformations of Germanic neopaganism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016.

7 Led Zeppelin, *Led Zeppelin III*. Atlantic, 1970. Track no. 1/A1.

8 Yngwie Malmsteen: *Rising Force*. Polydor, 1985. Track no. 1/A1.

9 Manowar: *Gods of War.* Magic Circle Music, 2007.

10 Bathory: *Blood Fire Death*. Under One Flag, 1988.

11 Bathory: *Hammerheart*. Noise International, 1990.

12 Bathory: *Twilight of the Gods.* Black Mark Production, 1991.

13 Enslaved: *Vikingligr Veldi*. Deathlike Silence Productions, 1994.

14 Absurd: *Asgardsrei*. IG Farben Produktion, 1999.

15 Absurd: *Facta Loquuntur*. No Colours Records, 1996. Track no. 10/B5.

16 Cf. Penke, Niels, "Töten für Wotan. Zur Radikalisierung des Mythischen im Black Metal", in Penke, Niels, and Teichert, Matthias (eds.), *Zwischen Germanomanie und Antisemitismus. Transformationen altnordischer Mythologie in den Metal-Subkulturen*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016, pp. 83–120.

17 Most notably in Penke, "Töten für Wotan".

18 Cf. Postone, Moishe, "Die Logik des Antisemitismus", *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, January Issue, 36 (1982), pp. 13–25.

19 The term was coined by Saul Ascher in the early 19th century the early 19ᵗʰ century. Cf. Ascher, Saul: *Die Germanomanie. Skizze zu einem Zeitgemälde*, Berlin: Achenwall, 1815.

20 Kipper, Rainer, *Der Germanenmythos im Deutschen Kaiserreich. Formen und Funktionen historischer Selbstthematisierung*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022.

21 Cf. Salzborn, Samuel, *Antisemitismus als negative Leitidee der Moderne*, Frankfurt: Campus, 2010.

22 Cf. Salzborn, *Antisemitismus als negative Leitidee der Moderne*.

23 Cf. Grünwald, Jan G., *Male spaces. Bildinszenierungen archaischer Männlichkeiten im Black Metal*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2012.

24 Cf. Kahn-Harris, Keith, *Extreme Metal. Music and Culture on the Edge*, New York: Berg Publishers, 2007.

25 Cf. Penke, Niels, "'Only Death is Real, Only Black is True'. Über Authentizität, Ernst und Tat im norwegischen Black Metal", *Litlog. Göttinger eMagazin für Literatur – Kultur – Wissenschaft*, (2016), <https://www.litlog.de/pop-ii-only-death-is-real/> [accessed 26 August 2022].

26 Luhmann, Niklas, "Kultur als Vergleich", in Luhmann, Niklas, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik. Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft*, Band 4 [first edition 1995], Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2012, pp. 31–54 (p. 51).

27 Ibid. "Für die Gesellschaft sind dies Kontrastformen, in denen sie *ihre Hoffnungslosigkeit, ihre Ausweglosigkeit, ihre Realität vor sich selber verbirgt. Denn all dies: Identität, Authentizität, Echtheit, Originalität, Einzigartigkeit läßt sich nicht kommunizieren.* Jeder Versuch dekonstruiert sich selbst, weil die konstative Komponente der Kommunikation durch die performative Komponente, die Information durch ihre Mitteilung widerlegt wird." [italics as in the original].

28 Schiller, Friedrich, "Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung" [first edition 1795]. in Schiller, Friedrich, and Riedel, Wolfgang (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke. Bd. V: Erzählungen, Theoretische Schriften*, Munich: Hanser, 2004, pp. 694–780.

29 Luhmann, "Kultur als Vergleich", p. 51.

30 Postone, "Die Logik des Antisemitismus", p. 24.

31 Postone, "Die Logik des Antisemitismus", p. 16.

32 Postone, "Die Logik des Antisemitismus", p. 24.

33 Cf. Salzborn, *Antisemitismus als negative Leitidee der Moderne*.

34 Herder, Johann Gottfried, "Iduna oder der Apfel der Verjüngung" [1796], in Irmscher, Hans D., *Schriften zu Literatur und Philosophie*. 1792–1800. (*Werke, Band 8*), Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag,1998, pp. 155–172 (p. 161).

35 "we take what serves us where we find it", Herder, "Iduna oder der Apfel der Verjüngung", p. 164.

36 Herder, "Iduna oder der Apfel der Verjüngung", p. 172.

37 Goetz, Hans-Werner, "Die 'deutschen Stämme' als Forschungsproblem", in Beck, Heinrich, Geuenich, Dieter, Steuer, Heiko, and Hakelberg, Dietrich (ed.), Zur Geschichte der Gleichung 'germanisch – deutsch'. Sprache und Namen, Geschichte und Institutionen, Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2004, pp. 229–253. See also Penke and Sahm 2018.

Speculative Stories

Entanglements in the Web of Conspiracy Theories, Speculative Fiction, Fantasy Role-Playing, Paganism and Right-Wing Extremism

Hermann Ritter

Speculative tales have become part and parcel of our everyday lives. In film and book form, they belong to the cultural mainstream just as much as the countless fantasy role-playing games that, in their digital versions for the PC (as single-player or multi-player online games), have taken over children's and adults' bedrooms alike. According to Florian F. Marzin, speculative fiction is understood here to mean a literature that, unlike one-dimensional literature, features two completely different plot circles that coexist on an equal footing within a text. When these two plot circles interact, speculative fiction as a metagenre emerges out of the interdependence between the first and second.[1] Speculative fiction encompasses the genres of science fiction, horror and fantasy, amongst others. Fantasy, too, is characterised by two different levels being juxtaposed with each other. The definition put forward by Helmut W. Pesch holds that the first level is where those literary conventions are negotiated with which the author seeks to endow their non-realistic narrative with a kind of credibility or external legitimacy within the realistically preconceived bounds of the reader's expectations. The second level, by contrast, concerns the imaginary world evoked by the text and those means and conditions that guarantee its credibility or inner legitimacy.[2]

Popular works such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy[3] by J. R. R. Tolkien, *Interview with the Vampire* (1976)[4] by Anne Rice (real name Anne O'Brien Rice), *The Mists of Avalon* (1982) and the *Darkover* cycle[5] by Marion Zimmer Bradley, the *Harry Potter* series[6] by J. K. Rowling and the *Twilight* tetralogy[7] by Stephenie Mayer have just as much impact on society as image- and myth-makers as do e.g. the works of Robert Ervin Howard,[8] *Star Trek,*[9] *Star Wars*[10] or the *Sandman*[11] series by Neil Gaiman.

Speculative literature and conspiracy theories

Proponents of speculative literature also incorporate an incredibly wide variety of pre-existing esoteric ideas and conspiracy myths into their narratives, which are then fed back into society through their works. One reason why this is a particularly successful way of communicating ideas of this kind is that these are often topics whose treatment is considered to be virtually the "core skill" of speculative literature.

Speculative fiction acts both as a source of ideas and as proof of the recipients' own views, since novels and films are often used as supposed sources for the arguments that they put forward.[12] Michael Barkun describes the connection between fiction and fictional reality and the shift in how fictions are perceived towards depictions of an actual truth as follows:

> Conspiracy literature is replete with instances in which manifestly fictional products, such as films and novels, are asserted to be accurate, factual representations of reality. In some cases, they are deemed to be encoded messages, originally intended for the inner circle of conspirators, that somehow became public. In other cases, truth is believed to have taken fictional form because the author was convinced that a direct representation of reality would be too disturbing and needed to be cloaked in fictional conventions. In still other instances, fictionalization is deemed to be part of the conspirators' campaign to indoctrinate or prepare a naive public for some momentous future development.[13]

In other words, this leads to "fringe ideas" both old and new popping up repeatedly in the popular media. One current example is Roland Emmerich's *Moonfall* (2022), a film based on the premise that the Moon is a man-made structure.[14] On this point, Barkun noted:

Mapping fringe ideas is a difficult undertaking. Familiar intellectual landmarks are unavailable, and the inhabitants of these territories tend to speak languages difficult for outsiders to penetrate. Some of these ideas have begun to filter into mainstream popular culture […]. But their origins lie in obscure and barely visible structures – millenarian religion, occultism and radical politics among them.[15]

When dealing with conspiracy myths, therefore, we encounter a significant problem with the theory. Followers of conspiracy narratives of this kind often believe that they have gained access to some clandestine knowledge that is being actively suppressed by a corresponding group of conspirators or other organised opposition to prevent this "stigmatised knowledge" from being revealed and the supposed truth about these secret connections from becoming known. "Stigmatised knowledge" is defined as

claims to truth that the claimants regard as verified despite the marginalization of those claims by the institutions that conventionally distinguish between knowledge and error – universities, communities of scientific researchers, and the like.[16]

Barkun developed the following diagram based on four example groups in order to illustrate the different relationship between (supposed) groups and activities on the one hand and the field of secrets on the other:[17]

Fig. 1   Barkun, Michael, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2nd edition 2003.

		Activities	
		Secret	Not Secret
Group	Secret	I Illuminati	II Anonymous philanthropists
	Not Secret	III Masons	IV Democratic political parties

A distinction is thus made between non-secret groups planning and carrying out non-secret activities (field IV), secret groups carrying out non-secret activities (field II), non-secret groups carrying out secret activities (field III), and finally secret groups carrying out secret activities (field I). Organisations from the world of conspiracy myths that stereotypically crop up in speculative fic-

tion, such as the Freemasons (field III) and the Illuminati (field I), are used for illustration purposes.
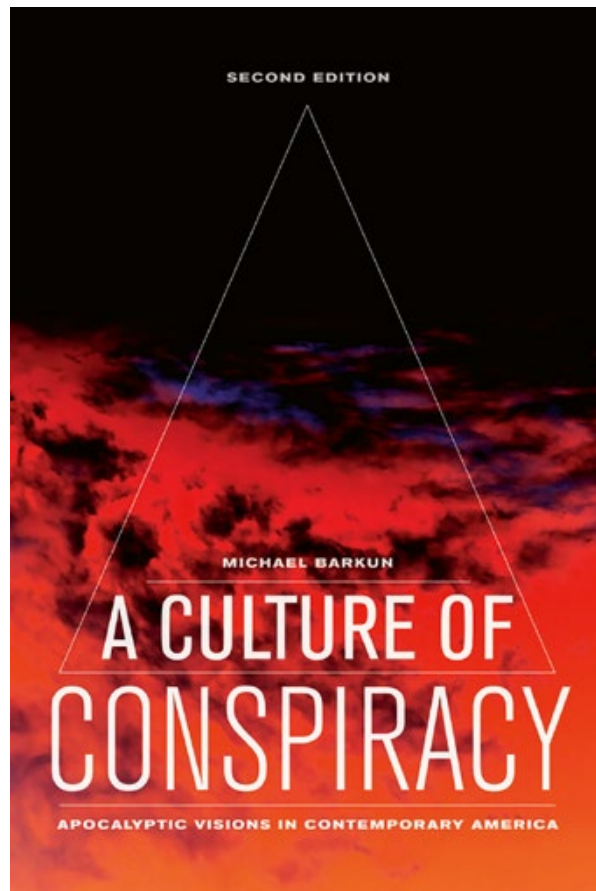
The preconceptions relating to the "stigmatised knowledge" described above mean that a critical and academic discussion of the various conspiracy theories is per se impossible. Rather than being viewed as a falsification, therefore, the lack of evidence for the existence of a secret/imperceptible group and of its unknown activities is, on the contrary, seen as proof of their successful work concealing the truth. Furthermore, any critical statement regarding the existence of such a group is interpreted as further evidence of efforts to conceal its existence and suppress knowledge and as part of the actual conspiracy itself. This mindset thus sees objective arguments as merely an attempt to divert attention from the truth, which, for its part, is known only to a small circle of insiders: the supposed conspirators themselves and the conspiracy theorists.

The development and perpetuation of conspiracy theories are increasingly being strengthened by widespread access to the Internet, "the first mass medium without gatekeepers"[18] or, in the words of Katharina Impelmanns:

These days, conspiracy theories are just a few clicks away. Anyone with an Internet connection can find conspiracist ideas quickly, easily and cheaply or spread them themselves in blogs, forums or social media without anything undergoing critical scrutiny by an editor or proofreader prior to publication. In this way, the Internet as a medium has contributed to making conspiracy theories more visible once again.[19]

In the age of fake news and today's "post-factual era", therefore, a good story will enjoy more success than any reliable fact.

As we will see in even more detail, speculative fiction is also a successful vehicle for conspiracy tales and themes that contain decidedly racist, antisemitic and extreme right-wing ideals. Themes like these can become embedded in the social mainstream via a large audience in this way.[20] On the question of why these concepts work so alarmingly well, science journalist George Monbiot explains:

In politics, there is a recurring story that captures our attention. It goes like this: Disorder afflicts the land, caused by powerful and nefarious forces working against the interests of humanity. The hero – who might be one person or a group of people – revolt against the disorder, fights the nefarious forces, overcomes them despite great odds and restores order. Stories that follow this pattern can be so powerful that they sweep all before them: even our fundamental values. For example, two of the world's best-loved and most abiding narratives – The Lord of the Rings and the Narnia series – invoke values that were familiar in the Middle Ages but are generally considered repulsive today. Disorder in these stories is characterised by the usurpation of rightful kings or their rightful heirs; justice and order rely on their restoration. We find ourselves cheering the resumption of autocracy, the destruction of industry and even, in the case of Narnia, the triumph of divine right over secular power. If these stories reflected the values most

people profess – democracy, independence, industrial, progress – the rebels would be heroes and the hereditary rulers the villains. We overlook the conflict with our own priorities because the stories resonate so powerfully with the narrative structure for which our minds are prepared. Facts, evidence, values, beliefs: stories conquer all.[21]

A similar argument had already been put forward by Eduard Gugenberger and Roman Schweidlenka, who saw it as irrefutable "that extreme-right groups consciously incorporate myths into their political ideology and thus, at first glance, have developed, or are still developing in a contemporary adapted form, the only myth-based, powerful strategy for achieving and maintaining dominance".[22]

Speculative fiction and the occult

Many of these myths come directly or indirectly from the world of the occult. Speculative literature and occultism have been influencing each other for a long time. Through its concept of life energy, or "Vril", amongst other things, works such as *The Coming Race*[23] (1871) by the writer and occultist Edward Bulwer-Lytton exerted a significant influence on the theosophy movement as well as, later, on Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy.[24] In turn, the roots of theosophy stretch back to Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine. The synthesis of science, religion and philosophy* (1888)[25] contains ideas including that of a superior primordial race from which all known Mediterranean cultures are believed to be descended, mixed with the notion of its racial and intellectual superiority.

This may seem somewhat surprising from today's perspective, but there are astonishingly few indications that the Nazis actually had any extensive plans for reviving a "Norse religion". Although "Norse" symbols and marks did find widespread use, Norse or Germanic Paganism was not propagated across the board, just as, overall, there was no uniform ideology in respect of religion. There are various exceptions, of course. Besides Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler himself, another example is Karl Maria Wiligut, alias Weisthor. Wiligut, who was also known as "Himmler's Rasputin", served as

Himmler's personal occultism advisor for a time and is believed to have been behind the choice of the Wewelsburg castle for an SS training centre and for the design of the SS rings, not to mention many other "highly sorcerous things".[26]

A look at the designs and work done by the workshop Gahr[27] on behalf of the Nazi Party and the SS also shows that the "Norse" or "Germanic" symbols were regarded as more important here than in the concepts for the overriding ideology of National Socialism. This is unsurprising, especially since there were significant differences in attitude to a "Germanic legacy" between key protagonists of the ideology including Adolf Hitler, Alfred Ernst Rosenberg and Himmler himself.[28] However, many of Himmler and Wiligut's occult ideas only unleashed their full potency through their reception post-1945, and even the famous mosaic on the floor of the Wewelsburg's north tower did not get its nickname of the "Black Sun" (*Schwarze Sonne*) until after the war.

Post-war speculative fiction of the extreme right

After the downfall of National Socialism, these kinds of "Norse" and "Germanic" symbols were adopted and employed en masse by radical right-wing groups. There were many different reasons for this. Firstly, these symbols were known about but had fewer negative connotations[29] and were not banned, allowing them to be used to attract many (new) members during the nascent boom in esotericism. Secondly, the racist *völkisch* ideals were adopted at the same time but camouflaged through the use of language. A person's blood and background were held to determine which deities were "responsible" for them. The concept of a *völkisch* or indigenous religion was thus postulated by attributing certain families of gods to certain peoples. Taking this circuitous route enabled racist views to be disguised by religious explanations. By the time "Àsatrú" (the name given to organised "Norse"/"Germanic" Neopaganism) had emerged in the mid-1970s, if not before, attempts were being made at speed to infiltrate Pagan religious communities with right-wing extremism. This is something that succeeded, for example, in the United States and, a few years ago, in Sweden.[30]

The post-war period saw the development of a field within speculative literature that linked more ancient occult myths with National Socialism. On this point Daniela Siepe writes:

> In the 1960s, a strand of speculative literature emerged that is still highly successful today amongst groups with an interest in esotericism. It claims that the true history of National Socialism, which has hitherto remained hidden from historians, can only be explained by the machinations of secret societies working in the background behind the official political scenes.[31]

One example of such a transfer of ideas that led to the concept of a "Nazi occult" is a work by the two journalists Jacques Berger and Louis Pauwels that appeared in Germany in 1962 under the title *Aufbruch ins dritte Jahrtausend* (published in English as *The Morning of the Magicians*).[32] This book revives and invents a large number of very different myths that went on to become firm fixtures of the esoteric landscape. These myths were also woven together to form veritable "myth strands", giving the impression that they were all part of a self-contained occult system. For example, the authors established the legend of a Tibetan lama entity who is said to have defended Hitler's bunker to the last. This they associated with the mythical kingdom of Agartha in the centre of the Earth and with information about a clandestine "Vril Society". As their source for this secret intelligence on the "Vril Society", the authors name Willy Ley, "one of the greatest experts in the field of rocket science", who was allegedly forced to leave Germany in 1933 and who had himself relied on Bulwer-Lytton's information on the "Vril".[33] However, more detailed research reveals that this information actually comes from an article entitled "Pseudoscience in Naziland", which Ley had published in 1947 in a US science fiction magazine.[34] The speculative nature of this book should have been clear to any reader owing to its numerous allusions and references. Thus, Bergier and Pauwels explain their treatment of their sources as follows: "Numinor [sic], the mysterious city of the Celts of the 5th century BC, might also not be a legend either, although we do not know the least bit about it". With its tongue firmly in its cheek, the accompanying footnote also states: "On this subject, see the works of Prof. Tolkien from the University of Oxford".[35] Even after reading it several times, it is still not clear whether this book was not planned as a wholesale joke. All the more startling

is the impact of *The Morning of the Magicians* – hardly any esoteric writer of conspiracy theories of the following decades got by without acknowledging the two authors somewhere along the line.

It is a similar story for *Spear of Destiny* (1972)[36] by Trevor Ravenscroft. Both bestsellers feature an esoteric SS and supposed occult orders such as the Thule Society or the fictitious Vril Society and stylise the planned SS training centre in the Wewelsburg as Himmler's "Castle of the Holy Grail". That these were all either half-truths or complete inventions did nothing to dampen their popularity.[37] It is unfortunately undeniable that this exerting of political influence — which was probably largely unplanned — is also being done in a controlled manner. However, that does not mean that fantasy novels are fascist, that fascists read fantasy novels or that Pagans automatically read fascist fantasy novels. Nevertheless, a certain number of actors on the right of the political spectrum clearly recognise that this literary genre is a suitable vehicle for getting corresponding political content across. Needless to say, this can also be identified as a way of preventing books from being banned by "disguising" them as narrative or fictional works instead of non-fiction.

One of the proponents of post-war National Socialist esotericism who has enjoyed the most exposure was undeniably Wilhelm Landig, who kept in close contact with both old and new adherents of National Socialism (Rudolf J. Mund, Jürgen Rieger, Hans-Ulrich Rudel, Miguel Serrano). In his *Thule* trilogy, consisting of the novels *Götzen gegen Thule* ("Idols against Thule", 1971), *Wolfszeit um Thule* ("Wolf-time around Thule", 1980) and *Rebellen für Thule* ("Rebels for Thule", 1991), Landig paints a picture of an esoteric circle within the SS that allegedly took refuge in underground bases underneath the North and South Poles after the war. They were also believed to possess highly advanced weapons technology that was said to be based on esoteric principles such as the fictitious "Vril force" and even to include "flying Reich saucers" or "V7s". Landig can therefore be regarded as the creator of the legend surrounding the so-called "*Reichsflugscheiben*", the Nazi UFOs memorialised in the film *Iron Sky*.[38]

He can also be considered the first person to use the "Black Sun" as an alternative to the banned swastika, especially since he established the legend surrounding the symbol as representing an esoteric SS elite and the particular connection linking the SS and Tibet:

Fig. 2 Wilhelm Landig's Thule-Triology by Parzifal-Verlag 2004.

The Black Sun is the symbol of a small yet highly influential circle of esotericists within the SS that has connections all around the world. One of its most important links is with the Yellow Hat lamas and Black Hat sect of Tibet.[39]

Landig reveals the unbroken political loyalty of this esoteric SS via the following dialogue between two main characters: "You won't find any Stauffenbergs here!"[40]

Landig's novels spread Nazi propaganda and revisionist history quite openly. For instance, he has his protagonists declare that reports of the Dachau concentration camp were merely Allied propaganda:

[…] and we know that the victims of the Munich bombing were heaped together, loaded onto lorries, taken to Dachau and photographed there as victims who had supposedly been gassed to death and that this horror film, featuring those murdered by the Allied bombs, was screened as compulsory viewing in the prison camps of the German soldiers […].[41]

Naturally, however, Landig also addresses themes that are highly significant to esotericists, such as the legend of Atlantis. He has this to say on the purported origin of the Atlanteans:

The Tuatha were the founders of the megalithic culture of the Neolithic period, and their name means 'the Germans'! 'German' is 'tuath' in Old Irish, 'thiude' in Old Frisian and 'tiutisch' in Middle High German.[42]

From there, he has no problem whatsoever furnishing further proof:

> And continuing on to the sound 'A': if you take the example of 'Attaland' – 'Atlantis' – you find it no fewer than three times. Of course, it has been preserved in German as 'Vatta' – 'Vaterland' ['fatherland']. German is descended from the language spoken in Atlantis![43]

And, naturally, the Atlanteans are actually Goths, which stands to reason if the Goths are both the ancestors of the Germans and the descendants of the Atlanteans:

> The word 'Atlantis' means 'fatherland'. If we think about the word for 'father', 'Atta', Wulfila's Gothic Lord's Prayer also begins with 'Atta unsar', meaning both 'father' and 'age'. Atlantis – 'Atta-Land' – and its synonym 'Papi-lond', which has been retained in the place known in current parlance as 'Babylon', are proof of the origin of an ancient and widespread racial culture.[44]

It's as simple as that. Echoing Blavatsky before him, he too mentions a "secret cosmic chronicle" complete with an "Atlantis myth" featuring seven sub-races.[45]

Even though these books – aside from their clear political views – can primarily be described as mythical gibberish, the fact that they nevertheless struck a nerve cannot be overlooked. Many readers wanted to see Landig as a kind of adept who would spread secret truths, dressed up as literature, that would not otherwise be allowed to be voiced.

The writings of Jaques de Mahieu are another noteworthy example of this kind of speculative fiction. He too began publishing works in the early 1970s, but these deal with the (alleged) activities of Vikings in South America. The final part of his seven-volume series was *Das Wikingerreich von Tiahuanacu. Geschichte eines nordischen Imperiums in Südamerika* ("The Viking Empire Tiahuanacu. History of a Nordic Empire in South America").[46] This book describes Helgoland as a pseudo-Atlantis ruled by an "Indo-European culture" that is governed by an "aristocracy of a Nordic race" and that created "the mother of all European alphabets".[47] We are also finally given an explanation for how the advanced cultures of South America could have developed in the first place: the Olmecs were actually Vikings, because

"Olmeca" apparently means "Ullmann's people".[48] The reader also learns that "The Incas thus spoke a Germanic language. The titles that they bore tells us that it was a Nordic dialect".[49] It is safe to say that there is no need to delve any further into this work at this point. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the original French version, entitled *Histoire de l'empire Viking de Tiahuanacu*, was translated into German by Wilfred von Oven, the former deputy to Joseph Goebbels.[50]

A further example is the esoteric Nazi thriller *Die Schwarze Sonne von Tashi Lhunpo* ("The Black Sun of Tashi Lhunpo", 1991), written by journalist Stephan Mögle-Stadel under the pseudonym of Russel McCloud. McCloud clearly based his choice of title for his only published novel on the accounts of the explorer Sven Hedin.[51] This work is another to develop the "Tibetan legend" described above. McCloud's inhabitants of the sunken Thule (taking the place of Atlantis here) fled to Tibet, where they split into two groups. One group, or the first path "to the left", was called *Agarthi* ("Agartha") and the other *Schamballah* ("Shambala").[52] In McCloud's tale, *Agarthi* was also home to the mythical core of the SS, which would also explain the SS's interest in Tibet. His tale is another to feature the "Spear of Destiny", which in this case is one of *Agarthi*'s powerful tools. As the Holy Lance, its history stretches back as far as Jesus' crucifixion, taking in Constantine the Great, Attila the Hun, Charlemagne, Emperors Otto I to III and Henry IV all the way through to Adolf Hitler. All of them wielded it and thus became instruments of destiny.[53] The spear was kept in the Wewelsburg,[54] a "spiritual centre" for the SS.[55]

We have the conspiracy literature of Jan van Helsing (real name Jan Udo Holey), particularly his book *Geheimgesellschaften und ihre Macht im 20. Jahrhundert* ("Secret Societies and Their Power in the 20th Century"),[56] to "thank" for adding new content to these continually recurring myths. His debut was followed in the same year by *Geheimgesellschaften 2: Interview mit Jan van Helsing* ("Secret Societies 2: Interview with Jan van Helsing")[57] and, a few years later, by *Buch 3 – Der Dritte Weltkrieg* ("Book 3 – The Third World War", 1996) and *Unternehmen Aldebaran. Kontakte mit Menschen aus einem anderen Sonnensystem. Die sensationellen Erlebnisse der Familie Feistle* ("Operation Aldebaran. Contacts with humans from another solar system. The sensational experiences of the Feistle family", 1997). Volumes 1 and 2 are banned from publication in Germany.[58] Van

Helsing's books mix older esoteric themes with extreme right-wing views and with interpretations based on conspiracy theories. However, most of his arguments are illogical and none of his texts have been properly proofread. In an interview with himself, he explains his approach thus: "Honestly, I've done next to no research whatsoever".[59]

Van Helsing is another to discuss the Thule Society and the Tibetan Yellow Hats, amongst other things. What is new this time around is the fact that the Thule Society supposedly received a telepathic message from the solar system of Aldebaran[60] in 1919 which

> [...] revealed to the Vril telepaths that, not only was Sumerian identical to the language spoken by the Aldebaranians but also that Aldebaranian-Sumerian sounded like a kind of unintelligible German and the audio frequency of the two languages – German and Sumerian – was virtually identical.[61]

It is therefore not surprising that the aliens should be addressing their descendants right there and then:

> It made perfect sense [for the Aldebaranians] to check in first of all on their indirect descendants who had remained most similar to them in their culture and ways – the people of Thule (Atlantis) – the Germans. And they even seem still to speak more or less the same language as they did back then [...]. The Aldebaranians had also realised that many of the great developments and achievements in the world had originated from this people [...], which also suggested that they had been the fastest and best to evolve.[62]

According to van Helsing, it is this contact with the Aldebaranians and the knowledge that they passed on that explains the existence and origin of the "flying Reich saucers". His book contains blueprints for these spacecrafts, called *Haunebu I*, *Haunebu II* and *Vril I*.[63] Calling them "blueprints" is definitely something of a euphemism, however, because building a replica would prove extremely difficult (except as a matchstick model). The spacecraft that he describes also boasts some impressive technical specifications: *Vril I* had a "space capability of 100 %".[64] By way of an indication of the impact of conspiracy myths of this kind, it should be noted that, even as recently as 2018, the company Revell launched

Fig. 3   Haunebu II Flying Saucer Bausatz Reichsflugscheibe 1:72 – Revell 03903. Model building construction kit by manufacturer Revell.

a model "flying Reich saucer" onto the market – although it was later withdrawn (fig. 3).[65]

All in all, three main arguments can be identified from the corresponding literature of the past few decades: A) The Aryans have always been the bringers of culture, regardless of whether they have done so via intermediaries or have themselves been inspired by extra-terrestrials. B) Aliens like Aryans. When you look at which advanced civilisation is being "pimped" here by white (!) extra-terrestrials, you soon realise that there has to be a strong affinity with Germanness down the millennia and beyond the orbit of Pluto. C) There is a secret history in which "we" (i.e. the Aryans/Germans) should have been rewarded with our richly deserved (ultimate) victory. As in the First World War, however, when we were "undefeated in the field", victory was stolen from "us" because "we" were deprived of flying Reich saucers, atomic bombs and the Spear of Destiny – even though "we" had been equipped with magical platoons of SS troops, "Vril" telepaths and Tibetan auxiliaries.

Speculative literature and fantasy role-playing games

Fantasy role-playing games are now commonplace, albeit only in the form of versions for the PC and games consoles or as MPOGs (multiplayer online games) and LARP (live-action role-playing). Few people would probably realise that this trend began with pen and paper. [66] The forerunners of the fantasy role-playing game were wargames or "tabletops", in which historical battles are

re-enacted using extremely complicated rules and the players move military units that likewise existed in real life. One of the most intelligent rulebooks was written by Herbert George ("H.G.") Wells and is called *Little wars: a game for boys* […] *with an appendix on Kriegsspiel* (1913).[67]

In 1971, Ernest Gary Gygax published *Chainmail*, a game for simulating historical battles. When developing it further, he adopted the already familiar combat system, while the fantasy element of the game, such as the basics of magic for the archaic world he had created, came from his imagination.[68] His inclusion of magic and idea of now using individual characters instead of units broke new ground in the development of the modern role-playing game.[69]

Dungeons & Dragons (*D & D*), the first pure fantasy role-playing game, arrived in 1974. Its sophisticated rules were designed to enable players to encounter and react to all the situations that made up "daily life" in a fantasy world. To this end, Gygax incorporated pure fantasy elements, such as a world of gods, and background information on the lives of various creatures (such as elves and dwarves) and invented "logical" foundations for how magic worked. By way of a generalisation, nowadays we can say that fantasy role-playing games are communicative actions that are controlled by variable rules and set in an imaginary or fictional world and that aim to have their players resolve conflicts and enjoy adventures.[70]

After some teething troubles, *D & D* soon became widely popular, and its marketing company Tactical Studies Rules (TSR) enjoyed something of a commercial triumph:

> By 1977 TSR realized that they would never be able to meet the demand for D & D products […]. The game was so successful that even big toy store chains were starting to sit up and take notice […]. […] Suddenly obscure little D & D was being printed in runs of 100,000 […].[71]

The huge success of *D & D* attracted more and more creative types to get involved in this field. Other role-playing systems soon followed in the US, some with backgrounds other than fantasy literature. As early as 1985, it was possible to identify different "milieus" in which role-playing games were being played. Their marketing was taken to a whole new level in September 1983, when the *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon series began its two-year stretch on Saturday morning TV.[72]
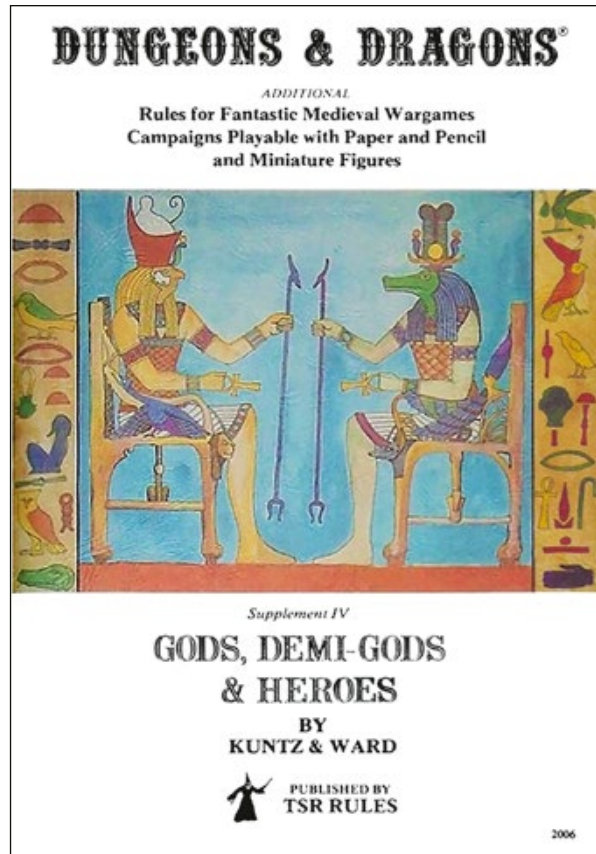
Fig. 4   Kuntz, Robert, and Ward, James: *Gods, Demi-Gods & Heroes. Dungeons & Dragons. Supplement IV, Rules for Fantastic Medieval Wargames. Campaigns Playable with Paper and Pencil and Miniature Figures*, Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Rules, 2006.

While it continued to spread rapidly in the US from then on, role-playing mania had already spilled over into Germany by 1977, driven mainly by military personnel and their friends, exchange students and dedicated groups of gamers. The following years saw not only licensed editions of US role-playing games appear in this country but also, with games like *Midgard* and *Das schwarze Auge* ("The Black Eye"), the emergence of an original German market boasting large print runs.

Over the decades, Gygax kept on adding to the fundamentals of a polytheistic game world and its mythical foundations that he had established early on. This affected both the rulebook for *D&D* and its extended version for more advanced players (*Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, or *AD & D*). A particular affinity with or connection to Norse mythology is hard to miss. The preface

to the aptly named *Gods, Demi-Gods & Heroes* reads as follows:

> What the authors have done in this volume is to attempt to set down guidelines that will enable you to incorporate a number of various mythologies into your game/campaign. They make no claims that any of this material presented is exhaustive, or even infallible. […] Myth is defined as a legend. Obviously, when dealing with material of this sort, there is a lot of latitude in interpretation. This is what the authors have presented: their interpretations. These interpretations are the result of months of painstaking, arduous research. As earlier defined, mythology is legend, and hundreds of volumes have been printed, each with its own interpretation. Further research and reading is recommended into all of the mythos presented herein. […] This is our last attempt to delineate the absurdity of 40+ level characters. When Odin, the All-Father has only (?) 300 hit points, who can take a 44th level Lord seriously?[73]

These rulebooks also came with reading lists designed to help players acquire relevant knowledge and information. Remarkably, their "Non Fiction" section includes the works *Norse Gods and Giants*[74] and *Trolls*[75] as well as numerous other examples of speculative literature with links to Nordic mythology. Even from an early point in this trend, therefore, the intensive use of images from Nordic mythology is clear – albeit (still) alongside other mythological images and elements. Norse mythology and its various constituent parts were afforded greater recognisability and seen as "closer" and more visually powerful, presumably not least due to their influence on modern speculative fiction. Thus, we have come full circle.

People's involvement with these role-playing games clearly also made fantasy literature and, in particular, Norse mythology even more popular – no surprise, therefore, that role-playing games were becoming more widespread at the same time as and in parallel with the development or emergence of organised "Norse" or "Germanic" Paganism such as Ásatrú.[76] This could be put at 1968 onwards for the US, while Odinistic groups also sprang up in Australia and in UK from 1972 and 1973 onwards respectively. The founding of the Asatrú Free As-

sembly in 1976 by the white nationalist activist Stephen McNallen also fits into this timeline.[77] Regarding his inspiration, Kurt Oertel explains: "In the US, it was Stephen McNallen who, inspired by fantasy literature and films, began worshipping Germanic deities for himself in 1968."[78] He has this to say on his own motivation:

> It is almost entirely because of the popularity of Tolkien's work that I was able to engineer an explosion in interest in fantasy material in its wake. It was a genre that used some of the archetypal features of magic, the hero's journey and beings from outside the realm of human nature or that of the limited Abrahamic pantheon.[79]

As we have seen, this link between Àsatrú and speculative fiction is no coincidence. These ideas and their lines of tradition in esotericism have been converging and cross-fertilising one another ever since the invention of science fiction and the subsequent fantasy boom, if not before. The trend can be traced from Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Gustav Meyrink via L. Ron Hubbard[80] and Marion Zimmer-Bradley all the way through to Mark Frost, Tim, Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman.

Conclusion

Of course, it is clear that the various groups of esotericists, Pagans, science fiction fans and esoteric Nazis neither completely overlap nor are completely separate from one another. Someone who believes in UFOs will not necessarily be a Holocaust denier. People who swirl their water around counterclockwise to rid it of evil radiation need not also believe that Hitler is still alive and in exile on Venus. Nevertheless, there are commonalities between all of them. The only thing that is up for debate is the extent of these commonalities, not their existence.[81]

For example, the treasure trove of quotations that one can take from the Neopagan movement demonstrates very impressively that the "classic Neopagan" is undoubtedly familiar with modern fantasy literature. But the reverse is also true: Neopagan elements can be found time and again in fantasy literature. To no small extent, the current Pagan scene is being kept invigorated by the "input" that it receives from fantasy literature (and, over the past 40 years, that it has been given by the film and television industry as well). This interrelation-

ship was picked up by Stefanie von Schnurbein as long ago as in her essay titled *Religion als Kulturkritik* ("Religion as Cultural Criticism", 1992):

> A literary analysis of fantasy literature, which uses many different elements from Germanic mythology, could provide an insight into the links between Germanic Paganism and various other subcultures of the present day.[82]

Across the board, one undoubtedly has to assume that all esoteric ideas of the 20th and 21st centuries have been influenced by literature. We are used to religion and magic being codified in scriptures from the "religions of the book", and this attitude naturally does not change automatically if one converts to Paganism or becomes a Pagan. Plus there is the fact that, for at least 100 years, our own experience has been replaced by other people's experiences that we have acquired through writing. The use of fantasy elements, which themselves draw on Norse myths, offers a perilously easy way in for "extreme-right seducers", as it allows them to operate on what is supposedly unproblematic terrain:

> Neo-Nazis make extensive use of the tools presented to them by Norse mysticism, Germanic runes and Pagan rites. Because there is no reliable tradition of their actual meaning(s), they can be filled with content as the filler sees fit. This allows a *völkisch* worldview to be imparted without anyone noticing […].[83]

Where this journey (to stay with the image) is going is hard to say. Wolfgang Benz, a researcher into antisemitism, sees many conspiracy myths as a putative reaction to a wide variety of fears. Referring to the antisemitic pamphlet *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which was published in the early 20th century by unknown editors based on fictional texts and is still considered an influential pamphlet for antisemitic conspiracy thought, he writes:

> The idea that obscure powers and forces are working away in the background to world events helps people cope with feeling powerless in the face of increasingly complex interrelationships between politics and economics on a social scale that no longer seem transparent to the individual.[84]

One way of fighting or addressing conspiracy theories is summed up by the journalist George Monbiot as follows: "The only thing that can displace a story is a story."[85] This is probably an extremely productive approach. We need to tell stories that are better and more credible than the conspiracies. And I believe that speculative fiction can do that – as it has already proved capable of doing over the past few decades. But that's another story.

References

1   Marzin, Florian F., *Die phantastische Literatur. Eine Gattungsstudie*, Frankfurt am Main and Bern: Lang, 1982, p. 140.

2   Pesch, Helmut W., *Fantasy – Theorie und Geschichte einer literarischen Gattung*, Passau: Erster Deutscher Fantasy Club, 1982, p. 6 f.

3   Tolkien, John R. R., *The Fellowship of the Ring: Being the First Part of the Lord of the Rings*, Oxford: George Allen & Unwin, 1954; Tolkien, John R. R., *The Two Towers: Being the Second Part of The Lord of the Rings*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954; Tolkien, John R. R., *The Return of the King: Being the Third Part of The Lord of the Rings*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955.

4   Rice, Anne, *Interview with the Vampire*, New York: Knopf, 1976. Her works include the thirteen-volume cycle *The Vampire Chronicles*.

5   Zimmer Bradley, Marion, *The Mists of Avalon*, New York: Knopf, 1982; Marion Zimmer Bradley wrote a total of 21 *Darkover* novels between 1958 and 2010.

6   Rowling, Joanne K., *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, London: Bloomsbury, 1997; Rowling, Joanne K., *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, London: Bloomsbury, 1998; Rowling, Joanne K., *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, London: Bloomsbury, 1999; Rowling, Joanne K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, London: Bloomsbury, 2000; Rowling, Joanne K., *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, London: Bloomsbury 2003; Rowling, Joanne K., *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, London: Bloomsbury, 2005; Rowling, Joanne K., *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, London: Bloomsbury, 2007.

7   Mayer, Stephenie, *Twilight*, New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2005; Mayer, Stephenie, *New Moon*, New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2006; Mayer, Stephenie, *Eclipse*, London: Atom, 2007; Mayer, Stephenie, *Breaking Dawn*, London: Atom, 2008.

8   Howard is called "the father of Sword & Sorcery", regarding his work on *Conan the Barbarian*.

9   *Star Trek*, from an idea by Gene Roddenberry, first appeared 1966.

10   *Star Wars*, screenplay/produced/directed by George Lucas, first appeared 1977.

11   Neil Gaiman's graphic novel *The Sandman* was published in 75 instalments by DC (and by Vertigo from part 47 onwards) between 1988 and 1996.

12   Ritter, Hermann, *Kontrafaktische Geschichte – Unterhaltung vs. Erkenntnis*, Master Thesis, 1995 <http://www.homomagi.de/Magisterarbeit_Hermann_Ritter_Kontrafaktische_Geschichte.pdf> [accessed 16 March 2023].

13   Barkun, Michael, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2003, p. 29.

14   *Moonfall*, directed by Roland Emmerich, 2022; cf. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moonfall_(film)> [accessed 12 February 2022].

15   Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, XI.

16   Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, p. 26.

17   Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, p. 5.

18   Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, p. 20.

19 Impelmanns, Katharina, "Im Netz der Verschwörungstheorien. Verschwörungstheorien im 21. Jahrhundert", in Stiftung Kloster Dalheim. LWL-Landesmuseum für Klosterkultur (ed.), *Verschwörungstheorien – früher und heute: Katalog zur Sonderausstellung der Stiftung Kloster Dalheim. LWL-Landesmuseum für Klosterkultur, 18. Mai 2019 bis 22. März 2020*, Münster: Ardey 2019, pp. 84–91 (p. 84): "Heute sind Verschwörungstheorien nur ein paar Klicks entfernt: Wer über einen Internetzugang verfügt, kann einfach, schnell und günstig verschwörungstheoretisches Gedankengut finden oder selbst in Blogs, Foren oder den sozialen Medien verbreiten, ohne dass dieses vor Veröffentlichung einer kritischen Prüfung durch Redaktion oder Lektorat unterzogen worden wäre. Auf diese Weise hat das Medium Internet dazu beigetragen, Verschwörungstheorien wieder sichtbarer zu machen".

20 In the course of my research, Klaus N. Frick and I, who would go on to become editor in chief of *Perry Rhodan*, interviewed Christian Worch, a leading figure on the German neo-Nazi scene, in 1994. Worch himself had been a fan of speculative fiction for a few years in his youth. His political activism at the time focused on "Anti-Antifa", or "anti-anti-fascism", a "penetrating legalism" and funding the neo-Nazis' build-up of technology and equipment. Cf. Ritter, Hermann, and Rüster, Johannes, and Spreen, Dierk, and Haitel, Michael (ed.), *Heute die Welt – morgen das ganze Universum. Rechtsextremismus in der deutschen Gegenwarts-Science-Fiction. Science-Fiction und rechte Populärkultur*, Murnau am Staffelsee: p.machinery, 2016.

21 Monbiot, George, *Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an age of Crisis*, London: Verso, 2017, pp. 3–4.

22 Gugenberger, Eduard, and Schweidlenka, Roman, *Die Fäden der Nornen – Zur Macht der Mythen in politischen Bewegungen*, Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1993, p. 190.

23 Bulwer-Lytton, Edward, *The Coming Race*, Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1871.

24 Maroney, Tim, "Introduction to the Book of Dzyan", in Maroney, Tim (ed.), *The Book of Dzyan. The Known Text, The Secret Doctrine, Additional Sources, A Life of Mme. Blavatsky*, Oakland: Chaosium Inc., 2000, p. 22; Wegener, Franz, *Alfred Schuler, der letzte deutsche Katharer. Gnosis, Nationalsozialismus und mystische Blutleuchte*, Gladbeck: Kulturförderverein Ruhrgebiet e.V., 2003, p. 59.

25 Blavatsky, Helena P., *The secret doctrine. The synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy*, London: Theosophical Publishing Company Ltd., 1888; Published in German as *Die Geheimlehre*, 1888.

26 Cf. John-Stucke, Kirsten, and Siepe, Daniela, "Himmlers Pläne und Aktivitäten in der Wewelsburg", in John-Stucke, Kirsten, and Siepe, Daniela (ed.), *Mythos Wewelsburg. Fakten und Legenden*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2015, pp. 13–42 (p. 19).

27 Cf. Meyer, Arthur (ed.), *Die Werkstatt Otto und Karoline Gahr in München und ihre Arbeiten für die NSDAP und deren Gliederungen. Otto und Karoline Gahr, die Silberschmiede der NSDAP und der SS*, Marsberg: Schulte, 1993.

28 Cf. Kroll, Frank-Lothar, *Utopie als Ideologie. Geschichtsdenken und politisches Handeln im Dritten Reich*, Paderborn/Munich/Vienna/Zurich: Schöningh, 1998.

29 At least in the legal sense.

30 Cf. Schnurbein, Stefanie von, *Religion als Kulturkritik. Neugermanisches Heidentum im 20. Jahrhundert*, Heidelberg: Winter, 1992; cf. Schnurbein, Stefanie von, *Göttertrost in Wendezeiten. Neugermanisches Heidentum zwischen New Age und Rechtsradikalismus*, Munich: Claudius-Verlag, 1993.

31 Siepe, Daniela, "Die Rolle der Wewelsburg in der phantastischen Literatur, in Esoterik und Rechtsextremismus nach 1945", in Schulte, Jan Erik (ed.), *Die SS, Himmler und die Wewelsburg*, Paderborn/Munich/Vienna/Zurich: Schöningh 2009, pp. 488–510, (p. 493): "In den sechziger Jahren kam eine Spielart der phantastischen Literatur auf, die bis heute in an Esoterik interessierten Kreisen sehr erfolgreich ist. In ihr wird behauptet, die wahre, der Geschichtswissenschaft bisher verborgen gebliebene Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus lasse sich nur mit dem Wirken von Geheimgesellschaften im Hintergrund der offiziellen Politik erklären".

32 Original French title: Bergier, Jacques, and Pauwels, Louis, *Le Matin des magiciens*, Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

33 Bergier, Jaques, and Pauwels, Louis, *Aufbruch ins dritte Jahrtausend*, Bern and Munich: Neue Schweizer Bibliothek, 1962, p. 303.

34 Frenschkowski, Marco, *Die Geheimbünde. Eine kulturgeschichtliche Analyse*, Wiesbaden: Marix, 2009, p. 170; Kramer, André, *Vorsicht Verschwörung! Verschwörungstheorien, UFOs, Atlantis und Paläo-SETI im Lichte rechtsextremer Unterwanderung*, Lüdenscheid: GEP, 2014, p. 26.

35 Bergier and Pauwels, *Aufbruch ins dritte Jahrtausend*, p. 212.

36 Ravenscroft, Trevor, *The Spear of Destiny. The occult power behind the spear which pierced the side of Christ*, London: Spearman, 1972. Published in German as *Der Speer des Schicksals. Das Symbol für dämonische Kräfte von Christus bis Hitler*, Zug/Switzerland: Edition Berg im Ingse-Verlag, 1974.

37 John-Stucke and Siepe, "Himmlers Pläne und Aktivitäten in der Wewelsburg".

38 *Iron Sky*, directed by Timo Vuorensola, 2012.

39 Landig, Wilhelm, *Götzen gegen Thule. Ein Roman voller Wirklichkeiten*, Hannover: Pfeiffer, 1971, p. 26: "Die Schwarze Sonne ist das Symbol eines kleinen, aber einflussreichen esoterischen Schutzstaffelkreises, dessen Verbindungen über die ganze Welt laufen. Eine der wichtigsten Verbindungen geht nach Tibet zu den Gelbmützenlamas und zu der Schwarzmützensekte".

40 Landig, *Götzen gegen Thule*, p. 82: "Bei uns gibt es keine Stauffenbergs!".

41 Landig, *Götzen gegen Thule*, p. 445: "[...] und wir wissen, dass man die Bombenopfer von München zusammen schaufelte, auf Lastwagen verlud, nach Dachau transportierte und sie dort als angeblich vergaste, Opfer fotografierte und diesen Greuelfilm, mit den gemordeten der alliierten Bomben, als Zwangsvorführungen in den Gefangenenlagern der deutschen Soldaten laufen ließ [...]".

42 Landig, *Götzen gegen Thule*, p. 161: "Die Tuatha waren die Träger der jungsteinzeitlichen Großsteingräberkultur und ihr Name bedeutet die Deutschen! Deutsch heißt auf altirisch 'tuath', auf altfriesisch 'thiude' und auf mittelhochdeutsch 'tiutisch'".

43 Landig, Wilhelm, *Rebellen für Thule. Das Erbe von Atlantis*, Vienna: Volkstum-Verlag, 1991, p. 109: "Und noch weiter zum Laut A: Dieser findet sich am Beispiel des Wortes Attaland – Atlantis – gleich dreimal. Es erhielt sich ja im Deutschen als Vatta – Vaterland. Deutsch ist die Erbsprache von Atlantis!".

44 Landig, *Götzen gegen Thule*, p. 298: "Die Bedeutung des Wortes Atlantis ist Vaterland. Auf das Vaterwort Atta weisend, beginnt auch Wulfilas gotisches Vaterunser mit 'Atta unsar', es bedeutet Vater und Alter gleichermaßen. Atlantis-Atta-Land und das Synonym Papi-lond, aus dem sich das landläufige Babylon der Jetztbezeichnung erhielt, erweisen dem Ursprung einer uralten und weit verbreiteten Rassenkultur".

45 Landig, Wilhelm, *Wolfszeit um Thule*, Vienna: Volkstum-Verlag, 1980, p. 290.

46 Mahieu, Jaques de, *Das Wikingerreich von Tiahuacu. Geschichte eines nordischen Imperiums in Südamerika*, Tübingen: Grabert, 1981.

47 Mahieu, *Das Wikingerreich von Tiahuacu*, p. 17.

48 Mahieu, *Das Wikingerreich von Tiahuacu*, p. 26.

49 Mahieu, *Das Wikingerreich von Tiahuacu*, p. 210.

50 Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, *Im Schatten der schwarzen Sonne. Arische Kulte, Esoterischer Nationalsozialismus und die Politik der Abgrenzung* [Original English title: *Black Sun*], Wiesbaden: Matrix-Verlag, 2009, p. 385.

51   Between 1905 and 1908, Sven Hedin travelled through the West Tibetan Plateau and the Transhimalaya, amongst other places, visiting the 9th Panchen Lama in the monastery of Tashi Lhunpo in Samzhubzê District. See <de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sven_Hedin> [accessed 25 April 2023].

52   McCloud, Russel, *Die schwarze Sonne von Tashi Lhunpo*, Vilsbiburg: Arun, 1991, p. 157.

53   McCloud, *Die schwarze Sonne von Tashi Lhunpo*, p. 290 ff.

54   McCloud, *Die schwarze Sonne von Tashi Lhunpo*, p. 292.

55   McCloud, *Die schwarze Sonne von Tashi Lhunpo*, p. 72.

56   Helsing, Jan van, *Geheimgesellschaften und ihre Macht im 20. Jahrhundert oder wie man die Welt nicht regiert. Ein Wegweiser durch die Verstrickungen von Logentum mit Hochfinanz und Politik*, Rhede (Ems): Ewert, 1995.

57   Helsing, Jan van, *Geheimgesellschaften 2. Interview mit Jan van Helsing*, Rhede (Ems): Ewert, 1995.

58   https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Udo_Holey#Juristische_Auseinandersetzungen; 12 February 2022

59   Helsing, *Geheimgesellschaften 2*, p. 23: "Ich habe ehrlich gesagt so gut wie überhaupt nicht recherchiert".

60   Helsing, *Geheimgesellschaften und ihre Macht im 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 118.

61   Helsing, *Geheimgesellschaften und ihre Macht im 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 120: "[…] kamen die Vril-Telepathen zu der Erkenntnis, dass das Sumerische nicht nur mit der Sprache der Aldebaraner identisch ist, sondern auch, dass das Aldebaranisch-Sumerische wie ein unverständliches Deutsch klingt und auch die Sprachfrequenz beider Sprachen – des Deutschen und des Sumerischen – fast gleich ist".

62   Helsing, Jan van, *Unternehmen Aldebaran. Kontakte mit Menschen aus einem anderen Sonnensystem. Die sensationellen Erlebnisse der Familie Feistle*, Lathen (Ems): Ewert, 1997, p. 274: "Es war [für die Aldebaraner] naheliegend, zuerst einmal bei ihren indirekten Nachfahren, die ihnen in ihrer Kultur und Art noch am ähnlichsten geblieben waren, nachzusehen – die Menschen von Thule (Atlantis) – und diese sprechen offenbar sogar noch fast die gleiche Sprache wie damals […]. Davon abgesehen war den Aldebaranern aufgefallen, dass viele große Entwicklungen und Errungenschaften auf der Welt aus diesem Volke kamen […], was ebenfalls darauf schließen ließ, dass diese sich am schnellsten und besten entwickelt hatten".

63   For more illustrations of "flying Reich saucers", see Helsing, Jan van, *Geheimgesellschaften und ihre Macht im 20. Jahrhundert*, pp. 123–128, 131–136, 141–145.

64   Helsing, Jan van, *Geheimgesellschaften und ihre Macht im 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 129.

65   <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revell> [accessed 13 February 2022].

66   Cf. Ritter, Hermann, *Struktur und Funktion von Fantasy-Rollenspielen bei Jugendlichen – neue Formen der Gruppenarbeit?*, Diploma Thesis, 1988 <http://www.rpgstudies.net/ritter/struktur.html> [accessed 16 March 2023].

67   Wells, Herbert George, *Little wars: a game for boys […] with an appendix on Kriegsspiel*, London: Frank Palmer, 1913.

68   Franke, Jürgen, "Die Welt der Rollenspiele", in Franke, Jürgen, and Fuchs, Werner (ed.), *Knaurs Buch der Rollenspiele*, Munich: Knaur 1985, pp. 7–22 (pp. 20–22); Kathe, Peter, *Struktur und Funktion von Fantasy-Rollenspielen*, Friedberg: Club für Fantasy- und Simulationsspiele e.V., 1987, pp. 12–15.

69   Cf. Nagel, Rainer, *Fachsprache der Fantasy-Rollenspiele. Wortbildungselemente und -prozesse im Englischen. Leipziger Fachsprachen-Studien 7*, Frankfurt am Main/Berlin/New York/Paris/Vienna: Lang, 1993, p. 11.

70   Nagel, *Fachsprache der Fantasy-Rollenspiele*, p. VII.

71   Schick, Lawrence Schick, *Heroic Worlds. A History and Guide to Role-Playing Games*, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991, p. 26.

72   Cf. Martin, Ingo, "Ein Überblick über die amerikanische und englische Rollenspiel-Szene", in Franke, Jürgen, and Fuchs, Werner (ed.), *Knaurs Buch der Rollenspiele*, Munich: Knaur 1985, pp. 182–186 (p.182).

73   Kuntz, Robert, and Ward, James, *Gods, Demi-Gods & Heroes. Dungeons & Dragons. Supplement IV, Rules for Fantastic Medieval Wargames. Campaigns Playable with Paper and Pencil and Miniature Figures*, Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Rules, 2006, p. 3.

74   Parin d'Aulaire, Ingri and Parin d'Aulaire, Edgar, *Norse Gods and Giants*, New York: Doubleday, 1967.

75   Parin d'Aulaire, Ingri and Parin d'Aulaire, Edgar, *Trolls*, New York: Doubleday, 1972.

76   Ritter, Hermann, *Drei Dekaden. SciFi & Heidentum*, Remda-Teichel: Edition Roter Drache, 2017.

77   Oertel, Kurt (ed.), *Ásatrú. Die Rückkehr der Götter*, Rudolstadt: Edition Roter Drache, 2012, p. 103.

78   Oertel, *Ásatrú*, p. 103: "In den USA war es Stephen McNallen, der angeregt durch Fantasy-Literatur und Filme 1968 für sich selbst mit der Verehrung der germanischen Gottheiten begann".

79   Oertel, *Ásatrú*, p. 103: "Es ist fast ausschließlich der Beliebtheit von Tolkiens Werk zu verdanken, dass ich in dessen Nachfolge ein explosionsartiges Interesse an Fantasy-Stoffen entwickeln konnte, eine Gattung, die sich archetypischer Merkmale von Magie, der Heldenfahrt und Wesenheiten jenseits menschlicher Natur oder der des beschränkten abrahamitischen Pantheons bediente".

80   Full name Lafayette Ronald Hubbard.

81   For reasons of transparency, the editors would like to point out at this juncture that the author is a qualified social worker and historian as well as an avowed and practising Pagan. He has also authored and edited numerous publications on fantasy and science fiction literature over the past 40 years (including *Battle Tech*, *Perry Rhodan*). A list can be found here: https://www.hermannritter.de/index.php?title=Zeitlich_sortiert#2014 [accessed 3 January 2024].

82   Schnurbein, *Religion als Kulturkritik*, p. 305: "Aufschluss über die Verbindungen zwischen germanischem Heidentum und verschiedenen anderen gegenwärtigen Subkulturen könnte eine literaturwissenschaftliche Analyse von Fantasy-Literatur geben, in der vielfach Elemente der germanischen Mythologie verwendet warden".

83   Staud, Toralf, *Moderne Nazis. Die neuen Rechten und der Aufstieg der NPD*, Köln: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 2006³, p. 107: "Ausgiebig bedienen sich die Neonazis im Fundus nordischer Mystik, germanischer Runen und heidnischer Riten. Weil es keine gesicherte Überlieferung ihrer tatsächlichen Bedeutung(en) gibt, können sie freihändig mit Inhalten gefüllt werden. Unauffällig lässt sich so ein völkisches Weltbild transportieren […]".

84   Benz, Wolfgang, *Die Protokolle der Weisen von Zion. Die Legende von der jüdischen Weltverschwörung*, Munich: Beck, 2007, pp. 9–10: "Die Vorstellung, obskure Mächte und Kräfte agierten auf der Hinterbühne des Weltgeschehens, dient der Bewältigung von Ohnmachtsgefühlen angesichts immer komplexer werdender und von Einzelnen nicht mehr durchschaubarer Zusammenhänge von Politik und Ökonomie in sozialem Maßstab".

85   Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage*, p. 3.

Newly Told Stories

On the Topicality of the Myth of the Germanic Peoples in Children's and Young Adult Books

Anna-Lena Heckel and Heike Sahm

The 19th-century myth of the Germanic peoples is proving surprisingly attractive in the present day: museum shops sell Thor's hammers and anthologies of Germanic heroic poetry, reenactments feature Germanic figures as their protagonists, and people dress up as these characters' modern-day descendants on YouTube. That the myth should have become so ubiquitous is in no way self-evident, because its basis in historical fact is exceedingly thin according to historians' recent findings. The name 'Germanic peoples' was first used by the Romans as a catch-all term for the various ethnic groups on the other side of the Rhine, and there is little evidence to suggest that these many groups even referred to themselves as 'Germanic peoples', let alone saw themselves as a single entity made up of such Germanic tribes. Over the past few decades, therefore, researchers have moved away from the idea of 'the Germanic peoples' in the sense of a community that tradition has living in Central and Northern Europe from the Bronze to the Viking Age, that was to be considered linguistically, ethnically, politically and culturally homogeneous, and out of whose continuity the German nation was said to have formed.[1]

Various reasons – including political, economic and didactic ones – for the re-emergence of the cliché of the Germanic peoples in the public debate have been cited,[2] and they are not going to be wheeled out again at this juncture. Instead, a handful of case studies will be used below to explore whether today's children's and young adult books are helping to preserve and reactivate traditional preconceptions about the Germanic peoples. What this requires first of all is a historical review of the role played by Germanic heroic poetry in establishing and popularising the myth.

Germanic heroic poetry and nation building

19th-century Germanists spent a lot of time inventing Germany as a cultural nation; indeed, they saw it as their chief mission:

> Die Deutschen bildeten nach weit verbreiteter Meinung eher eine Kultur- als eine Staatsnation, und in dieser 'Kultur' spielt (neben Musik und Philosophie) Literatur, besser: 'Dichtung', eine zentrale Rolle. Die 'nationalistische und rassistische Germanistik' propagiert sie als ein Medium der Homogenisierung und emotionalen Bindung der Bevölkerung jenseits staatlicher Institutionen und ihrer Regularien und strebt in Schule und Universität eine dem entsprechende Institutionalisierung als Identifikations-Agentur an. Sie konstruiert ein – im übrigen denkbar vages – 'deutsches Wesen' und legt dieses mit besonderer Emphase in der 'Dichtung' frei, weil es dort zu seinem ersten Ausdruck finde.[3]

The Germans were widely held to be more a cultural nation than a nation in the political sense, and literature – or, more accurately, 'poetry' – plays a key role in this 'culture' (alongside music and philosophy). This cultural nation touts 'nationalist and racist Germanic philology' as a means of homogenising the population and securing its emotional loyalty beyond government institutions and their sets of regulations and aims for a corresponding institutionalisation in schools and universities as an agency of identification. It constructs an – extremely vague – 'German nature' and unveils it with particular emphasis in 'poetry', because it is here that it is believed to first find expression.

As literature that tells of 'the very beginnings', Germanic heroic poetry seemed particularly suitable for moulding the nation and its character. In order to be able to be used as such, the material was excised from the context in which it had principally been passed down, namely that of the Late Middle Ages, and re-set in an unadulterated 'Germanicness' of Late Antiquity or the Early Middle Ages that was seen as "genuine". Before they were recorded in writing, tales of Siegfried the dragon-slayer, Brunhild the mistress of Isenstein, and the hoard lost in the Rhine were said to have emerged in the Germanic-speaking world and passed down there by word of mouth over many centuries. It was with tales like these that the Germanic peoples allegedly communicated their activities, their principles and their values. It is not possible at this juncture to trace the study of heroic poetry as a specifically national legacy from the 19th century onwards in an especially nuanced way. Rather, it is to be explored by way of example based on one single representative from the field of early-20th-century German philology, the continuously much-cited Germanist Andreas Heusler, and focusing solely on the key words that are relevant here.[4] Parts of his monograph *Altgermanische Dichtung* pick up on the views already developed on the origins of heroic poetry and take them further: having first developed among the Goths, probably even before their migration southwards (p. 113),[5] by the 6th century the Germanic narrative song could largely be regarded as a "common Germanic art form" in Heusler's view (cf. p. 155). He identifies around 50 different elements of song content (p. 151) that he believes were passed on through migration amongst the tribes (p. 159) and that suggested "what mighty common property the great family of peoples had in their heroic poetry" (cf. p. 158 f.).

Heusler sees the purpose of the texts as highlighting a 'heroic attitude to life':

> Das Heldische ist – bei aller geziemenden Einschränkung – der hellste, der beherrschende Klang im altgermanischen Sprachschaffen. Ein außerkirchliches Kriegervolk hat die Linien vorgezeichnet, die tief in die getauften und staatsbürgerlichen Zeiten herein wirksam geblieben sind.[6]

> The heroic is – with all due qualification – the brightest, the dominant sound in ancient Germanic speech. A heathen warrior people marked out the lines that have remained clearly visible well into the age of baptism and the nation-state.

With this "ethos: courage, pride, resoluteness, loyalty to one's own sense of honour and to one's lord, one's brother in arms" (cf. p. 164), he wrote, the heroic song might have had its origins in the warrior aristocracy but also reached wider circles, at least in the form of the heroic legend, and was also appreciated by "all classes" (cf. p. 160) because of this "Herrenethik" ("lordly ethic", cf. p. 14). Heusler sees heroic poetry as retaining its own character and remaining free of influence from Ancient or Christian Rome.[7] With little being passed down in the Early Middle Ages, he concedes that "only splinters, spurs and offshoots" (cf. p. 2) of the broad-based tradition have survived. After all, he argues, clerics had no interest in writing down what were seen to be Pagan heroic songs. For Heusler, however, this did not impair the continuity of the heroic traditions at first, even after Christianisation, because: "The ancient Germanic material was rooted deep enough in the German people to last for hundreds of years" (cf. p. 24).[8]

Like many scholars before him, one of the reasons why Heusler is interested in the texts is because they seemed to reflect a heroic time that was untouched by 'foreign' influences – the putative common property of the Germanic peoples and their descendants, the Germans, since time immemorial. As remnants of a centuries-old tradition, the texts were expected to preserve national values; indeed, they revealed the national character, which was believed to have been temporarily buried with the enforcement of confessionalisation in the 16th and 17th centuries but which now needed to be reactivated.[9] That this was tackled systematically can be seen in the wave of anthologies on the heroic saga that were published: re-tellings of Germanic heroic sagas flooded the market in the 19th century, particularly after the German Empire was declared in 1871.[10]

Heroic poetry and the popularisation of the "Germanic"

Although the standard anthologies of Germanic heroic sagas feature the Nibelungen, Gudrun and Dietrich von Bern, the tales passed down by these figures in Middle

Fig. 1   Book cover of Koch, Max and Heusler, Andreas, *Urväterhort. Die Heldensagen der Germanen*, Berlin: Martin Oldenbourg, 1904.

and Early New High German are often supplemented with material taken from the *Edda* songs or sagas of Iceland. This approach is justified in the paratexts by the fact that the "Northmen" are also included with the Germanic peoples[11] and their testimonies – supplementing the continental sources – are seen as meaningful for our own cultural history: in other words, the stories of the Icelanders "give us a glimpse of a much more ancient cultural period of our own people".[12] Series of heroic sagas with titles such as *Jugend- und Hausbibliothek* ("Young People's and Home Library") and *Unsere Vorzeit* ("Our Prehistory") and books with names like *Urväterhort* ("Hoard of our Forefathers") indicate that the Germanic heroic sagas had become an integral part of the national curriculum by the second half of the 19th century. Researchers including Heusler also took part in this programme of popularising "national literature", listing the didactic benefits of these re-tellings in his collection of Germanic heroic sagas published in 1905:

Das Entscheidende ist die Heldengesinnung. Unsere Heroensage ist eine große Verherrlichung der altgermanischen Ehre. Diese heidnische Ehre befiehlt dem Manne, sich nichts bieten zu lassen, kein Recht preiszugeben, seinen Ruhm unvermindert ins Grab zu nehmen; in unbeugsamem Trotze in den Tod zu gehen, ein Lachen auf den Lippen; sie macht ihm zur obersten Pflicht die Rache für die eigene Kränkung und für den Tod des Angehörigen; sie gebietet dem Gefolgsmanne, mit freudigem Stolze für den Herrn zu sterben. […] Urväterhort mögen diese Sagen mit Recht heißen: den Alten haben sie ihr Kriegerleben verklärt; dem Nachkommen sind sie das Vermächtnis, woraus ihm die Stimme der Vorzeit vernehmlich entspringt.[13]

The heroic spirit is key. Our heroic saga is a great glorification of ancient Germanic honour. This Pagan honour commands the man to yield nothing, to surrender no right, to take his glory to the grave undiminished; to go to his death with indomitable defiance and a laugh on his lips; it makes it his supreme duty to take revenge for the affront done to him and for the death of his kinsman; it commands the follower to die for his lord with joyful pride. […] These sagas are right to be called 'hoard of our forefathers': for the ancients, they romanticised their warrior life; for those yet to come, they are the legacy from which the voice of the past speaks to them.

Instructions like these for the reader, which appear dozens of times in fore- or afterwords, serve to tell them that the texts should be read with a normative, present-day mindset rather than from a historically distanced perspective. This is because, if continuity between the "Germanic" and "German" people did exist, then the national character – with its attributes of loyalty, the quest for freedom, an understanding of honour and a willingness to make sacrifices – could not have changed much, and the short sword wielding Bronze Age warrior would largely have followed the same principles as Arminius of the Cherusci, Frederick the Great or the modern soldier. Now, one could argue that the clarion call made by these texts was bound to go unnoticed because hardly anyone, particularly not young people, ever read such fore- or afterwords. Yet the work done to prepare these anthologies for a young audience

does not end with the paratexts. It also extends to what is done with the texts themselves, which are presented to benefit a clearer national curriculum. One of the reasons that this Germanic-German agenda had such a broad impact was therefore because the authors of the anthologies, including some subject specialists, go against the scholarly principle of reproducing the texts close to their sources in order to make the assumed concept running through them all the more prominent. Although the authors of these re-tellings state in their fore- and afterwords that the texts they are presenting are faithful reproductions of the original, this is most definitely not always the case. It is helpful at this point to provide two examples of how non-binding the traditional textual basis is sometimes taken to be. Once again, the anthology of Koch and Heusler serves as illustration: it contains a re-telling of *Kudrun*, a text dated to the mid-13th century but only handed down in the early 16th, which recounts how three kings attempt to marry the king's daughter Kudrun of Hegelingen. The first of these three is the famous King Sîfrit von Môrlant, king of Alzabê. That this suitor has a different skin colour to the others in no way diminishes the esteem in which he is held by the narrator or by the protagonist Kudrun:

> Ez kunde ein ritter edele nimmer gevarn baz.
> si truoc im holden willen – ofte tet si daz –,
> swie salwer varwe er wære ze sehene an sînem lîbe.
> er phlæge ir minne gerne: dô gab im si niemen ze
> wîbe. (583)[14]

Never could a noble knight have performed better. She was fond of him, something that repeatedly became clear, even if he looked dark-skinned. He would gladly have won her love, but no one made her his wife.

Sîfrit's wooing goes unanswered, as does that of the two other warriors, Hartmuot and Herwîc. The fact that Kudrun is finally betrothed to Herwîc makes Sîfrit so angry that he sets out with 80,000 heroes and – according to the text – other black kings to avenge his rejection; he and his men then play a key part in rescuing Kudrun, who has since been kidnapped by one of the other rejected suitors (Hartmuot), and he ends up marrying Herwîc's sister. In their version, Koch and Heusler summarise the various deeds of courtship as follows:

Manchem vornehmen Freier wurde die Hand der schönen Gudrun verweigert. Einer unter ihnen war Hartmuot, der Sohn des Königs von der Normandie. Auch den kühnen Herwîc hatte Hetel verschmäht; da bestürmte der junge Held die Burg der Hegelinge mit Waffengewalt.[15]

Many a noble suitor was refused the hand of the fair Gudrun. Among them was Hartmuot, son of the king of Normandy. The bold Herwic had also been spurned by Hetel, so the young hero stormed the castle of the Hegelings by force of arms.

That King Sîfrit, of all people, is excluded as a potential suitor for Kudrun is probably because he does not exhibit the ethnic homogeneity that was expected in the Germanic heroic tradition.

The second example relates to how Christianity is treated: the heroic sagas are usually retold in a way that portrays their heroes as Pagans. Where the texts that have been passed down to us from the High Middle Ages mention a visit to church or the endowment of a monastery, such references are often skated over in the re-tellings. According to the assumption that is rarely made explicit, the "ancient Germanic peoples" were Pagans.[16] Yet attempting to see Christian references exclusively as a later addition not made until the High Middle Ages gets one entangled in some huge contradictions. If, like Heusler, one presumes that the original versions of the surviving texts were written in the 5th, 6th or 7th century and refer to figures and events from the so-called Migration Period, then the assumption (already addressed in section I) that the 'Germanic heroes' were all Pagans must be viewed as wishful thinking, including amongst researchers. This can be seen in the historical inspirations for the heroic figures: the model for Dietrich of Bern, the best-loved popular hero of Middle High German heroic poetry, is Theodoric the Great, who died in 526 as the Gothic ruler of a post-Roman kingdom. Theodoric, however, was a Christian, as were most Goths from the 4th century onwards; indeed, it is probably largely down to him that any manuscripts of the Gothic translation of the Bible still exist. And Theodoric is by no means the exception. The 5th-century Burgundians, who were so important to the *Nibelungenlied*, and the Lombards of the 6th century were likewise probably Christians according to researchers. It was more likely

to have been 19th-century researchers than any oral narrative tradition that turned them into avowed Pagans.[17]

In the published anthologies, Germanic heroic sagas are not told consistently in line with academic standards and thus in accordance with the sources, even by researchers, but instead following an agenda that accentuates certain characteristics and omits others, generally without these alterations being explicitly identified. On the contrary, in fact, researchers also tend to claim that the tale comes "straight from the original sources".[18] Although Koch and Heusler, by contrast, admit in the introduction to his *Urväterhort* that they have "restored the power and value of this Germanic heroic poetry" that it had lost in being passed down so that their readers can experience "all these sagas as close blood relatives of the heroes", the "old Germanic spirit" that they purport to reconstruct in this way is not the direct result of reproducing the original exactly but is emphasised in the re-tellings based on his own specifications.[19]

Of course, the harnessing of the "Germanic heroic sagas" for political ends on this basis was evident after the war and has been addressed exhaustively by researchers, focusing primarily on the *Nibelungenlied*.[20] Particularly in view of the problematic nature of their reception over time, it may therefore come as a surprise to know that the Germanic heroic sagas can still be found in today's book market. The German National Library's online catalogue reveals high print runs for some titles even up to the present day.[21] Admittedly, one might concede that the anthologies are perhaps still being sold and put on people's shelves but are no longer being read, simply because the outdated language and the one-dimensional way the heroes are portrayed is no longer to the modern taste, especially that of a young person well versed in diversity. What is more, the critical voices raised since the post-war period have also led to new approaches being taken to the older anthologies, a selection of which are presented below. The main question here is how these more recent anthologies pick up both explicitly and implicitly where their predecessors left off.

Germanic peoples in young adult books: anthologies from 1945 to the present day

One early example is the volume of re-tellings of Germanic heroic poetry by Gretel and Wolfgang Hecht that was first published in 1969. In their afterword, both authors explicitly distance themselves from the harnessing of heroic poetry for political ends that went on during the Third Reich.[22] In terms of how they treat their sources, however, there are clear parallels with their predecessors, e.g. in the portrayal of Kudrun's suitors in the epic of the same name. Regarding Sîfrit's wooing, the text says:

> Viele edle Fürsten warben um die schöne Kudrun, doch Hetel wies jeden Freier ab und schuf sich dadurch viele Feinde. Einer davon war König Siegfried von Moorland, ein tapferer Held, der über ein großes und reiches Land gebot. Aber Hetel versagte ihm ebenso wie allen anderen Kudruns Hand.

> Many noble princes courted the beautiful Kudrun, but Hetel rejected every suitor and made many enemies as a result. One of them was King Siegfried of Moorland, a brave hero who ruled over a great and rich land. But Hetel refused him Kudrun's hand, as he did all the others.

The Middle High German word *môre*, which the Grimm dictionary identifies as coming from *Maure*, "inhabitant of Mauretania", is instead taken to mean "moor" or "swamp".[23] The same rule thus appears to apply here too: anyone who does not fit the established idea of "Germanic man" is omitted or assigned a different background, irrespective of what has been passed down in the historical sources.

The way in which Hecht and Hecht approach the texts can also be seen in their re-telling of the *Walter* material. The Latin epic poem *Waltharius* is the only completely surviving text that covers this material. It tells of how three Hun hostages – Walther the Aquitanian, Hagen the Frank and Hildegund the Burgundian – each finally manages to escape to their homeland after spending their childhood and youth at the court of Etzel. Walter and Hildegund are attacked by the Frankish king

Gunther and his previously escaped henchman Hagen as they make their escape with a considerable slice of the Hun treasure. Besides *Waltharius*, the Old English *Waldere* also exists in fragmentary form, and on top of that there are two fragments in Middle High German. Researchers have thus refrained from jumping to any conclusions about the origin of the story in light of these various elements that were passed down.[24] Nevertheless, Hecht and Hecht state in their brief afterword to the re-telling:

> Eines dürfte feststehen: das Werk ist keine Erfindung des lateinisch dichtenden Epikers, wie einige Forscher jüngst behauptet haben, sondern ihm liegt ein deutschsprachiges Waltherlied zugrunde.[25]

> Let one thing be certain: rather than being the creation of an epic poet writing in Latin, as some researchers have recently claimed, the work is based on a German-language *Waltherlied*.

It is this premise that also provides the legitimacy for tackling the surviving text. After all, Hecht and Hecht recognise that: "Man spürt deutlich, daß der Dichter dem einheimischen Stoff innerlich fern stand." ("You clearly sense that the poet was inwardly distant from the original material").[26] Applying this standard, the Christian references in *Waltharius* could only be a later addition; they are stripped out by Hecht and Hecht, who also state that Christian elements can exclusively be found in the Latin adaptation of the material. By doing so, of course, they also skate over a corresponding passage in the Old English, i.e. Germanic-language, *Waldere* (V. 21 f.):

> Weorða ðé selfne
> ȝódum dǽdum,   ðenden ðín ȝod recce!

> Honour thyself
> through good deeds   as long as thy God takes care of thee![27]

In no way is the "Christianisation" of the *Walter* material thus to be understood as a later addition by the Latin author alone.

As well as eradicating Christian aspects, the Germanic elements have also been accentuated more clearly in the editing process. For instance, Hecht and

Hecht write in their introduction: "Many Germanic peoples had already been subjugated by the Hun king Etzel and were forced to pay him tribute."[28] That the *gentes* being threatened by Etzel were allegedly "Germanic" is a qualification added by Gretel and Wolfgang Hecht. The *Waltharius* talks of Franks, Aquitanians and Burgundians; indeed, the term *germanicus* does not appear at all. This minor detail also reflects the national horizon of understanding into which Hecht and Hecht inscribe the *Waltharius*.

Another change from the original comes at the end of the re-telling, where King Gunther fights Walter on his own. Since Hecht and Hecht refrain from commenting on the motivation behind this modification, one can only assume that it was done to ensure a fair fight (one against one). Presumably, they expected the violation of this principle to be the work of a Latin arranger – in *Waltharius*, Hagen and Gunther team up to fight Waltharius. The final dialogue between the warriors, in which they joke about the mutilations that they have inflicted on each other, is also shortened with the excision of the ironically distancing dimension: Hecht and Hecht simply have the heroes resolve their conflict and part ways.[29] The motivation for this change too can only be inferred; presumably, it is that mocking their fight and its consequences does not sit well with the ethos of Germanic heroic poetry.

Even though they explicitly distance themselves from the anthologies that came before, Hecht and Hecht nevertheless adopt some of the editing principles used in these anthologies, such as ethnically homogenising the *dramatis personae*, turning the main characters archaically into non-Christian heroes and focusing on their willingness to die a heroic death. They also follow their predecessors on a methodological level in terms of the "Germanisation" of the original story passed down to them. Claiming to have a "better" knowledge of the presumed "Germanic" substrate of the texts, they proceed to modify them without saying anything about the standards they applied or the changes they made. In so doing, they are continuing to pursue the same agenda as the predecessor anthologies, which they had originally set out to discard in favour of a re-telling that was close to the version passed down.

Apparently still considered the best choice in both West and East Germany, however, the volume was soon reprinted. 1969's first edition was followed by a whole host of successors published by Inselverlag, dtv and

Suhrkamp in 1969, 1970, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1981, 1987, 1994, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2006 and 2018.[30] As already mentioned, of course, the pre-war anthologies were themselves also reissued.

And there have also been more recent attempts at a critical reflection on the tradition of anthologies of heroic sagas. One such example is Stefan Schwarz's 2018 work *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben. Deutsche Heldensagen*. Schwarz also frames his re-telling as an attempt to reset the agenda. In his brief foreword, he explains that he wants to update the heroic sagas because one could learn a lot from them, albeit not regarding the national character; rather, this updating was a necessary step because older re-tellings would trivialise the content (although Schwarz does not provide any proof of this) and emphasise contempt for death, something that he does not necessarily see in the original texts. He concludes: "Schluss mit Walledeutsch und Männertrutz! Die Heftigkeit dieser Texte musste wieder ans Licht." ("No more antiquated German language or masculine defiance! The vehemence of these texts had to be brought back into the light").[31]

The foreword also goes on to explain what this means for how the texts have been rendered: Schwarz is trying to adapt the texts to contemporary language, to align them with the mediaeval sources (rather than to their reception) and finally to relativise the characteristics traditionally attributed to the warriors by deliberately re-telling the material in a comical way.

How he implements this agenda is explored below, again using the example of *Waltharius*. Although there are no corresponding indications in the tradition of the material passed down to us, Schwarz's text contains repeated additions that serve to set the Hun hostages from Franconia, Burgundy and Aquitaine apart from the Huns in terms of their appearance and mentality and that do not only serve to perpetuate racist ideas in this juxtaposition: For example, the hostages at the Hun court are well respected, as they are in the original, with Hildegunde[32] being entrusted with the key to the treasury. In Schwarz's version, this distinction is also motivated by the fact that "a Hun" cannot be trusted: "He has sticky fingers by nature, and many a ring and pearl gets stuck on them," explains Helche, King Etzel's wife.[33] Besides being untrustworthy, Schwarz's Huns are also cruel, ugly and all the same: thus the hostages from the West are "equal to the Huns in their skill and agility but far superior in their stature and physical strength";[34]

Fig. 2   Book cover illustrated by Tanja Székessy. Schwarz, Stefan, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben. Deutsche Heldensagen*, Berlin: Rowohlt, 2018.

they are "unkempt fellows"[35] and, while making their escape, the western hostages dream of a life without Huns: "'We'll soon be home, Hildi,' said Walther, 'then we'll be safe. We'll get married and have children who won't have Hun heads. All you need to do is keep watch one more time and wake me up if you hear anything or see anything coming up the path.'"[36] And the Hun king Etzel compares the appearance of his hostages with that of his people and concludes thus: "'I must admit I'm a bit thrown,' Etzel complained. 'When I have a Hun in front of me, I only need to look him once in the devious slits he calls eyes to know if he is loyal or still needs a bit more whipping. But those white faces with their big, blue marble eyes…'".[37] This alludes to two clichés at once, namely that of the blue-eyed Germanic man and

that of the Asian who is supposedly inferior to him – although this episode is not highlighted as an ironic reference to the myth of the Germanic peoples.[38]

There is thus a marked discrepancy between the author's intention to be progressive and what he is actually doing, which can be linked all too easily to problematic re-tellings of the past 150 years. It is also evident in the style: by deliberately using everyday language (before their escape, for example, Walther says to Hildegunde: "Let's not waste any time with tenderness, Hildi! Take the key to the treasury and fill a chest with Etzel's weapons and armour."[39] And a drunk Walther slurs "Tha' … was … par' … of the plan, m'dear Hillegunne!"[40]). With this and Eckefried speaking in Saxon dialect,[41] he is following through on the plan announced in his introduction to update the language and drop the *Walledeutsch*, or "antiquated German", of his predecessors. Yet his language is routinely just as archaic as theirs, e.g. in his use of "Weib" instead of "Frau" to mean "wife". Thus Etzel promises Walter that he will get "a pretty Hun wife"[42] but doubts that he will still be able to serve Etzel if "a wife bedevils him with conjugal duties".[43] And, at the end, "his eyelids closed, and Hildegunde stroked his hair pensively".[44] The characters are also addressed several times as "Recken" ("warriors") and "Helden" ("heroes"). Yet this term is reserved for Burgundians, not Huns (pp. 244, 247; Walter as a "Held", p. 253), which is not the case in the Middle High German texts or in the re-telling by Hecht and Hecht. This too thus introduces a distinction between "Germanic" and Hun main characters that is not present in the same form in the medieval models.

The examples cited here (Hecht & Hecht and Schwarz) show that even anthologies that distance themselves in their paratexts from the agendas pursued by their predecessors can remain at least partially committed to these predecessors' editing principles and thus also to their agenda, thus helping to perpetuate their clichés.

Germanic peoples in young adult books: Tommy Krappweis's *Mara*

The last in this series of case studies on the depiction of "Germanic heroes" in children's and young adult books concerns the *Mara* trilogy by the author and comedian Tommy Krappweis, which provides a way into the topic

through its targeted use of the language of young people.[45] Unlike in the anthologies discussed earlier, Krappweis does not simply re-tell the stories. Instead, he makes some of their characters part of a fantasy novel whose protagonist Mara follows a plot pattern that is common to this genre with her mission to save gods and the world in each book. One unique feature of the narrative technique employed is that the main character can switch to a parallel Norse world at any time. Needless to say, whatever she sees and experiences there is commented on by the "professor of Norse-Germanic mythology" accompanying her, who is guided firmly by the latest research,[46] i.e. that one should not "confuse the centuries"[47] when dealing with the Germanic peoples, that "Loki never existed"[48], and that the Sîfrit of the *Nibelungenlied* does not necessarily have what it takes to be a national hero.[49] A more problematic aspect of the setup of this fantasy novel would seem to be the weighting afforded to the Germanic images that are invoked. This is because, even though the professor keeps Mara abreast of the Norse gods and their reception history based on the latest research consensus, the older stereotypes prove true often enough at the level of the plot. Mara is thus impressed when she sees Siegfried after she has magically transported herself and the professor to Gnita-Heath:

> Und ganz im Gegensatz zu irgendwelchen Mr. Universums, die vor Muskeln kaum laufen konnten, wirkte Siegfried so beweglich wie eine Sprungfeder. Sein blondes langes Haar schien von Weitem zu leuchten, wie es da so im leichten Wind wehte. Und obwohl sie seine Augen nicht sehen konnte, wusste Mara, dass sie einfach stahlblau blitzen mussten![50]

> And quite unlike some Mr Universe or other, who could hardly walk for muscles, Siegfried appeared as agile as a coiled spring. His long blond hair seemed to shine from afar as it blew around in the breeze. And even though she couldn't see his eyes, Mara knew that they simply had to flash steel-blue!

Even if this impression that the main character has is sent up as a cliché in the very next sentence,[51] the basic setup of the young adult novel plays empirical knowledge off against book knowledge often enough to the benefit of Mara. Elements of the legend of the Germanic peoples are thus repeatedly reaffirmed against the current research consensus, and this imbalance in how the

knowledge presented is evaluated is essentially not eliminated, even through the irony that is obviously being striven for on repeated occasions. Although this may not be the intention of the author or his consultant, the Professor of Nordic Studies, Rudolf Simek from the University of Bonn, at all,[52] comments left on Amazon show that, at the very least, readers do not only see the work as an amusing and entertaining coming-of-age story but also as a tool for acquiring actual knowledge about the Germanic peoples.

Conclusion: How children's and young adult literature has helped to perpetuate the myth

Children's and young adult literature thus also reflects a continuation of the heroic in the post-heroic age, not least in the continuity of a preoccupation with Germanic heroic sagas that has been demonstrated here. This is significant because it has long since been established that the one-sided emphasis placed by 19th- and 20th-century German philologists on key characteristics of the "Germanic heroes" such as their willingness to die, their sense of honour and their physical strength owes much to their harnessing for political ends. It is undeniable that recent adaptations have tackled this problematic historical background of their heroes in the German Empire and the Third Reich head on and have also distanced themselves from it by discussing, ironising or trivialising characteristics of this kind. With some basic principles, however, such as the assumption that all the heroes portrayed were ethnically homogeneous Pagans, the young adult books presented here do replicate the agenda pursued by their predecessors to some extent. Thus a broader interest can clearly be served and higher sales achieved by sticking to the "great narrative" of the Germanic peoples. Once again, however, the fact that the premises adopted by previous German philologists are clearly still exerting an influence on these narratives is undoubtedly due not least to how researchers' interests have changed over time. In the years after 1945, they shifted from tackling questions of the origins of heroic poetry in the Early Middle Ages to interpreting the texts that actually survived from the High and Late Middle Ages. As a result, historiographers' findings concerning ethnogenesis, namely that Germanic peoples as understood by the 19th-cen-tury legend did not exist at all, have not yet been questioned by German philologists in terms of their ramifications for Germanic heroic poetry as a genre.[53] This lack of any new model means that, amongst other things, the idea that heroic poetry as a narrative genre is "ultimately of Pagan origin" is still being perpetuated in introductions even now.[54] Even if German philologists no longer play a significant role in the popularisation of the Germanic heroic saga, the length of time that some ideas have persisted in public discourse is hardly surprising given this research situation, and researchers will have no choice but to keep on commenting critically on the young adult books outlined here.

References

1 Cf. Ehlers, Joachim, "Erfundene Traditionen? Zum Verhältnis von Nationsbildung und Ethnogenese im deutschen und französischen Mittelalter", in Beck, Heinrich, Geuenich, Dieter, Steuer, Heiko, and Hakelberg, Dietrich (eds.), *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung 'germanisch-deutsch': Sprache und Namen, Geschichte und Institutionen*, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2004, pp. 131–162; Goetz, Hans-Werner, "*Gentes et linguae*. Völker und Sprachen im ostfränkisch-deutschen Reich in der Wahrnehmung der Zeitgenossen", in Haubrichs, Wolfgang, and Beck, Heinrich (eds.), *Theodisca. Beiträge zur althochdeutschen Sprache und Literatur in der Kultur des frühen Mittelalters*, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2000, pp. 290–312.

2 Wolfram, Herwig, "Wie schreibt man heute ein Germanenbuch?", in Becher, Matthias, and Dick, Stefanie (eds.), *Völker, Reiche und Namen im frühen Mittelalter*, Paderborn: Fink, 2010, pp. 15–43; Banghard, Karl, and Raabe, Jan, "Die Germanen als geschichtspolitisches Konstrukt der extremen Rechten", in Killguss, Hans-Peter, and Langebach, Martin (eds.), *"Opa war in Ordnung!" Erinnerungspolitik der extremen Rechten*, Cologne: NS-Dokumentationszentrum der Stadt Köln, 2016, pp. 130–143 (p. 131): "Während sich auf zeithistorischen geschichtspolitischen Feldern – etwa bei der Leugnung des Holocaust – schnell massive Widerstände gegenüber extrem rechten Deutungsversuchen einstellen, öffnen sich beim Thema Vorgeschichte strategisch bedeutsame Bewegungsspielräume." ("Whereas major resistance to extreme right-wing attempts at interpretation – e.g. Holocaust denial – soon builds in the fields of contemporary history and historical politics, the topic of prehistory opens up some strategically significant room for manoeuvre.") Cf. Penke, Niels, and Sahm, Heike, "Die sogenannten Germanen. Fragen zum Umgang mit einem Faszinosum", *Demokratie-Dialog* 2 (2018), pp. 87–95.

3 Ketelsen, Uwe-K., "Nationalistische und rassistische Germanistik", in Schneider, Jost (ed.), *Methodengeschichte der Germanistik*, Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2009, pp. 529–548 (p. 533).

4 On Heusler, cf. Zernack, Julia, "Heusler, Andreas", in König, Christoph (ed.), *Internationales Germanistenlexikon 1800–1950*, Vol. 2, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2003, pp. 738–741; von See, Klaus, "'Mich hat der gelehrte Beruf nur mässig beglückt' – Andreas Heusler als Wissenschaftler und Zeitzeuge", in von See, Klaus (ed.), *Ideologie und Philologie. Aufsätze zur Kultur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006, pp. 165–204. Heusler has corrected older views of the origin of heroic poetry mainly in that he makes the heroic song penned by an author the basis of the saga (rather than the other way round).

5 Heusler, Andreas, *Altgermanische Dichtung*, Potsdam: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, 2., neu bearb. und verm. Aufl. 1943 [first edition 1923].

6   Cf. Heusler, *Altgermanische Dichtung*, p. 243.

7   Cf. Heusler, *Altgermanische Dichtung*, p. 1: "Es war eine nach Stoff und Form eigenartige, heimische Kunst; sie stand außerhalb der Dichtarten Roms, des alten wie des kirchlichen." ("It was a unique, indigenous art in terms of its material and form; it stood apart from the types of poetry practised in Rome, both ancient and ecclesiastical.")

8   On the concept of "Altgermanisch" ("Ancient Germanic" or "Old Germanic"), cf. Beck, Heinrich, "Andreas Heuslers Begriff des 'Altgermanischen'", in Beck, Heinrich (ed.), *Germanenprobleme in heutiger Sicht*, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 1986, pp. 396–412 (p. 398): Beck writes that, in his inaugural address to the Prussian Academy of Sciences in 1907, Heusler declared "daß er seine Arbeit der Erforschung des Germanischen Altertums gewidmet habe. Dieser Altertumskunde gab er bereits damals einen Mittelpunkt, an dem er lebenslang festhielt: die Erforschung der germanischen Gesittung." ("that he had dedicated his work to the study of Germanic antiquity. Even back then, he was giving this study of antiquity a focus to which he would stick throughout his life: the study of Germanic civilisation.").

9   Such an agenda had already been borrowed from Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (1808) and developed further in the 19th century, and establishing a "German national literature" was an important building block in this agenda: "[I]n deren Erzählung sollte das ans Licht treten, was im tiefsten Wesen deutsch sei, und zwar nicht allein als narrativ zurückschauende Herleitung aus seinem Urquell und seinen geschichtlichen Manifestationen, sondern zugleich als nationalpädagogisches Ziel aller vaterländischen Bildung." ("That which was held to be German in its deepest essence was to come to light in its telling, not only as a derivation from its original source and its historical manifestations that is retrospective in its narrative sense but also, at the same time, as the national goal of all education in the Fatherland.") (Ketelsen, "Nationalistische und rassistische Germanistik", p. 542).

10   Cf. Sahm, Heike, "'Nibelungenlied' und Heldensagen: Die Popularisierung des Germanischen durch Germanisten zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts", in Plotke, Seraina, Schöller, Robert, and Büchli, Lysander (eds.), *Das 'Nibelungische' und der Nationalsozialismus. Populäre und wissenschaftliche Diskurse im 'Dritten Reich'*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2023, pp. 151–170.

11   Cf. Wolters, Friedrich, and Petersen, Carl, *Die Heldensagen der germanischen Frühzeit*, Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1921, 6th edition 1942, p. 7.

12   Bonus, Arthur, *Isländerbuch. Sammlung altgermanischer Bauern- und Königsgeschichten*, München: Georg D. W. Callwey, Wien: Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1935 [first edition 1918], p. 7. On the emergence of Nordic studies, cf. Engster, Hermann, *Germanisten und Germanen. Germanenideologie und Theoriebildung in der deutschen Germanistik von den Anfängen bis 1945 in exemplarischen Darstellungen*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986.

13   Koch, Max and Heusler, Andreas, *Urväterhort. Die Heldensagen der Germanen*, Berlin: Martin Oldenbourg, 1904, p. 5.

14   Bartsch, Karl (ed.), *Kudrun*, new expanded version of the 5th edition by Karl Stackmann, Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1980.

15   Koch and Heusler, *Urväterhort*, p. 17.

16   In the *Urväterhort*, this premise is clearly stated in the introduction when he declares (p. 6): "Die Gesinnung unsrer Heldensage ist urheidnisch." ("The ethos of our heroic saga is primordially Pagan.") Cf. the explicit statement in Wolters and Petersen, *Die Heldensagen der germanischen Frühzeit*, pp. 4–7.

17   Criticism of the cliché of the Pagan Germanic heroes is evident as early as in Kuhn, Hans, "Heldensage und Christentum", in Leussink, Hans, Neumann, Eduard, and Kotowski, Georg (eds.), *Studium Berolinense. Aufsätze und Beiträge zu Problemen der Wissenschaft und zur Geschichte der Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960, pp. 515–524, as well as in Hauck, Karl (ed.), *Zur germanisch-deutschen Heldensage. Sechzehn Aufsätze zum neuen Forschungsstand*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftl. Buchgesellschaft, 1961, pp. 416–426.

18   Examples include Mudrak, Edmund, *Nordische Götter- und Heldensagen*, 32nd edition, Würzburg: Arena, 2016, p. 325.

19   Here is the corresponding passage of text in the context of Heusler's introduction, *Urväterhort*, p. 7 f.: "Aber da ohnedies gekürzt werden muß, strebt der Nacherzähler, auf Kosten des Ritterlichen, Höfischen, Minniglichen zu kürzen, damit das Heroische beherrschend hervortrete, der altgermanische Geist, der das Gerüste dieser Dichtungen trägt. So weicht wiederum die äußere Ungleichheit dem Gemeinsamen, und wir empfinden alle diese Sagen als nahe Blutsverwandte, soweit sie nach Zeit, Ort und Stimmung ihrer Quellen auseinanderliegen. Die altbekannten deutschen Sagen nehmen sich herber aus, als wenn sie in der üblichen Weise mit dem Ritterprunke und den gefühlvollen Zugaben der späten Epen nacherzählt werden. Der Leser wird leicht erkennen, auf welcher Seite die Kraft und der Wert dieser germanischen Heldendichtung liegen." ("But since a certain abridgement is essential, the re-teller strives to trim away the chivalrous, the courtly, the dainty, to leave the stage free for the heroic, the old Germanic spirit that underpins these tales. Thus outward disparity once again gives way to commonality, and we experience all these sagas as our close blood relatives despite their differences in terms of time, place and the tone of their sources. The famous German sagas seem more austere than when they are retold in the usual manner, complete with chivalric pomp and the emotional additions of the late epics. It will be easy for the reader to see where the strength and value of this Germanic heroic poetry lies.").

20   Frevert, Ute, "Vom heroischen Menschen zum Helden des Alltags", in Bohrer, Karl Heinz, Scheel, Kurt (eds.), *Heldengedenken. Über das heroische Phantasma*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2009 (*Merkur* 63,9/10), pp. 803–812 (p. 805), sees the harnessing of "heroes" for political ends primarily in the reception of the *Nibelungenlied*, which she believes "many generations first encountered" in Wilhelm Grimm's *Die deutsche Heldensage* of 1829. Cf. Heinzle, Joachim, and Waldschmidt, Anneliese (eds.), *Die Nibelungen. Ein deutscher Wahn, ein deutscher Alptraum. Studien und Dokumente zur Rezeption des Nibelungenstoffs im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991; Härd, John Evert, *Das Nibelungenepos. Wertung und Wirkung von der Romantik bis zur Gegenwart*, translated from the Swedish by Christine Palm, Tübingen, Basel: Francke, 1996; von See, Klaus, "Das Nibelungenlied – ein Nationalepos?", in Heinzle, Joachim, Klein Klaus, and Obhof, Ute (eds.), *Die Nibelungen. Sage – Epos – Mythos*, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2003, pp. 309–343; Puschner, Uwe, "Germanenideologie und völkische Weltanschauung", in Beck et al., *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung 'germanisch – deutsch'*, pp. 103–129; Bönnen, Gerold, and Gallé, Volker (eds.), *Ein Lied von gestern? Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte des 'Nibelungenliedes'. Dokumentation des 1. wissenschaftlichen Symposions, veranstaltet von der Nibelungenliedgesellschaft Worms e.V. und der Stadt Worms am 5. und 6. Oktober 1998*, 2nd edition, Worms: Worms-Verl., 2009.

21   For example, Gustav Schalk's *Germanischen Heldensagen* was published in its 22nd edition in 1932, in five more new editions between 1933 and 1945, and then again in 1953, 1955, 1957, 1960, 1963, 1964 and 2009. Another, Mudrak's *Götter- und Heldensagen*, was first published in 1939. Its 32nd edition came out in 2016. Heusler's 1904 *Urväterhort* was likewise reprinted in 2016.

22   Hecht, Gretel, and Hecht, Wolfgang, *Deutsche Heldensagen*. Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1987; initially Insel-Verlag Anton Kippenberg 1969 Leipzig, afterword pp. 305–328.

23   "mohr, m.", *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, digitalised version in the Trier Center for Digital Humanities' Dictionary Network, Version 01/21, <https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=M06586> [accessed 17 January 2022].

24   Cf. Haug, Walter, and Vollmann, Benedikt K. (eds.), *Frühe Deutsche Literatur und Lateinische Literatur in Deutschland 800–1150*. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1991, pp. 1178–1181.

25   Hecht and Hecht, *Deutsche Heldensagen*, p. 317.

26   Hecht and Hecht, *Deutsche Heldensagen*, p. 317.

27 Strecker, Karl (ed.): *Ekkehards Waltharius*. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1907. The addendum contains the fragments from *Waldere* and those in Middle High German as well as translations. "Ehre dich selber durch gute Taten, solange deiner Gott sich annimmt!" German translation ibid.

28 Hecht and Hecht, *Deutsche Heldensagen*, p. 177 ("Viele germanische Völker hatte der Hunnenkönig Etzel schon unterworfen, und sie mußten ihm Tribut zahlen.").

29 Hecht and Hecht, *Deutsche Heldensagen*, p. 318. They argue thus: "Im 'Waldere' gewinnt Gunther also am Schluß die königliche Würde zurück, die wir im lateinischen Epos an ihm vermissen." ("In *Waldere*, Gunther thus regains at the close the kingly dignity that he lacks in the Latin epic.") They have this to say on the joking around: "Und jene groben Späße, mit denen sich die Helden gegenseitig nach dem Kampf wegen ihrer furchtbaren Verstümmelung verspotten, haben mit der deutschen Heldensage überhaupt nichts mehr zu tun. Hier offenbart sich schon der Geist der Spielmannsdichtung." ("And those crude quips with which the heroes taunt each other after the battle because of how terribly mutilated they are have nothing at all to do with the German heroic saga. They belong squarely with the poetry of the wandering minstrels.")

30 The illustrations by Burkhard Neie are one new feature of the latest edition (*Deutsche Heldensagen*. Nacherzählt von Gretel und Wolfgang Hecht. Illustriert von Burkhard Neie. Berlin: Insel Verlag, 2018). They take the interpretation of the texts to another level and require more detailed study than is possible here. Cf. Moos, Julika, and Heckel, Anna-Lena, "Diffuse Düsternis. Mittelalterlichkeit in der Insel-Ausgabe der 'Deutschen Heldensagen' mit Illustrationen von Burkhard Neie", in Büchli et al. (eds.), *Das 'Nibelungische' und der Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 303–333.

31 Schwarz, Stefan, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben. Deutsche Heldensagen,* Berlin: Rowohlt, 2018, p. 9.

32 Both Schwarz and Hecht and Hecht call her "Hildegunde" rather than "Hiltgunt", while Attila and Ospirin bear the names "Etzel" and »Helche« in the re-tellings as well as in the Vienna fragment in Middle High German. Schwarz, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben.*

33 Schwarz, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben*, p. 234 ("Er hat von Natur aus klebrige Finger, und da bleibt mancher Ring und manche Perle haften.").

34 Schwarz, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben*, p. 234 ("[d]en Hunnen an Geschick und Wendigkeit ebenbürtig, doch an Wuchs und Körperkraft weit überlegen").

35 Schwarz, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben*, p. 233 ("diese struppigen Gesellen").

36 Schwarz, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben*, p. 242 ("'Bald sind wir zu Hause, Hildi', sagte Walther, 'dann sind wir in Sicherheit. Wir werden heiraten und Kinder ohne Hunnenköpfe haben. Du musst nur einmal noch Wache halten und mich wecken, falls du etwas hörst oder den Weg heraufkommen siehst.'").

37 Schwarz, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben*, p. 235 ("'Ich gebe zu, ich bin verunsichert', klagte Etzel. 'Wenn ich einen Hunnen vor mir habe, dann muss ich ihm nur einmal in die verschlagenen Schlitzaugen sehen, um zu wissen, ob er treu ist oder noch ein bisschen ausgepeitscht werden muss. Aber bei diesen Weißgesichtern mit ihren großen blauen Murmelaugen ...'").

38 These instances of stereotyping are not new and have already been studied in depth. In his introduction, Klaus von See writes: "It has only been since the early days of race theory – or, more accurately, since Gobineau published his *Inequality of Human Races* in the 1850s – that the blond, blue-eyed man has increasingly come to represent the Germanic peoples as the final and most superior exemplar of the Aryan race." And the juxtaposition of "Germanic peoples" and "Huns" can also already be found in von See's work, where he writes that Fritz Lang's 1924 film *Die Nibelungen* depicted "[...] the Huns as Asian barbarians from the East, while the blonde

Kriemhild [...]", a Burgundian, resembled "Uta von Naumburg", who had been elevated to a national treasure in the 1920s. Von See, Klaus, "'Blond und blauäugig'. Der Germane als literarische und ideologische Fiktion", in Bönnen and Gallé (eds.), *Ein Lied von gestern? Wormser Symposium zur Rezeptionsgeschichte des Nibelungenlieds*, pp. 105–139 (p. 105, 135).

39 Schwarz, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben*, p. 236 ("Lass uns keine Zeit mit Zärtlichkeiten verplempern, Hildi! Nimm den Schlüssel zur Schatzkammer und fülle eine Kiste mit Etzels Waffen und Rüstung.").

40 Schwarz, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben*, p. 237 ("Dasz ... ge ... hörte ... szum Plan, meine gute Hillegunne!").

41 Schwarz, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben*, p. 248: "So wos habsch ja überhaupt no nie gesähn! Bei dir geht ja ´s Töten wie bei annern Leuten dös Fliegenklatschen" ("I've never seen anything as pretty as that! For you, killing is just like swatting flies is for other people."). This is presumably connected to the reference in *Waltharius* to the "Saxones". Whether this means continental Saxons is debatable, of course, something that is also reflected in Haug's edition of *Waltharius*. Either way, however, the term as used from the Early to the Late Middle Ages cannot be used to support the reference that Schwarz makes to the modern German federal state and the dialect spoken by the people who live there.

42 Schwarz, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben*, p. 235 ("ein schönes hunnisches Weib").

43 Schwarz, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben*, p. 235 ("wenn mich ein Weib mit ehelichen Pflichten heimsucht").

44 Schwarz, *Als Männer noch nicht in Betten starben*, p. 242 ("Dann sanken ihm die Lider, und Hildegunde strich ihm versonnen über das Haar.").

45 Krappweis, Tommy, *Mara und der Feuerbringer*, Cologne: Schneiderbuch Egmont, 2009; Krappweis, Tommy, *Mara und der Feuerbringer. Das Todesmal*, Cologne: Schneiderbuch Egmont, 2010; Krappweis, Tommy, *Mara und der Feuerbringer. Götterdämmerung*, Cologne: Schneiderbuch Egmont, 2011. The quotations and page references are from the first book in the series. Cf. Niels Penke's discussion of other examples in his "'Only the gods are real?' Neil Gaimans postmoderne Adaptionen altnordischer Stoffe", in Busch, Nathanael, and Velten, Hans R. (eds.), *Die Literatur des Mittelalters im Fantasy-Roman*, Heidelberg: Carl-Winter-Universitätsverlag 2018, pp. 205–218.

46 There is no equivalent chair at any university in Germany.

47 Krappweis, Mara und der Feuerbringer, p. 91 (Man dürfe die "Jahrhunderte nicht durcheinander" werfen).

48 Krappweis, Mara und der Feuerbringer, p. 94 ("Ach, was red ich denn da, er hat eben nie gelebt").

49 Needless to say, this injection of expertise also relates to content of a more problematic nature: in the second part of the trilogy, Mara saves the world once again by fighting off zombie versions of Roman legionaries in the final showdown on the *Hermannsdenkmal* monument. The theory that Arminius is the historical model for Siegfried is also cited at this point. Although the professor does indicate that the hypothesis is contentious, he nevertheless backs it. It does not seem unobjectionable that the theory is guaranteed to be perpetuated in this young adult book when there is no possibility whatsoever of discussing the prerequisites for and implications of this assumption – one that is controversial from a history of research perspective. Cf. Sieber, Andrea, "Zeitreisen zum Nibelungen-Mythos. Überlegungen zur Mara und der Feuerbringer-Trilogie von Tommy Krappweis", in Busch and Velten, *Die Literatur des Mittelalters im Fantasy-Roman*, pp. 181–203 (p. 195, footnote 73).

50 Krappweis, Mara und der Feuerbringer, p. 243.

51 On the role of Siegfried cf. Sieber, "Zeitreisen zum Nibelungen-Mythos ...", p. 194: "Vorübergehend kompensiert [Siegfried] die noch nicht vollkommen ausgeprägte Handlungskompetenz der Weltenretterin Mara, wobei gender-stereotype Heldenbilder sowohl bestätigt als auch ironisch

gebrochen werden." ("[Siegfried] compensates temporarily for the fact that Mara, the saviour of the world, has not yet fully developed her decision-making skills, thus both reaffirming and, ironically, violating gender-stereotypical images of the hero.").

52   In any case, the volumes do offer recommendations for further reading and additional factual information in the explanatory notes. Sieber, "Zeitreisen zum Nibelungen-Mythos …", (p. 199) regards the *Mara* novel as having been inspired by a recent re-telling of the *Edda*, specifically Bringsværd, Tor Åge, *Die wilden Götter: Sagenhaftes aus dem hohen Norden*. German version by Tanaquil Enzensberger. With 77 illustrations, initial capitals and endpaper by Johannes Grützke, Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2001.

53   The discussion is picked up by Ghosh, Shami, "On the Origins of Germanic Heroic Poetry: A Case Study of the Legend of the Burgundians", *PBB* 129 (2007), pp. 222–252; Ghosh, Sami, *Writing the Barbarian Past. Studies in Early Medieval Historical Narrative,* Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016; Kragl, Florian, "(K)Ein Gote? Theoderich und die Heldensage der Germanen", in Wiemer, Hans-Ulrich (ed.), *Theoderich der Große und das gotische Königreich in Italien*, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021, pp. 369–392; Sahm, Heike: "Mündlichkeit", in Langeslag, Paul, Sahm, Heike, Scheel, Roland, Schwarzbach-Dobson, Michael (eds.), *Die Anfänge germanischsprachiger Literaturen. Ein interdisziplinäres Studienbuch*, in print but not yet published.

54   Millet, Victor, *Germanische Heldendichtung im Mittelalter. Eine Einführung*, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2008, p. 121.

Connections and References Between the German Alt-right's Views of Prehistory and Its Ideology

Based on the Example of the Institut für Staatspolitik[1]

Hannes Buchmann and Julius Roch

The alt-right is a global phenomenon as it is a current of post-war fascism. Yet it is not a homogeneous movement because the alt-right has been shaped differently in different countries on account of the prevailing historical and cultural circumstances. The most important common ground is the basic ideological idea of superiority of one's own group, race or nation. Thus, there is no significant difference to the ideology of the "old" right. The alt-right can mainly be distinguished from "old" Nazism by the wording it uses and the ways in which it prefers to put its ideas into practice.

In most European and North American countries, the alt-right's influence has grown stronger in recent years, and it has close links to a political party (in Germany the Alternative für Deutschland, – "Alternative for Germany", or AfD). In German-speaking countries, the term for alt-right is *Neue Rechte* (literally "New Right"). This paper serves to examine the specific history of this movement and some of its unique characteristics.[2]

In Germany, the *Neue Rechte* describes a current of the extreme right that has emerged since the 1960s as a reaction to the failure of the fascist party Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) to enter parliament and that had been influenced primarily by French thinkers as well as fascist currents of the inter-war period.[3] The *Neue Rechte* has been gaining in importance as an object of research for several years. There are therefore many publications that examine the German alt-right from a socio-historical perspective, including the historical references provided by the main actors and their view of history. These studies usually focus on 20th-century history for two reasons: firstly, the *Neue Rechte* makes frequent references to this period and tries to establish corresponding reactionary interpretations of the period's history. Secondly, many analyses have demonstrated that the *Neue Rechte* is itself closely connected to the history of the first half of the 20th century and can only be comprehensively understood within this historical context. Studies of these historical references are thus both important and urgently needed.

Despite this research into the role played by 20th-century history in shaping the ideology of the German alt-right, the function of history cannot be fully understood without also considering the significant role of earlier eras. Yet there is a noticeable lack of detailed analyses, particularly with regard to prehistory and early history. Those archaeologists who deal with the political issues of archaeology in the present often focus mainly on right-wing radicals and Neopaganism.

This lack of research is regrettable, as prehistoric and early medieval narratives are also equally important cornerstones for building the ideology of the alt-right.[4] This article will fill in this gap and demonstrate the importance of prehistory and early history in the fascist ideology of the *Neue Rechte*. It also sets out to show the ideological interest that the *Neue Rechte* has in the past and the importance of the concept of *Volk* ("people") for both current debates and an understanding of earlier eras. The focus will be on the institution Institut für Staatspolitik ("Institute for State Policy", or IfS) and its publication media. The IfS is regarded as one of the most important nodes of the right-wing network in Germany and Europe, making it not just a case study example but also a very influential actor of the far right.[5]

The Institut für Staatspolitik was set up in May 2000. Originally founded in Bad Vilbel in Hesse it has been based in Schnellroda in the south of Saxony-Anhalt in central Germany since 2003.[6] The founding member and guiding spirit of the IfS, Götz Kubitschek, and his wife Ellen Kubitschek own a two-sided farm that they themselves refer to as a "manor". Affiliated to the IfS is the publishing house Verlag Antaios, formerly Edition Antaios, run by Kubitschek, as well as the magazine *Sezession* with an associated blog.

It is also important to understand that the right-wing authors are always social and political actors too. In contrast to smaller radical groups with right-wing or Neopagan tendencies, the *Neue Rechte* has the potential (especially through the AfD) to embed reactionary historical interpretations amongst broad swathes of the population if it is successful. This in turn would lead to a strengthening of even more radical understandings of history and the ideologies behind them.

This paper does not set out to highlight any factual and methodological errors in the right-wing publications analysed. Although the publications to be discussed are considered by their authors to be works of non-fiction and reference, they are in fact far removed from the current scholarly debate. Instead, it focuses on strategy, methodology and emphasis in the construction of the people (*Volk*) and history, especially regarding prehistory and early history. The political dimensions and consequences can then be derived on this basis.[7]

The concept of Volk in the current production of ideology

The reflections on the concept of *Volk*, as a concept of a people in the sense of an ethnic community,[8] will be examined using the example of two books and one article respectively blog post.

Robert Peter Sieferle – *Finis Germania*

The starting point for reflections on the concept of people in the Verlag IfS ideology will be the book *Finis Germania* [sic] by Rolf Peter Sieferle, published in 2017 by Verlag Antaios. The editor of the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, Johannes Saltzwedel, would go on to vote Sieferle's book into the list of non-fiction maintained by the Northern German radio and television broadcaster Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) and the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* by awarding all the points available to him to the book. This was unusual, since points are usually distributed amongst several works. This incident as well as the ensuing public debate brought the book and the publishing house unexpected publicity, turning the work into a bestseller.[9]

Since Sieferle's understanding of the German people hinges on an antagonism towards the Jews, it is neces-

sary to examine the structure of this antisemitic juxtaposition.[10] The following passage is significant in this respect:

> Since the Jews were unable to share in the Christian honour, they nested in the niches of this society, as usurers and merchants. Here, too, [is] an affinity with the German people, who went from heroes to merchants, despised by all the world and focused single-mindedly on their advantage.[11]

Initially, the unconcealed antisemitism is evident in the characterisation of Jews as "usurers and traders".[12] Furthermore, he subsequently projects the antisemitic resentment, which he articulates in the first section – the image of the parasite in the nest and of Jews as usurers and traders remaining outside of (Christian) society – onto the Germans. According to the logic of the passage, the Germans are now the new Jews. This does not only refer to victimhood, but they would also have had to adopt supposedly Jewish behaviour. Last but not least, the biological determination of the concept of the people becomes clear through the exclusion of Jews; Jews were unable to be part of society and had to nest in "niches". Sieferle returns to this antagonism later on:

> Even though Germany has now disappeared as a great historical entity and has become merely an economic and geographical concept, its terrible name will nevertheless remain in the memory of the peoples, regardless of what actually happens in this country. Since the Holocaust happened not to a profane but to a chosen people, the people of the perpetrators were also transported away from profane history and elevated to the status of immortality. [...] The Jews, to whom their God Himself assured eternity, are today building memorials to their murdered peoples all over the world, in which not only is the power of moral superiority attributed to the victims, but the power of eternal depravity is also attributed to the perpetrators and their symbols. After the real Germany has perished, it is permanently preserved as a legend. [...] Here the callousness that permanent confrontation with a legend produces pays off: the people who live in Germany have become just as accustomed to coping with anti-Germanism as the Jews had to learn to cope with antisemitism.[13]

It becomes clear that the Holocaust has become the pivotal point of Sieferle's concept of *Volk*. He makes a distinction between the Germans and "other peoples" without specifying them in more detail. This also seems unnecessary, since he remains concerned with the imagined antagonism between Germans and Jews, both profane and sacred. It is from this antagonism that he derives an essential affinity. Thus, the fact – in actual fact a trivial one – that Holocaust memorials also recall the deeds of the perpetrators is denounced as a deliberate act of moral superiority. For Sieferle, the "real Germany" also perished and congealed into a legend after the Second World War and the end of the Holocaust. Last but not least, he imagines an anti-Germanism as an inverted antisemitism. By writing "how the Jews had to learn to cope with antisemitism", he rationalises and justifies the antisemitism that ultimately led to the Holocaust as a quasi-natural phenomenon.

In summary, it remains to be said that Sieferle's *völkisch* concept of the Germans is biologically determined. The point of reference of his ideology is the Holocaust, from which he wants to construct a consanguinity between the Jews and the Germans. In doing so, he projects Jews as a homogeneous people in order to imagine the Germans likewise as a homogeneous people – the "real Germany".

Mario A. Müller – *Kontrakultur*

The second example is the book *Kontrakultur* by Mario A. Müller. The book is a suitable subject for a case study because Müller was one of the leading figures of the German "Identitarian Movement" at the time of its publication. Furthermore, the book was written in the style of a glossary and aimed specifically at a younger audience. A few passages are singled out below to understand the underlying concept of *Volk*.

With reference to the lemma for "democracy", Müller writes that it developed in the "community of fate" (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*) of the Greek *polis*,[14] whereas the interest of the people no longer plays a role in modern "sham democracies" in his view. Ironically, he counters this with the anti-democrat and so-called "Attorney General of the Third Reich", Carl Schmitt: for Schmitt, democracy is an agreement between rulers and the ruled, "a homogeneous popular democracy without foreign influence."[15] Thus conflicts of interest are negated in favour of a homogeneous, *völkisch* community of fate that, following this argument, can only turn to the outside world by presenting a united front.

He further emphasises the inner homogeneity of a society when he defines ethnopluralism, one of the ideological buzzwords of the alt-right. In Müller's words, "Ethnopluralism is the conviction that the diversity of the peoples, cultures and religions of this Earth constitutes its wealth and is therefore worth preserving as a *value* in itself."[16] The passage goes on to name inequality, tensions and struggles as essential characteristics of the respective ethnos. In this way, homogenisation is perceived as an inward process and differences are naturalised on biological grounds, again leaving open the possibility of hierarchisation.[17] Another aspect of ethnopluralism according to Müller is the fixed location of "cultures" in an "ancestral place". Based on these assumptions, Müller aims to set the *Neue Rechte* apart from the *Alte Rechte* ("old right"), as the latter's "chauvinistic racism and antisemitic fetish" is be rendered unnecessary in his view by the concept of the fixed location.[18] Müller explains an ethnocultural identity as follows:

> As Germans as well as white Europeans, we are all closely related to one another and share the same ancestors and the same fate. Without this relatively homogeneous ethnic dimension, neither the cultural nor the civilisational dimension can endure.[19]

The people (*Volk*) is therefore not only a community of fate but also a homogeneous, ethnically determined ancestral community. Thus, a temporal depth is presumed to exist for this community. Moreover, Müller sees leading the community of fate into the future as the noblest duty of all.[20] The biologistic component of the *völkisch* ideology is expressed here not least in the lemma for "Europe" when he writes:

> Europe is the land of Europeans. Like our ancestors, we are fused with the landscapes of our homeland. Its forests rustle into our language, its mountains tower in our architecture, its tides reflect on our skin. We are at home in Europe and Europe lives through us. Europe is our destiny. [...] Our homeland is both our heritage and our mission.[21]

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that the idea of "grown people" conveys a linguistic image with antisemitic connotations. As we have seen above with Sieferle's reference to "Jews nesting in niches", Jews have historically been considered invaders of homogeneous *Völker*.[22]

Another buzzword of the alt-right is the "Great Replacement", which was also the title given to his pamphlet by the right-wing terrorist of Christchurch. The term harks back to the French fascist Renaud Camus, whose work *Le grand replacement* was translated and the German edition published by Verlag Antaios.[23] Referring to Camus, Müller writes that the "Great Replacement" is actually happening and that the "ethnic German population" is being replaced by "immigrants foreign to its space and culture".[24] Adopting the term as dogma is indicative of the ideological tradition of the *Neue Rechte* in the Counter-Enlightenment, according to which a clarification of the dogma is not possible.[25] Müller goes on to say that "we", i.e. the Identitarians, are the last generation that can ensure the continued existence of "Europe's thousand-year-old culture", according to which they perform an existential struggle that is no longer only political but is now also fundamental.[26] In addition to what is a very violent approach in linguistic terms, it becomes apparent that everyone's own actions go beyond politics and are seen as a heroic duty.

The heroic self-exaltation becomes even more conspicuous with the catchword "legend" (*Mythos*) when Müller writes:

> The millennia-old bond of tradition seems to have been broken. [...] Europe must therefore reconnect with its ethnocultural heritage: the great narrative of its tradition, which can link the deeds of our ancestors with the heroes of our future.[27]

The ancestors thus cannot be experienced through a rational approach, unlike in today's society as heroes of history. The unreal and the heroic must be conveyed into the future.

With regard to the question pursued in this paper, the following remains to be said: in Mario Müller's writings, the concept of the *Volk* is biologically determined. A people is defined as a clearly delineated community that acts as a homogeneous unit of rulers and ruled. This characterisation of the *Volk* is in turn accompanied by the exclusion of those who do not belong to it. Last but not least, Müller conveys the image of a heroic and legendary past to which it is necessary to reconnect,[28] contrasting the "naturally grown society" with the modern democratic one.

Caroline Sommerfeld-Lethen – "Bin ich völkisch? Drei Volksbegriffe"

The third and final example is a post on the *Sezession* blog entitled "Bin ich völkisch? Drei Volksbegriffe" ("Am I *völkisch*? Three Concepts of the People").[29] The author is Caroline Sommerfeld-Lethen, who holds a PhD in philosophy from the University of Rostock. In addition to its *Sezession* journal, which appears every two months, the accompanying blog is the IfS's most important publication medium, where a direct exchange between authors and the community is also conducted via the comments column.

Sommerfeld-Lethen makes it clear right from the start that she represents an ethnic concept of the *Volk* and that it is against this background that an answer must be found to the question: what is German?

Essentially, she distinguishes between three types of German, the first of which is the "German by descent" (*Abstammungsdeutscher*): "The phenotype of the German that emerges from physical heredity and, in Weberian terms, ethnic commonality, is obvious."[30] This characterisation as "obvious" shows us once again the unreal side of neo-right ideology: what is allegedly apparent is not questionable but is unalterably determined from the outside. The *Volk*, i.e., the community of Germans by descent, she presents as the *Volkskörper*, "body of the people", even if she admits – blurring the lines somewhat – that descendants of people who are not German by descent can become part of the *Volkskörper*, though only over generations.[31]

The second category is that of the "passport German" (*Passdeutscher*). Regarding this one, she states:

> The joke is that it is not a question of the common race (which is undoubtedly there: people were and are Europeans). Rather, the "nationalism test" tests cultural parameters that are simply not significantly different amongst neighbouring peoples.[32]

It becomes clear that Sommerfeld-Lethen's understanding of the people presupposes the existence of races. She continues: "The passport German is and remains distinguishable from the German by descent."[33] Again, for Sommerfeld-Lethen, one's *völkisch* affiliation is determined by what one looks like. She then writes:

> Germany is one of those states which base the granting of citizenship on the principle of descent.

[It is] "Fictitious" because the Basic Law is not a constitution issued by the people themselves, and therefore the idea that the *Volk* that existed historically in 1949 were in some way sovereign can only ever be an assumption.[34]

Besides borrowing from *Reichsbürger*-ideology that the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) is not actually a constitution, one point stands out: only those who were on the territory of the two German states in 1949 belong to the community of Germans by descent. The fact that she elaborates on this point with regard to the passport Germans suggests that the matter of who does not belong to this community is not insignificant for her: it must be remembered that the Holocaust was brought to an end a mere four years earlier by the defeat of Germany. The fact that Sommerfeld-Lethen now chooses this point in time as the reference point for her concept of a people could also be seen as an antisemitic motive influencing her definition of the concept. She concludes the section on passport Germans by defining two subgroups:

> Someone who migrates to Germany in order to become a passport German but who only wants to reap the benefits of this status without having the slightest feeling for the soul of the people is consequently a *Fremdkörperdeutscher* ["foreign-body German"] or, if they arrive as part of a mass group, an *Umvolkungsdeutscher* [a person who is actively supporting the replacement of Germans].[35]

Consequently, the people's soul in the sense of the *Volksgeist* to be felt is closely related to the biological understanding of the "body of the people", the *Volkskörper*. The fact that non-productive passport Germans are now being called "foreign bodies" expresses the exclusive character of the underlying ideology. This is heightened not least by the conspiracy-fuelled logic of the "Great Replacement", according to which many unproductive "passport Germans" want to replace the productive "Germans by descent".

According to Sommerfeld-Lethen, the third category of the German is the *Volksdeutscher*, an expression first used in Nazi German terminology to describe Germans or people with German roots living abroad:

> Germany has a *causa finalis*, that it is in the world for the sake of something. In each people, very spe-

cial soul characteristics are brought out and cultivated, which are later to be passed on to all mankind as a spiritual gift.[36]

She thus links the fate of humanity with that of the Germans, whose spiritual characteristics, of the imagined *Volkskörper*, are understood as a gift to humanity. Further she states:

> A lot of Germans by descent and passport Germans counted amongst their number have no share in any form of spiritual or even mental Germanness […]. If in doubt, they turn against Germany […]. In an essential sense, they are not Germans; they have forfeited their nationality.[37]

She returns several times to the dilemma that passport Germans in particular, but also Germans by descent, do not follow their *völkisch* ideals and do not understand Germany as a *causa finalis*. She solves this dilemma by forfeiting the nationality of these persons, who according to her thus no longer belong to the body of the people. She ends her post by answering the question she posed at the start:

> To be a *Volksdeutscher* in this sense, who is truly part of their people, also means aesthetic and moral self-education, aligning oneself, raising oneself. This is not a mass programme, but is only now considered by Kaltenbrunner's 'elite'. Seen in this way, I am then *völkisch*: I suffer from the stark discrepancy between the degenerate present and a higher concept of the German people that lies outside time.[38]

We shall conclude this part by summarising once again the basic pillars of the concept of the people (*Volk*) as seen by the IfS: the Volk in the sense of the ideology of ethnopluralism is based on a territorial entity, which in turn is connected with community of Germans by descent. Contrary to the postulation of a fixed coexistence, this is not fixed due to the determination of the territorial entity by temporal depth but is arbitrarily dependent on the definition of that community.[39] It is no coincidence that the ideological concept follows that of the *Volkskörper* of Nazi ideology, especially since Caroline Sommerfeld-Lethen also used the term in the texts studied.

Furthermore, the definition of the *Volk* is linked to the notion of ancestors, who are heroised as part of the

legend. In the ideology, these ancestors become reference points to be linked to in the future[40]. With the reference to the past, which becomes the norm of a future to be realised, an anti-modernist counter-position to modern society is explicitly formulated. This is why a detailed exploration of the publications of Verlag Antaios with a historical bent is needed in order to understand the connection between its ideology and its view of history.

The German Germanic peoples: The structure and (mis-)use of prehistoric narratives

The publishing house Verlag Antaios and the journal *Sezession* have produced numerous publications with a historical bent, so it makes sense to limit our analysis to just one of the historical eras covered. Of course, the basic strategies and narrative motifs can also be found in publications on non-historical themes. Prehistory and early history are particularly significant, however, as "the Germanic peoples"[41] (*die Germanen*) form a constituent element in the German understanding of history.

Many of the books and articles with a historical bent were written before 2015, which has been described as a "year of crisis"[42] on account of the many migrants who left Africa and West Asia for Europe in that year. The public debate shifted markedly to the right and politicians pandered to nationalist, conservative and anti-refugee interests. Votes for populistic right-wing parties shot up in 2015 and subsequent years.

This means that the racist ideologemes with a historical reference were already in existence, enabling the AfD and other parties to quickly harness these narratives at the time.[43] It should therefore be noted that, rather than developing these reinterpretations of history itself, the AfD has merely adopted them from ideologists such as those from the IfS.[44] One obvious example is AfD politician Björn Höcke's exclamation: "Thuringians! Germans! 3,000 years of Europe! 1,000 years of Germany!"[45] When a right-wing party is able to influence educational and cultural policy, it will take measures to make its own view of history the social consensus, something that has been observable in Hungary in recent years.[46]

There is an active, intentional construction of the desired historical narratives.[47] For example, this is evident in the fact that certain selected historical events

and individuals reappear almost canonically in the publications. Clear statements on this can be found in prefaces and introductions, such as in *Deutsche Daten* ("German Data") by Erik Lehnert:

> The selection of specific events posed a challenge, as it had in the previous volumes. Should one do similar to what has always been done for German history and thus accept that the dates given in the official historiography are a representative selection? Or is not the selection in itself decisive in order to obtain one's own, alternative view of history? We have decided in favour of the latter.[48]

Erik Lehnert is currently the managing director of the IfS. The book *Deutsche Daten* is the final volume in the series *Staatspolitisches Handbuch* ("Handbook of State Policy"), which Lehnert edits. As the name suggests, the series is intended as a group of textbooks for learning the basics of the German alt-right. On the very first few pages of this book, Lehnert states that the selection of the data presented is designed to form a canon of historical events worth remembering with the aim of strengthening German identity.[49] The authors who write for Verlag Antaios and *Sezession* are aware of the importance of a historical view that fits their ideology.

The prefaces of the two overview works *Kleine Geschichte der Deutschen* ("A Brief History of the Germans") and *Kleine Geschichte Europas* ("A Brief History of Europe") by Peter Bollmann, Ulrich March and Traute Petersen, both published by Verlag Antaios in 2004, also hint at a political agenda: "They [the authors] cannot and do not want to renounce their allegiance to the German nation".[50] "In times of crisis, it is necessary to go back to basics."[51] The two books were first published by Seewald in 1980 and 1984 respectively.[52] All three authors have worked as history teachers.[53] There are no differences in structure and interpretations from the editions by Verlag Antaios apart from two new chapters on the postwar period and some minor changes in wording – perhaps most noticeably replacing "Indo-Germanic" with "Indo-European".

The narratives of history told in the publications linked to the IfS are similar to those of the German conservative bourgeoisie. This is not only a matter of fitting into such a conservative tradition but also a strategy to achieve broad impact, since corresponding historical views are widespread.[54] As we will see, the fascist posi-

tions are skilfully embedded in the bourgeois conservative views within the IfS's publications.

The texts, which are written by qualified historians and other humanities scholars, provide the main editors of Antaios and *Sezession* (i.e. the main figures in the IfS) with seemingly unbiased academic literature produced by specialists, thus lending objectivity as well as authority and legitimacy to their arguments.[55] By simplifying the narrative and detaching it from established facts, it becomes a (political) legend geared towards shoring up the position of the publishers (the IfS) within the community (its readership) and to push through their political goals.[56] A political legend is a narrative that is not or no longer based on facts and that is meaningful for the community concerned in terms of their self-image and worldview.[57] This is matched by emphasising the allegedly scholarly nature of the texts, for example in some cases the form of references.[58] The following section examines how these publications understand history as well as the ways of argumentation and interpretation before going on to present the most important narratives about prehistory and early history.

As mentioned above, the fundamental axiom is that humanity is made up of different peoples (*Völker*) and that a German one also exists. Like many other ideological set pieces, this is presented as an unquestionable, incontrovertible fact. The historiography adopted by Verlag Antaios and *Sezession* invariably refers to the present. The combination of the *Volk* axiom with this reference makes it clear that the current *völkisch* ideology and the reinterpretation of history can only be understood together. One of the main aims is to trace the German people back as far as possible in the past but also to demonstrate the metaphysical continuities. These supra-temporal aspects serve as evidence for the naturalness of the *völkisch* goals in both the present and future. Andreas Vonderach, another significant author published by Verlag Antaios, articulates this connection clearly: "The peoples of Europe today are extraordinarily stable communities; they have lived in their territories for over a thousand years [...]."[59]

Another example is the "character" (*Volkscharakter*) and "will" (*Volkswille*) of the people, which are postulated to have been and always will be the same across all epochs.[60] This is strongly connected with the construct of the fate of the people (*Volksschicksal*), which has already been mentioned above in reference to *völkisch*

ideology. To produce such generally valid statements, anachronistic or even illogical, partly fictitious contexts are constructed if no suitable facts are available. Circular reasoning and omission are also very common. In writing about the people's character and how it is influenced by their natural environment, for example, Bollmann, March and Petersen adopt the following argument:[61] the Indo-Europeans came from the steppes and are therefore used to hard living conditions and have internalised their constant struggle for survival. A nobility class developed during the Bronze and Iron Ages, which became a warrior nobility because of this internalised struggle for survival. Thus, the constant struggle for performance (competition) became typical for Europe, finally leading to the evolutionary survival of the best leaders in Europe (in contrast to the priestly and bureaucratic nobility of the Near East).

The fact that natural conditions directly influence the development of a people leading to a specific bond with their natural surroundings is an important narrative of so-called ethnopluralism. This narrative is even to be found in texts about the oldest time period covered by IfS publications:

> One characteristic of Europe, unity in diversity, is thus not only predetermined from the outset by the geographical conditions, namely the strong natural division of a relatively small land mass, but also by basic ethnic structure.[62]

This sentence refers to the "Indo-European foundations" of European and German history.

Overall, the publications analysed can be divided into two large groups: those with a European and those with a German focus. Europe is a key element of the *Neue Rechte* because the goal of a strong nation with a homogeneous people is to be achieved not only for Germany but for almost all European countries.[63] It is therefore helpful to state that all (true) Europeans are descended from the Indo-Europeans and split into different "major peoples" from the second millennium BCE onwards.[64]

In typical right-wing fashion, history is shrunk down and the chapters on the Germanic peoples follow a brief explanation of the Bronze Age. However, many of the publications with a historical bent begin with the Germanic peoples.[65] The Germanic peoples have a 500-year history of reception and have been an important

point of reference for nationalist and racist ideologies in Germany since at least the 19th century.[66] They form an integral part of the German understanding of history. The role played by prehistoric archaeology in the development of a Germanic ideology has been studied and communicated to the public in recent years,[67] and the academic debates surrounding the terms *Volk* and Germanic cannot be reproduced here due to their sheer volume.[68]

The Germanic peoples also still lend themselves better than any other past culture to making core ideological issues comprehensible and concrete, such as racial ideology, gender roles, warriorism and antisemitism.[69] For many German right-wing radicals, Germanic ideology is a fundamental element of their worldview.[70] To adapt this ideology to different situations and groups, they always demonstrate a certain flexibility, so that almost any content can be projected into it.[71] As the IfS and Verlag Antaios are mainly text-producing institutions, this analysis will focus on these texts. Beside texts, however, there exist other ideologist representations such as music and pictures.

Amongst the authors of the Verlag Antaios, Andreas Vonderach in particular deals with the Germanic tribes in depth.[72] Vonderach makes use of archaeological, historical and anthropological results and is able to reflect the history of research in thorough detail (as he has a degree in anthropology). This enables him to harness the problems inherent in these three disciplines to serve his own arguments. By using different Germanic concepts and premises,[73] the arguments put forward by the three disciplines have often referenced one another in circular reasoning in the past.[74] Vonderach exploits these methodological weaknesses: on the one hand, he picks out the most fitting aspects from all three disciplines, while on the other refuting undesirable findings from one discipline in favour of more fitting results from another. Vonderach transfers ethnopluralism to the tribal level[75] following a biologistic and racial ideology:

> Even within Europe, the different peoples can still be easily distinguished from each other. For example, statistical methods can correctly assign 90.1 per cent of Swedes, 80.2 per cent of Poles and 64.4 per cent of Germans (including Austrians) genetically.[76]

His use of scientific data makes his statement look legitimate. Later on, he assigns special characteristics to the "scientifically proven" peoples. Vonderach is able to combine this effectively with the *völkisch* ideologeme of the "community of descent" (*Abstammungsgemeinschaft*): "It follows that all Germans, for example, have almost all ancestors alive before 1200 in common."[77] He uses the concepts of pedigree collapse and endogamy to state that the pre-modern Germans have been a homogenous people – which, of course, is a key prerequisite for being a point of reference in the German alt-right ideology.

As a lead for his monograph *Gab es Germanen?* ("Did the Germanic People Exist?"), Vonderach discusses the 2013 Bremen exhibition *Graben für Germanien* ("Excavating for Germania") as well as the Early Roman Iron Age part of the permanent exhibition in the State Museum of Prehistory (Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte) in Halle, which was opened at that time.[78] He uses the most blatant statements in an abbreviated manner to polemically pin down the current academic discourse to "there were no such thing as Germanic peoples". According to Vonderach's logic, Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl are left-wing radicals, because they are purportedly pursuing the goal of the dissolution of all peoples by deconstructing the concepts of *Volk* and the Germanic peoples.[79] Sebastian Brather is also labelled a Marxist on account of his critical understanding of ethnic identity as a political instrument of power.[80] For Vonderach, this is equally an attack on the German people – because, equating German with Germanic is a significant principle for both him personally and the *Neue Rechte* in general.[81] Thus his goal is to reconstruct the Germanic peoples, for which he uses the concept already described of people based on a list of characteristics: a community of humans with common descent, territory, language and culture and a sense of belonging.[82] He allegedly succeeds in proving that every aspect was already in evidence in the Roman Iron Age. It is striking that he bases his anthropological considerations almost exclusively on the work of Ilse Schwidetzky, a proponent of racial hygiene.[83] He backs up individual points such as strict endogamy with excerpts from written sources that he reproduces uncritically.[84] He makes use of corresponding ethnic interpretations for the archaeological cultural groups as categories based on excavated material culture and thus identifies the Elbe group as Suebi, the Przeworsk culture as Vandals, etc.[85] He does that in a seemingly scholarly fashion, while actually ignoring unclear and critical aspects. Ultimately, Vonderach discovers that the origins of the Germanic peoples lie in the Nordic Bronze Age or, to some extent, even earlier – in the

Single Grave culture (*Einzelgrabkultur*) at the end of the Neolithic.[86] In this way, he is following the *völkisch* tradition of Gustaf Kossinna's works, which established an essentialist ethnic interpretation of archaeological sources at the beginning of the 20th century and paved the way for Nazi archaeology.

To complete his "reconstruction", he tries to prove the existence of a sense of belonging. This he sees as being evident in the form of a continuous religion, heroic poetry and selected Roman texts, all of which he traces back to the Bronze Age.[87] Vonderach expresses hope for meaningful results from aDNA studies and seems to see the possibility that this will make biologistic ideology more acceptable again.[88]

An online article in *Sezession* by Jonas Schick should be added here. Jonas Schick is one of *Sezession*'s core authors and addresses recent topics in his regular series titled *Netzfundstücke* ("findings from the web"). In *Netzfundstücke* no. 31 from 2019, he refers to an interview in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* with Harald Meller, chief archaeologist of Saxony-Anhalt, about the opening of the Late Roman Iron Age and Migration Period section of the permanent exhibition in the *Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte* in Halle. Schick also terms the deconstruction of the Germanic peoples a left-wing-liberal conspiracy and expresses a hope that new genetic analyses will come along and prove it wrong.[89] Even though Meller's statements do not go far enough for Schick, they nonetheless point in a promising direction, which is why he addresses Meller's answer to the question of "continuities between the Bronze Age and the Germanic tribes". According to Meller:

> […] we cannot connect the time of 2000 or even 1600 BCE with the Germanics. But in the meantime, genetics can help. […] From 1600 BCE to the Germanic peoples and up to the present time, we no longer see any dramatic genetic change. […] We still speak these languages [Indo-European ones] today, we still carry the genes today, so we can assume with some justification a population continuity between the time of around 2000 BCE until today.[90]

Except for the first sentence, this serves well for the argumentation for a continuity of the Germanic peoples as understood by the *Neue Rechte* (descent, language), especially since the "we" in Meller's quote emphasises the reference to the present. Consequently, Schick notes:

His [Vonderach's] most recent work for the Verlag Antaios, *Gab es Germanen? Eine Spurensuche*, deals precisely with the subject of the *FAZ* interview and comes to a conclusion that agrees with Meller: We did exist![91]

This shows the danger of archaeological results being misused or misconstrued if they are not always communicated in a critical and reflective way – because they can thus be used as arguments to back up right-wing views of history as explained above.[92]

Other IfS-publications dealing with Germanic history are mainly historical narratives about noble victories of the Germanic tribes against the Romans, mostly shown in a positive light and with pathos.[93] The coronation of King Henry the Fowler (Henry I) can usually be seen as marking the transition from "Germanic" to "German" history.

Finally, a construct of history that focuses on Europe should be examined, such as that formulated by Ulrich March in some texts for the IfS. As mentioned above, March worked as a teacher and wrote short history books that have been published by Verlag Antaios and other publishing houses. He also wrote some articles for *Sezession* and attended an IfS *Sommerakademie* ("summer academy") in 2009. These conferences are meant to appear academic in nature but are mainly for networking purposes. In an article named "Die Grundlegung Europas" ("The Foundation of Europe"), March claims: "Europe can be defined neither geographically nor economically nor in terms of contemporary politics but only as a historical and cultural phenomenon."[94] The concept of Europe is very important to the ideology of the *Neue Rechte*, but the common geographical and political definitions of the continent do not really fit its aims. So March establishes a suitable definition, one that can even be expressed in mathematical terms: 1. Europe = Occident (*Abendland*), 2. Occident = Antiquity + the Germanic world + Christianity.[95] Ulrich March, who is influenced by the theories of Oswald Spengler, combines *völkisch* ideology with the need for a European perspective.[96] He postulates that the border between the Western and Eastern Roman Empires in late Antiquity (i.e. the border between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches) is the border of the Occident.[97] The "amalgamating process" of both he sees as having started in the eighth century and being mainly accelerated by Charlemagne.[98] March is guilty of significantly overrat-

ing and misconstruing Occidental history. For example, he attributes the metaphysical principles of freedom, ratio and humanism to it and claims that, unlike Asia, the Occident did not experience any rule by tyrants because Absolutism was enlightened and the dictatorships did not last long.[99]

Conclusion

With the AfD, the extreme right in Germany succeeded in entering parliament. At the same time, a strengthening of extreme right-wing movements can be observed worldwide. So a discussion of this trend seems justified. *Sezession* and the Verlag Antaios are important publication media for the *Neue Rechte* in general and for the IfS in particular. This is why it is especially important to trace the ideology of the *Neue Rechte* on the basis of selected examples and to discern the image of history that it perpetuates. Against this background, we would like to summarise what has been set out above.

Our study has shown that the ideology is built on a *völkisch* worldview. It thus propagates an ethnopluralism that is based on a homogeneous concept of the people (*Volk*). However, this unity is not possible without a mutual demarcation.[100] The construction of unity requires "voluntary conformism",[101] which is produced through irrational myths and the heroisation of the past. The *Neue Rechte* draws on these patterns in order to design a positive future with their help. It constructs a straight line between the past and the future in which people are collectively bound. Since unity is based on biological inequality and blind traditions, it tends to oppose other collectives in a friend/enemy relationship.[102]

The aim of the publications of Verlag Antaios and *Sezession* with a historical bent is not to present new academic results but to develop and disseminate reactionary and *völkisch* narratives. One of the key elements of the pre-modern history construct of the *Neue Rechte* is Germanic ideology. By implementing the Germanic aspects as well as the Christian ones in its ideology, the *Neue Rechte* can recruit from both political camps: right-wing Neopagans and right-wing Christians.[103] The European component is another important point that some other fascist views of history lack.

The *völkisch* ideology cannot be understood without recognising the inherent view of history and vice versa. Both aspects fuel each other as facts for argumentation, as points of reference, and as condition. Unlike contemporary history, Germanic prehistory functions as a surface on which to project the promise that this ideology offers (pure, primal people). Furthermore, the *völkisch* Germanic ideology serves as legitimation and motivation for the actions of the fascists in the present day.[104]

References

1   This contribution reflects the level of knowledge and discourse from 2022. Later publications from social science or from the alt-right as well as political trends could not be included. Two important developments in 2024 should be mentioned: The Institut für Staatspolitik dissolved itself as an association, probably to avoid a prohibition by the state. Successor organisations were founded. In three federal state elections, the AfD received around 30% of the votes and was thus able to achieve new highs. In the Thuringian parliament, it even has the strongest group. So, despite the dissolution of some alt-right organisations, the alt-right with its party AfD was able to influence broad parts of the German population.

2   For an overview of the *Neue Rechte*, see Audretsch, Andreas, and Gatzka, Claudia C. (eds.), *Schleichend an die Macht. Wie die Neue Rechte Geschichte instrumentalisiert, um Deutungshoheit über unsere Zukunft zu erlangen*, Bonn: Dietz, 2020; Weiß, Volker, *Die autoritäre Revolte. Die Neue Rechte und der Untergang des Abendlandes*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2017.

3   A snapshot of the resurgence of the extreme right in the form of the *NPD* in the 1960s is offered by the lecture given by Adorno, Theodor W., *Aspekte des neuen Rechtsradikalismus*, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019. A historical overview of the emergence of the *Neue Rechte* is provided by Weiß, Volker, *Deutschlands Neue Rechte. Angriff der Eliten – Von Spengler bis Sarrazin*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2011; Weiß, *Die autoritäre Revolte. Die Neue Rechte und der Untergang des Abendlandes*.

4   For an overview of the international manifestations of the alt-right, see Hermansson, Patrik, and David Lawrence, and Joe Mulhall, and Simon Murdoch (eds.), *The International Alt-Right. Fascism for the 21st Century?*, Oxon: Routledge, 2020., who also highlight the movement's European roots.

5   See Audretsch and Gatzka, *Schleichend an die Macht*; Weiß, *Die autoritäre Revolte*.

6   A good overview of the history of the IfS and its main figures is given in the anthology der rechte Rand (ed.), *Das IfS. Faschist*innen des 21. Jahrhunderts. Einblicke in 20 Jahre 'Institut für Staatspolitik'*, Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 2020. On the Weikersheim Study Centre, a former extreme-right-wing think tank, see Weiß, *Deutschlands Neue Rechte. Angriff der Eliten – Von Spengler bis Sarrazin*, pp. 41–47.

7   Audretsch, Andreas, and Gatzka, Claudia C. (eds.), "Warum wir um die Geschichte kämpfen müssen, um eine Zukunft zu haben", in Audretsch, Andreas, and Gatzka, Claudia C. (eds.), *Schleichend an die Macht*, pp. 17–28; Benjamin, Walter, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, 1940; Kocka, Jürgen. "Geschichte als Kampffeld", in Audretsch, Andreas, and Gatzka, Claudia C. (eds.), *Schleichend an die Macht*, pp. 9–14 (p. 14); Anon., "Resolution des Verbandes der Historiker und Historikerinnen Deutschlands zu gegenwärtigen Gefährdungen der Demokratie", *H-Soz-Kult*, 8 October 2018, <www.hsozkult.de/news/id/news-248> [accessed 2 July 2022].

8   On the historical dimension of the concept of the *Volk*, cf. Wildt, Michael, *Die Ambivalenz des Volkes. Der Nationalsozialismus als Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019.

9   Cf. Weiß, Volker, *Der Klassische Pappkamerad. Notizen aus Neuschwabenland, Teil 21: Die Affäre um »Finis Germania«*, 22.6.2017 <https://jungle.world/artikel/2017/25/der-klassische-pappkamerad> [accessed 2 July 2022] Weiß, Volker, *Furor Teutonicus*, 4.7.2017 <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/furor-teutonicus/> [accessed 2 July 2022].

10   On modern antisemitism, cf. Claussen, Detlev, *Grenzen der Aufklärung. Die gesellschaftliche Genese des modernen Antisemitismus*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag. On the psychosocial moment of antisemitism, which develops the antisemitic projection from a reciprocal inversion of the relation between society and the individual, cf. Salzborn, Samuel, 'Zur Politischen Psychologie des Antisemitismus', in Katrin Henkelmann, and Christian Jäckel, and Andreas Stahl, and Niklas Wünsch, and Benedikt Zopes (eds.), *Konformistische Rebellen. Zur Aktualität des autoritären Charakters*, Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2020, pp. 107–23.

11   Sieferle, Rolf P., *Finis Germania*, Schnellroda: Verlag Antaios, 2017, p. 68: "Da die Juden keinen Anteil an der christlichen Ehre haben konnten, nisteten sie sich in den Nischen dieser Gesellschaft ein, als Wucherer und Händler. Auch hier eine Affinität zu den Deutschen, die von Helden zu Händlern geworden sind, von aller Welt verachtet und auf ihren Vorteil bedacht."

12   Cf. Holz, Klaus, *Die Gegenwart des Antisemitismus. Islamische, demokratische und antizionistische Judenfeindschaft*, Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005, p. 30. On the antisemitic connotation of the semantics, also cf. Weiß, Volker, *Moderne Antimoderne. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck und der Wandel des Konservatismus*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012, p. 307.

13   Sieferle, *Finis Germania*, pp. 76–77: "Wenn Deutschland heute als historische Größe verschwunden und zum bloßen wirtschaftsgeographischen Begriff geworden ist, wird sein schrecklicher Name doch im Gedächtnis der Völker erhalten bleiben, ganz unabhängig davon, was in diesem Lande wirklich geschieht. Da der Holocaust keinem profanen, sondern einem auserwählten Volk widerfahren ist, wurde das Volk der Täter ebenfalls der profanen Geschichte entrückt und in den Status der Unvergänglichkeit erhoben. [...] Die Juden, denen ihr Gott selbst die Ewigkeit zugesichert hat, bauen heute ihren ermordeten Volksgenossen in aller Welt Gedenkstätten, in denen nicht nur den Opfern die Kraft der moralischen Überlegenheit, sondern auch den Tätern und ihren Symbolen die Kraft ewiger Verworfenheit zugeschrieben wird. Nachdem das reale Deutschland untergegangen ist, bleibt es als Mythos dauerhaft erhalten. [...] Hier zahlt sich die Abgebrühtheit aus, welche die permanente Konfrontation mit einem Mythos erzeugt: Die Menschen, welche in Deutschland leben, haben sich ebenso daran gewöhnt, mit dem Antigermanismus fertigzuwerden, wie die Juden lernen mußten, mit dem Antisemitismus zurechtzukommen."

14   Müller, Mario A., *Kontrakultur*, Schnellroda: Verlag Antaios, 2017, p. 59.

15   Müller, *Kontrakultur*, p. 60.

16   Müller, *Kontrakultur*, p. 78: "Ethnopluralismus ist die Überzeugung, daß die Vielfalt der Völker, Kulturen und Religionen dieser Erde ihren Reichtum ausmacht und daher als *Wert* an sich erhaltenswert ist."

17   On the connection between "voluntary conformism" within and the in-depth recognition of biological and social inequality, see Stapelfeldt, "Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten", in Stapelfeldt, Gerhard (ed.), *Soziologische Gegenaufklärung. Vorträge und Aufsätze zur Kritik der Soziologie, Kritik und Reflexion. Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur kritischen Gesellschaftstheorie 17*, Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2017, pp. 9–52 (p. 21). The constitution of peoples in recognition of the Darwinian struggle for survival now opens up the possibility of turning the Darwinian categories outwards; cf. Stapelfeldt, "Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten", p. 57.

18   Müller, *Kontrakultur*, p. 79.

19   Müller, *Kontrakultur*, p. 126: "Als Deutsche wie als weiße Europäer sind wir alle eng miteinander verwandt, teilen die gleichen Ahnen und das gleiche Schicksal. Ohne diese relativ homogene ethnische Dimension haben weder die kulturelle noch die zivilisatorische Bestand."

20   Müller, *Kontrakultur*, p. 127.

21   Müller, *Kontrakultur*, p. 80: "Europa ist das Land der Europäer. Wie unsere Ahnen sind auch wir mit den Landschaften unserer Heimat verwachsen. Ihre Wälder rauschen in unsere Sprache, ihre Gebirge ragen in unserer Architektur, ihre Gezeiten spiegeln sich auf unserer Haut. Wir sind in Europa zu Hause und Europa lebt durch uns. Europa ist unser Schicksal. [...] Unsere Heimat ist unser Erbe und Auftrag zugleich."

22   See above the comments on Sieferle, who wrote that "Jews nested in niches"; cf. footnote 10. Sieferle's quote in particular shows that the Jews are depicted here as the aliens. Stapelfeldt's words should be added to this statement: "The unity of the community, of the 'mass' atomised in itself, confirms and realises itself in xenophobia: it reflects itself unconsciously in the foreigner." ("Die Einheit der Gemeinschaft, der in sich atomisierten "Masse", bestätigt und realisiert sich in der Xenophobie: sie reflektiert sich bewusstlos im Fremden.") Stapelfeldt, "Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten", p. 57.

23   Camus, Renaud, *Revolte gegen den Großen Austausch*, Schnellroda: Verlag Antaios, 2016.

24   Müller, *Kontrakultur*, p. 99.

25   Stapelfeldt writes this about the Counter-Enlightenment: "*Enlightenment* is the conscious memory of past and present history [...] The 'people's community' (Tönnies 1887: XXXVIII) is the negation of reason: the social world of the Counter-Enlightenment. *Counter-Enlightenment* is memorylessness: of past and present history" ("*Aufklärung* ist bewußtwerdende Erinnerung der vergangenen, gegenwärtigen Geschichte [...] Die "Volksgemeinschaft" (Tönnies 1887: XXXVIII) ist die Negation der Vernunft: die soziale Welt der Gegenaufklärung. *Gegenaufklärung* ist Erinnerungslosigkeit: der vergangenen, gegenwärtigen Geschichte.") Stapelfeldt, Gerhard, "Gemeinschaft – Gesellschaft – Volk. Die deutschen Sozialwissenschaften auf dem Weg zum Nationalsozialismus", in Stapelfeldt, Gerhard (ed.), *Soziologische Gegenaufklärung* ..., Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2017, pp. 119–178 (p. 120); On the irrational-rational relationship of the Counter-Enlightenment, cf. also Stapelfeldt, Gerhard, "Dialektische Kritik des Fortschritts der Aufklärung zur Gegenaufklärung. Zur Frage einer gesellschaftstheoretischen Aufklärung des Antisemitismus", in Stapelfeldt, Gerhard (ed.), *Soziologische Gegenaufklärung* ..., Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2017, pp. 397–470 (p. 411, pp. 461–466).

26   Müller, *Kontrakultur*, p. 100.

27   Müller, *Kontrakultur*, pp. 196–197: "Das jahrtausendealte Band der Tradition scheint zerrissen zu sein. [...] Europa muß daher wieder an sein ethnokulturelles Erbe anknüpfen: Die große Erzählung seiner Tradition, die die Taten unserer Vorfahren mit den Helden unserer Zukunft verbinden kann."

28   In this, he also ties in with ideological themes of *Jungkonservatismus*: Weiß, *Moderne Antimoderne. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck und der Wandel des Konservatismus*, pp. 309–310.

29   The following quotes are from the post by Sommerfeld-Lethen, Caroline. 2018. *Bin ich völkisch? Drei Volksbegriffe. 22. 9. 2018* <https://sezession.de/59430/bin-ich-voelkisch-drei-volksbegriffe> [accessed 2 July 2022].

30   Sommerfeld-Lethen, *Bin ich völkisch? Drei Volksbegriffe*: "Der aus physischer Vererbung und im weberschen Sinne ethnisch Gemeinsamen hervorgehende Phänotyp des Deutschen ist augenscheinlich."

31   Sommerfeld-Lethen, *Bin ich völkisch? Drei Volksbegriffe*: "Wenn wir einen Schwarzafrikaner hernehmen, der nach Deutschland kommt, eine Deutsche heiratet, mit ihr Kinder bekommt und sich sukzessive mit der deutschen Seele verbindet, dann nähern sich seine Kinder und Kindeskinder ihrerseits schrittweise dem Abstammungsdeutschtum an und werden so leibliche Teile des Volkskörpers."

32   Sommerfeld-Lethen, *Bin ich völkisch? Drei Volksbegriffe*: "Der Witz ist, daß es nicht um die gemeinsame Rasse geht (die zweifellos vorhanden ist, die Leute waren und sind Europäer), sondern beim 'Nationalismustest' kulturelle Parameter abgeprüft werden, die eben nicht nennenswert verschieden sind bei Nachbarvölkern."

33   Sommerfeld-Lethen, *Bin ich völkisch? Drei Volksbegriffe*: "Der Paßdeutsche ist und bleibt vom Abstammungsdeutschen unterscheidbar."

34   Sommerfeld-Lethen, *Bin ich völkisch? Drei Volksbegriffe*: "Deutschland gehört zu denjenigen Staaten, die das Abstammungsprinzip bei der Vergabe der Staatsbürgerschaft zugrundelegen. 'Fiktiv', weil es sich beim Grundgesetzt nicht um eine sich selbst vom Volk gegebene Verfassung handelt, und man daher das historisch existierende Volk des Jahres 1949 als Souverän nur als Annahme vorausgesetzten kann."

35   Sommerfeld-Lethen, *Bin ich völkisch? Drei Volksbegriffe*: "Wer nach Deutschland einwandert, um Paßdeutscher zu werden, jedoch nur die Vor-

teile dieses Status abgreifen will, ohne für die Volksseele auch nur ein Fünkchen Gespür zu haben, ist folglich ein Fremdkörperdeutscher oder, wenn er in Massen auftritt, ein Umvolkungsdeutscher."

36 Sommerfeld-Lethen, *Bin ich völkisch? Drei Volksbegriffe*: "Deutschland hat eine *causa finalis*, das bedeutet, es ist um etwas willen in der Welt. In jedem Volk werden sehr spezielle Seeleneigenschaften herausgebildet und gepflegt, die später als Geistesgabe an die ganze Menschheit übergehen sollen."

37 Sommerfeld-Lethen, *Bin ich völkisch? Drei Volksbegriffe*: "Eine Menge Abstammungsdeutsche und ihnen zugezählte Paßdeutsche haben keinen Anteil an irgendeiner Form geistigen oder auch nur seelischen Deutschseins, [...]. Sie wenden sich im Zweifelsfall gegen Deutschland [...]. Sie sind in einem wesentlichen Sinne keine Deutschen, haben ihre Volkszugehörigkeit verwirkt."

38 Sommerfeld-Lethen, *Bin ich völkisch? Drei Volksbegriffe*: "In diesem Sinne 'Volksdeutscher', der wahrhaftig Teil seines Volkes ist, zu sein bedeutet auch ästhetische und moralische Selbsterziehung, Sich-Ausrichten, Sich-Aufrichten. Das ist kein Massenprorramm, sondern wird nur mehr von Kaltenbrunners 'Elite' gedacht. So gesehen bin ich dann 'völkisch': Ich leide unter der tiefen Diskrepanz zwischen der verkommenen Gegenwart und einem überzeitlichen höheren Gedanken des deutschen Volkes." On Kaltenbrunner's book *Elite. Erziehung für den Ernstfall* and its reception by the *Neue Rechte*, see e.g. Scholz, Robert, "Auf die Leistung kommt es an: 'Elite – Erziehung für den Ernstfall'", *Endstation* Rechts, 13. 2. 2009, <https://www.endstation-rechts.de/news/auf-die-leistung-kommt-es-elite-erziehung-fur-den-ernstfall> [accessed 2 July 2022].

39 This ideological predisposition becomes clear in the writings of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, one of the key ideological figures in the contemporary *Neue Rechte*: cf. Weiß, *Moderne Antimoderne. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck und der Wandel des Konservatismus*, pp. 219–222)

40 Here again, a connection to the *Jungkonservatismus* of the Weimar Republic can be identified in that reconnection was a central ideological element; cf. Weiß, *Moderne Antimoderne. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck und der Wandel des Konservatismus*, pp. 98–101).

41 The admittedly not unproblematic term "the Germanic peoples" will be used from this point on as its German equivalent is used in a similarly not-unproblematic way in the sources. Klicken oder tippen Sie hier, um Text einzugeben. Schmauder, Michael, and Wemhoff, Matthias, "Vorwort", in Uelsberg, Gabriele, and Wemhoff, Matthias (eds.), *Germanen. Eine archäologische Bestandsaufnahme*, Darmstadt: wbg Theiss, 2020, pp. 14–17 (p. 16).

42 See e.g. Bollmann, Peter, Ulrich March, and Traute Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte der Deutschen*, Schnellroda: Edition Antaios, 2004; Bollmann, Peter, Ulrich March, and Traute Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte Europas*, Schnellroda: Edition Antaios, 2004; March, Ulrich, "Das Christentum und die Entstehung des Abendlandes", *Sezession*, 18 June: 16–21 (2007); March, Ulrich, "Die Grundlegung Europas", *Sezession*, 26: 6–9 (2008); Vonderach, Andreas, *Völkerpsychologie. Was uns unterscheidet*, 1st edition, Schnellroda: Antaios, 2014.

43 Audretsch, Andreas, "Deutschland: Neue alte Großmachtsphantasien", in Audretsch, Andreas, and Gatzka, Claudia C. (eds.), *Schleichend an die Macht ...*, Bonn: Dietz, 2020, pp. 31–37; Kocka, "Geschichte als Kampffeld".

44 Cf. Audretsch, "Deutschland: Neue Großmachtphantasien"; Autretsch and Gatzka "Warum wir um die Geschichte kämpfen müssen ..."; Kocka, "Geschichte als Kampffeld".

45 "Thüringer! Deutsche! 3 000 Jahre Europa! 1 000 Jahre Deutschland!" Quoted in Crolly, Hannelore, "Kann man unseren Schülern Björn Höcke zumuten?", *Welt*, 28 December 2015, <https://www.welt.de/debatte/kolumnen/deutsch-sued-west/article150397374/Kann-man-unseren-Schuelern-Bjoern-Hoecke-zumuten.html> [accessed 15 January 2022].

46 Cf. Ozsváth, Stefan, "'Make Hungary great again'", in Audretsch, Andreas, and Gatzka, Claudia C. (eds.), *Schleichend an die Macht ...*, Bonn: Dietz, 2020, pp. 48–58; Jürgensen, Paul, and Richter, Hedwig, "Wissenschaft, Politik und Zivilgesellschaft – wir alle tragen Verantwortung für die Geschichte und die Zukunft", in Audretsch, Andreas, and Gatzka, Claudia C. (eds.), *Schleichend an die Macht ...*, Bonn: Dietz, 2020, pp. 105–113 and the other articles in this book.

47 Audretsch and Gatzka, "Warum wir um die Geschichte ...", pp. 18–19; Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*; Hein, Heidi, *Historische Mythosforschung, Digitales Handbuch zur Geschichte und Kultur Russlands und Osteuropas*, 2005, <https://www.osmikon.de/materialien/bibliografien-handbuecher/digitales-handbuch-zur-geschichte-und-kultur-russlands-und-osteuropas> [accessed 13 January 2022].

48 Lehnert, Erik, *Deutsche Daten*, 5. Staatspolitisches Handbuch, Schnellroda: Verlag Antaios, 2017, p.: "Die Auswahl der konkreten Ereignisse stellte wie schon bei den letzten Bänden eine Herausforderung dar. Sollte man sich am Gewohnten entlang der deutschen Geschichte annähern und damit akzeptieren, daß [sic] die Daten der offiziellen Geschichtsschreibung eine repräsentative Auswahl darstellen? Oder ist nicht bereits die Auswahl entscheidend, um einen eigenen, alternativen Blick auf die Geschichte zu gewinnen? Wir haben uns für letzteres entschieden."

49 Lehnert, *Deutsche Daten*, pp. 7–9.

50 Bollmann, March and Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte der Deutschen*, p. 6. "Von ihrer Zugehörigkeit zur deutschen Nation können und wollen sie [die Verfasser:innen] hierbei nicht absehen."

51 Bollmann, March and Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte Europas*, p. 7. "In Krisenzeiten ist die Besinnung auf die Grundlagen geboten."

52 Bollmann, Peter, Ulrich March, and Traute Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte Europas*, Stuttgart: Seewald, 1980; Bollmann, Peter, Ulrich March, and Traute Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte der Deutschen*, Stuttgart: Seewald, 1984.

53 Adam, Konrad, "Review of Peter Bollmann, Ulrich March and Traute Petersen, Kleine Geschichte Europas (Stuttgart 1980)", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5 September 1980, p. 27.

54 Decker, Oliver et al., "Die Leipziger Autoritarismus Studie 2020: Methode, Ergebnisse und Langzeitverlauf", in Decker, Oliver, and Brähler, Elmar (eds.), *Autoritäre Dynamiken. Alte Ressentiments – neue Radikalität Leipziger Autoritarismus Studie 2020*, Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2020, pp. 27–88; Banghard, Karl, and Raabe, Jan, "Die Germanen als geschichtspolitisches Konstrukt der extremen Rechten", in Killguss, Hans-Peter, and Langebach, Martin (eds.), *"Opa war in Ordnung!". Erinnerungspolitik der extremen Rechten*, Köln: ibs Info- und Bildungsstelle gegen Rechtsextremismus im NS-DOK der Stadt Köln, 2016, pp. 130–144 (p. 131); Raabe, Jan, and Schlegelmilch, Dana, "Die rezente extreme Rechte und das Germanentum", in Focke-Museum (ed.), *Graben für Germanien. Archäologie unterm Hakenkreuz*, Stuttgart: Theiss, 2013, pp. 172–178 (p. 173). For example, social-Darwinist views are shared by about a third of the German population and nationalist views by about two thirds (see Decker et al., "Die Leipziger Autaritismus-Studie").

55 Hein, *Historische Mythosforschung*, pp. 5–6.

56 Hein, *Historische Mythosforschung*, pp. 3–4.

57 Hein, *Historische Mythosforschung*, p. 3.

58 Bollmann, March and Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte der Deutschen*, p. 6; Bollmann, March and Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte Europas*, p. 7; Vonderach, *Völkerpsychologie*; Vonderach, Andreas, *Gab es Germanen? Eine Spurensuche*, 1st edition, Schnellroda: Antaios, 2017.

59 Vonderach, *Gab es Germanen?*, p. 145. "Die heutigen Völker Europas sind außerordentlich stabile Gemeinschaften, sie leben seit über tausend Jahren in ihren Territorien [...]."

60 Bollmann, March and Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte der Deutschen*, pp. 20–21; Bollmann, March and Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte Europas*, pp. 15–17.

61 Bollmann, March and Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte Europas*, pp. 16–17.

62 Bollmann, March and Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte Europas*, p. 13. "Ein Merkmal Europas, die Einheit in der Vielfalt, ist damit nicht nur durch die geographischen Voraussetzungen, nämlich die starke naturräumliche Gliederung einer verhältnismäßig kleinen Landmasse, sondern auch durch die ethnische Grundstruktur von vornherein vorgegeben."

63 Zinell, Adelheid, *Europa-Konzeptionen der Neuen Rechten. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Frankreichs, Italiens und Belgiens*, Europäische Hochschulschriften Reihe 3, Geschichte und ihre Hilfswissenschaften, 1043, Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2007.

64   Bollmann, March and Petersen, *Kleine Geschichte Europas*, pp. 13–16; Vonderach, *Völkerpsychologie*.

65   An exception is the *Kleine Geschichte der Deutschen*, which begins in the 8th century CE.

66   Halle, Uta, *"Die Externsteine sind bis auf weiteres germanisch!"*. *Prähistorische Archäologie im Dritten Reich*, Band 68: Sonderveröffentlichungen des Naturwissenschaftlichen und Historischen Vereins für das Land Lippe, Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2002; Losemann, Volker, "Die 'Kulturhöhe' der Germanen. Spuren der NS-Germanenideologie", in Berke, Stephan (ed.), *2000 Jahre Varusschlacht. Mythos*, Stuttgart: Theiss, 2009, pp. 234–242; Steuer, Heiko, "Das ,völkisch' Germanische in der deutschen Ur- und Frühgeschichtsforschung. Zeitgeist und Kontinuitäten", in Beck, Heinrich, Geuenich, Dieter, Steuer, Heiko, and Hakelberg, Dietrich (eds.), *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung "germanisch-deutsch"*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014; Wiwjorra, Ingo, *Der Germanenmythos. Konstruktion einer Weltanschauung in der Altertumsforschung des 19. Jahrhunderts*, doctoral thesis written at Freie Universität Berli, 2004, Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges, 2006.

67   Focke-Museum (ed.), *Graben für Germanien. Archäologie unterm Hakenkreuz*, Stuttgart: Theiss, 2013; Halle, *"Die Externsteine sind bis auf weiteres germnisch!"*; Halle, Uta, "Ideologisierung und Politisierung. Die Vereinnahmung der prähistorischen Archäologie durch Ideologie und Politik im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert", in Berke, Stephan (ed.), *2000 Jahre Varusschlacht. Mythos*, Stuttgart: Theiss, 2009, pp. 243–252; Uelsberg, Gabriele, and Wemhoff, Matthias(eds.), *Germanen. Eine archäologische Bestandsaufnahme*, Darmstadt: wbg Theiss, 2020.

68   Cf. works by Sebastian Brather, Walter Pohl, Herwig Wolfram and Heiko Steuer for information on the debate in German-speaking countries.

69   Banghard and Raabe, "Die Germanen als geschichtspolitisches Konstrukt", p. 131; Raabe and Schlegermilch, "Die rezente extreme Rechte …", p. 172.

70   Banghard and Raabe, "Die Germanen als geschichtspolitisches Konstrukt", p. 131; Raabe and Schlegermilch, "Die rezente extreme Rechte …", p. 172; Mölders, Doreen, and Hoppadietz. Ralf, "'Odin statt Jesus'. Europäische Ur- und Frühgeschichte als Fundgrube für religiöse Mythen neugermanischen Heidentums?", Arbeitsgemeinschaft Theorie in der Archäologie, Rundbrief, 6.1 (2007), pp. 32–49 (p. 32).

71   Banghard and Raabe, "Die Germanen als geschichtspolitisches Konstrukt", p. 133; Hein, *Historische Mythosforschung*, p. 4.

72   Vonderach, *Völkerpsychologie*; Vonderach, *Gab es Germanen?*

73   Brather, Sebastian, "Germanen als Kategorie der Forschung? Römischer Blickwinkle und kulturelle Praxis", in Uelsberg, Gabriele and Wemhoff, Matthias (eds.), *Germanen. Eine archäologische Bestandsaufnahme*, Darmstadt: wbg Theiss, 2020, pp. 401–415 (pp. 412–13).

74   Steuer, "Das 'völkisch' Germanische …", pp. 463–468.

75   Vonderach, Andreas, *Die deutschen Stämme*, Beltheim-Schnellbach: Lindenbaum, 2021. In his latest publication (not published by Verlag Antaios), he postulates a continuity of the Germanic tribes leading right up to the present day.

76   Vonderach, *Völkerpsychologie*, p. 10. "Selbst innerhalb Europas lassen sich die verschiedenen Völker noch gut voneinander unterscheiden. So kann man zum Beispiel die Schweden mit statistischen Methoden zu 90,1 Prozent, die Polen zu 80,2 Prozent und die Deutschen (einschließlich der Österreicher) zu 64,4 Prozent genetisch richtig zuordnen."

77   Vonderach, *Völkerpsychologie*, p. 10. "Daraus ergibt sich, daß [sic] zum Beispiel alle Deutschen fast sämtliche vor dem Jahr 1200 lebenden Ahnen gemeinsam haben."

78   Vonderach, *Gab es Germanen?*, p. 10.

79   Vonderach, *Gab es Germanen?*, pp. 29–30.

80   Vonderach, *Gab es Germanen?*, p. 39.

81   Cf. Beck, Heinrich et al. (eds.), *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung "germanisch-deutsch"*, 34: Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde Ergänzungsbände, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004; this is also a common narrative across German society as a whole, but it holds important ideological implications for the alt-right in particular, of course.

82   Vonderach, *Gab es Germanen?*, p. 55.

83   Vonderach, *Gab es Germanen?*, pp. 58–79. On Ilse Schwidetzky: Michelsen, Jakob, "Ilse Schwidetzky", in Fahlbusch, Michael, Haar, Ingo, and Pinwinkler, Alexander (eds.), *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften. Akteure, Netzwerke, Forschungsprogramme*, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2017, pp. 751–62.

84   Vonderach, *Gab es Germanen?*, p. 81.

85   Vonderach, *Gab es Germanen?*, pp. 91–97.

86   Vonderach, *Gab es Germanen?*, pp. 100–115; Lehnert, *Deutsche Daten*, p. 11.

87   Vonderach, *Gab es Germanen?*, pp. 116–136.

88   Vonderach, *Gab es Germanen?*, pp. 49–53.

89   Schick, Jonas, "Netzfundstücke" (31) – Kontinuität, Faschismus. 2 November 2019, <https://sezession.de/61762/netzfundstuecke-31-kontinuitaet-faschismus> [accessed 14 January 2022].

90   Ebbinghaus, Uwe, "Eine Kontinuität ist schon erkennbar", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30.10.2019, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/geschichte/neues-von-den-germanen-eine-kontinuitaet-ist-schon-erkennbar-16447131.html> [accessed 14 January 2022]. "Wir können aber nicht die Zeit von 2000 oder auch 1600 vor Christus mit den Germanen verbinden. Doch inzwischen kann die Genetik helfen. […] Von 1600 bis zu den Germanen und bis in die heutige Zeit sehen wir keine dramatische genetische Veränderung mehr. […] Wir sprechen heute diese Sprachen [Indoeuropäisch], die Gene tragen wir heute noch in uns, sodass wir mit einer gewissen Berechtigung zwischen der Zeit um 2000 bis heute von einer Bevölkerungskontinuität ausgehen können."

91   Schick, "Netzfundstücke". "Sein [Vonderachs] jüngstes Werk für den Verlag Antaios, "Gab es Germanen? Eine Spurensuche", setzt genau an der Thematik des FAZ-Interviews an und kommt zu einem mit Meller übereinstimmenden Ergebnis: Es gab uns doch!"

92   Schmauder and Wemhoff, "Vorwort", Jürgenson and Richter, "Wissenschaft, Politik und Zivilgesellschaft", p. 106; Anon., "Resolution des Verbandes".

93   E.g. Lehnert, *Deutsche Daten*, pp. 13–17; Müller, *Kontrakultur*, pp. 30–31.

94   March, "Die Grundlegung Europas", p. 6 "Europa läßt [sic] sich weder geographisch noch wirtschaftlich noch von der gegenwärtigen Politik her definieren, sondern nur als historisch-kulturelles Phänomen erfassen."

95   March, "Das Christentum", p. 16; March, "Die Grundlegung Europas", p. 8; Lehnert, *Deutsche Daten*, p. 19.

96   March, Ulrich, "Spengler und Toynbee", *Sezession*, May: 34–38 (2005); March, "Das Christentum", p. 16; cf. Zinell, *Europa-Konzeptionen* der Neuen Rechten, pp. 400–401. He did not invent it, as the French *Nouvelle Droite* were already employing similar narratives.

97   March, "Das Christentum", p. 21; March, "Die Grundlegung Europas", p. 8.

98   March, "Das Christentum", p. 18; March, "Die Grundlegung Europas", p. 7.

99   March, "Die Grundlegung Europas", p. 9.

100   Stapelfeldt, "Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten", p. 57.

101   Stapelfeldt, "Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten", p. 21.

102   Stapelfeldt, "Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten", p. 21.

103   Mölders and Hoppadietz, "'Odin statt Jesus'", pp. 37–41.

104   Audretsch, "Deutschland", pp. 35–36; Banghard and Raabe, "Die Germanen als geschichtspolitisches Konstrukt", p. 143; Jürgensen and Richter, "Wissenschaft, Politik und Zivilgesellschaft", p. 105; Raabe and Schlegermilch, "Die rezente extreme Rechte", p. 178.

2

Perspectives from Poland

Christianisation as Trauma

Aspects of Ethnonationalist Identity Construction Amongst Slavic Neopagan Groups in Poland

Philipp Schaab

In Poland, where membership of the Catholic Church is seen as part of the national identity, it goes without saying that anyone and any movement that questions this particular status quo will find life somewhat difficult.[1] Nevertheless, there have been growing signs – especially since the end of state socialism – of a Slavic Neopagan movement that claims to represent the true, identity-shaping religion of the country (fig. 1). A headline in the Polish edition of *Newsweek* a few years back claimed that Neopagan churches were "mushrooming".[2]

However, the historical and religious roots of this movement stretch back into the 19th century when Poland was being partitioned and occupied by its neighbours. Although most Polish elites saw the Catholic Church as the protector of their national identity,[3] a tiny minority thought differently and linked the struggle for renewed political sovereignty with a desire to return to a pre-Christian religion and culture.[4] After the country regained its independence in the wake of the First World War, the first Neopagan Slavic communities emerged and began to formulate their own agendas. Amongst them was the group led by Jan Stachniuk, founder of the anti-Catholic *Zadruga* ideology.[5] His teachings would go on to form the ideological foundation of ethnonationalist groups that, since the 1990s, have been campaigning for an ethnically homogeneous Poland and for its conversion to the pre-Christian beliefs of the Slavs.[6] His legacy was taken up by communities such as Rodzima Wiara and Fundacja Watra.

Fig. 1 Members of Polish Neopagan community Chram MIR celebrating *Szczodre Gody*, a winter holiday celebrated around Christmas.

Fig. 2   Rafał Merski, *Żerca* ("priest") of Fundacja na rzecz Kultury Słowiańskiej "Watra" during the Slavic Native Faith Stado festival in Sulistrowic, Poland, in 2019

The concept of identity is key to any study of ethnonationalist views. Barbara Szacka describes it as the idea of the permanence of a subject or object over time. On a collective level, remembering the past plays a central role in defining what identity means.[7] For Werner Gephart, belief in a common ancestry is a core component of ethnically defined identity – he also talks of a "sense of 'us'" fostered by actors who attribute their actions to a commonality whose structure is of a spatial, temporal or social nature.[8] In so doing, he draws on Max Weber and his concept of belief in commonality, which is underpinned by the aspects of ethnicity and nationality. According to Weber, a subjective belief in a common ancestry is based on collective similarities in one's habitus, customs or beliefs and historical events. The community, he says, shapes our morals and promotes internal harmonisation amongst us but also sets us apart from the world outside. Commonalities or contrasts between different communities act as a repellent force or – where there is great similarity – an attractive one.[9] Socially constructed communities are essentialised and sacralised, and collective identity is seen as immanent, uncontestable and a "given". The stranger is not only a political but also a religious "other" who stands outside the identity-forming community order that draws its legitimacy from deities and ancestral spirits.[10]

According to Simon Coleman, identity – be it individual, collective, cultural, ethnic, national or transnational – is always defined in and through relationships with other people. The only meaningful way to foster self-identification as a community is by drawing a line between it and a counterpart. Thus ethnic, national and religious identity constructs lead to a demarcation between "us" and "them".[11] The Slavic Neopagan activists in Poland believe that Christianity should become a religious "other" from which they want to set themselves apart.

Overshadowed by crisis – Slavic religion and national identity in the 19th century

The ethnographer, historian and archaeologist Adam Czarnocki, who wrote under the pseudonym "Zorian Dołęga-Chodakowski", is regarded as the first person to advocate for a return to a pre-Christian Slavic religion in Poland. Influenced by Herder's concept of the *Volksgeist*, or "spirit of the people", and weighed down by the destruction of Poland's aristocratic republic by the major powers of Russia, Prussia and Austria, he came to the conclusion that Christianity was to blame for his country's downfall.[12] In texts such as *O Słowiańszczyźnie przed chrześcijaństwem* ("On the Slavs Before Christianity"), he expressed the hope of being able to find remnants of the old religion in peasant traditions and lore. Chodakowski is said to have described himself as a Pagan.[13]

The messages proclaimed by Herder and Chodakowski were received loud and clear by Bronisław Ferdynand Trentowski, who set about forging a national philosophy for the Polish people.[14] He advocated a pantheistic concept that saw nature as the divine being at the moment of its material existence or, put another way, God in His eternal and time-bound corporeality.[15] In his work *Wiara Słowiańska, czyli etyka piastująca wszechświat* ("The Slavic Faith, or the Ethics That Govern the Universe"), he argued for the reconstruction of the Slavic religion based on philosophy.[16] He believed that faith was the most important spiritual foundation for a community,[17] that abandoning the old religion had led Poland effectively to dissolve itself and that Christianisation had resulted in Asia triumphing over Poland and spreading the spirit of slavery.[18]

The historian Joachim Lelewel, an active supporter of Congress Poland on the left wing of the *Sejm*, was likewise influenced by Chodakowski and developed the idea of *gminowładztwo*, an early Slavic form of democracy.[19] Robbed of a country of their own, artists and intellectuals hunting for symbols, motifs and narratives that would create meaning and identity turned instead to the traces of the region's pre-Christian past, which was transformed into a kind of Slavic Arcadia during the Romantic era.[20]

Anti-Catholic nationalism in the 20th century – the *Zadruga* ideology

After Poland was re-established in the wake of the First World War, the first groups formed that were actively seeking to resurrect pre-Christian religious beliefs and systems of values. One of the key figures in these groups was the aforementioned Jan Stachniuk, who turned away from Catholic nationalism in the 1920s. With the *Zadruga* ideology,[21] he developed a worldview that combined a radical belief in progress with a vitalist and heroic philosophy.[22] He married the ideas propounded by Chodakowski, Trentowski and Lelewel with Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*. However, he was also influenced by Max Weber's theories of Protestantism and capitalism. He denounced Catholicism as an "unculture" (*wspakultura* in Polish), which he said had made the Slavs passive, lazy and too focused on the life of the world to come. He wanted a new Polish human being who would re-embrace the warrior ethic of their pre-Christian ancestors. Religion and rituals held no interest for him. Instead, he called for Poland to modernise rapidly with centralist measures driven by a planned economy.[23] He may not have made any explicitly antisemitic remarks himself, but some of his followers did. Although he did not believe that the world's peoples were created unequal, he did not want them to mix. He called for eugenic measures to preserve the purity of the people, saying that "biology is the stem on which the flower of culture is to be grown."[24] He referred to himself as a nationalist.[25]

Stachniuk's legacy – Rodzima Wiara and the Fundacja na rzecz Kultury Słowiańskiej "Watra"

The fall of communism in the early 1990s enabled Slavic Neopagan movements to grow freely in Eastern Europe.[26] One such group, Rodzima Wiara ("Native Faith"), was formed in 1996 under the name "Zrzeszenie Rodzimej Wiary" before being renamed four years later. The group places itself firmly in the tradition of the teachings espoused by Chodakowski, Trentowski and, in par-

ticular, Stachniuk. Members such as its first leader Maciej Czarnowski and other activists like Antony Wacyk had been disciples of Stachniuk even while he was still alive.[27] Czarnowski's successor Stanisław Potrzebowski wrote the agenda entitled *Wyznanie Wiary Lechitów* ("The Creed of the Lechites").[28]

Rodzima Wiara has organisational ties to various political organisations, and several individuals are members of both the former and the latter. Particularly worthy of mention at this point is the Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Tradycji i Kultury "Niklot" ("'Niklot' Association for Tradition and Culture"),[29] which advocates on its website the racist idea of ethnopluralism and rejects multiculturalism and what it sees as the "Americanisation" of Europe.[30] Influenced by alt-right theories, it calls for the establishment of an Indo-European-Slavic civilisation and seeks to exert cultural influence in the meta-political debate.[31] Many members of Rodzima Wiara are also members of "Niklot".[32] Rodzima Wiara also has links to the group known as Zakon Zadrugi "Północny Wilk" (the "'Northern Wolf' Zadruga Order", or ZZPW), which is seen as bringing together the neo-Nazi black metal, skinhead and Slavic Neopagan scenes. Originally pro-Germanic and neo-Nazi, it went on to embrace a Slavic nationalist agenda aligned with the *Zadruga* doctrine.[33]

More closely linked to Rodzima Wiara is the Nacjonalistyczne Stowarzyszenie Zadruga ("Nationalist Zadruga Association", or NS Zadruga).[34] Established in Wrocław in 2006, it is – according to Agniezska Gajda – to be regarded as extremely nationalist and anti-Christian. She sees it as representing a racist, antisemitic and xenophobic agenda and combining nationalist, pan-Slavic and Slavic Neopagan views in its ideology.[35] Its member Stanisław Grzanka, who was likewise a *Zadruga* activist in Stachniuk's time, describes how the group sees itself as follows: "We reject everything that is alien to it [the Polish nation], that destroys it in parasitic fashion and that stifles its vital energies."[36]

The community known as Fundacja na rzecz Kultury Słowiańskiej "Watra" ("'Watra' Foundation for Slavic Culture", or "Watra" for short) was set up in 2009 by Rafał Merski and registered as a foundation four years later.[37] He acts as the community's *Żerca* ("priest") and has put together the group's agenda (fig. 2 and 3). He was previously an active member of another Slavic Neopagan community, Zachodniosłowiański Związek Wyzna-

niowy "Słowiańska Wiara" (the "'Slavic Faith' West Slavic Association of Believers"), which likewise emerged from the trail left by Rodzima Wiara.[38] Merski is also involved in the ultranationalist organisation Ruch Narodowe ("National Movement") and was a candidate for the radical right-wing party Kukiz'15.[39]

At the heart of Rodzima Wiara's religious doctrine lies a pantheistic concept of God as a force that is immanent within the world. Its texts describe a "divine will" permeating the entire universe and striving for divine perfection:

> The world is evolving together with the Primordial Force immanent within it – The One. Everything that exists is developing and seeks to constantly improve, to increase its power and the range of possibilities open to it.[40]

It holds that pre-Christian Slavic religion emerged out of the fusion of Neolithic "pre-Aryan" and later "pre-Baltic Slavic" and "Aryan" ethnic groups into a single people with a shared culture living in the part of the world now populated by Slavs.[41] Rodzima Wiara advocates the protection of "Aryan heritage" and a hierarchical model of society divided into estates of priests, warriors and farmers/growers.[42]

It aims to restore the unity of all Aryan peoples based on "the genetic kinship of the Aryan peoples and the Vedic sources of our civilisation and culture".[43] This collective identity is forged from close links between a community that is based on lineage, the environment surrounding it and a shared religion.

The characters of individual peoples and nations are formed out of the overlap between inherited traits of upbringing, pressure from the natural environment and the impact of their surroundings. If their origin and faith share the same source and are compatible with each other, then the conditions are created for a harmonious and strong character to emerge.[44]

Converting to "alien" religions, by contrast, causes psychological damage: "If one's genotype is at odds with one's creed, an inner rift emerges. The character of a person and particularly of a nation is unstable and weak, prone even to self-harm."[45] The decadence of Ancient Greece and Rome is alleged to have paved the way for "Judeo-Christianity" and thus for "unculture", with Christianity being a religion that destroys the

Fig. 3   Rafał Merski, *Żerca* ("priest") of Fundacja na rzecz Kultury Słowiańskiej "Watra" at the historical reenactment festival Najazd Barbarzyńców ("Invasion of Barbarians"), Ogrodzieniec, Poland, July 2024.

self-confidence of nations and the connection that they have with their gods.[46] One consequence of the "unculture" and decadence rampant in Europe, the organisation believes, is its willingness to accept migrants from Africa and Asia, something which is likely to destroy its indigenous culture.[47] According to Rodzima Wiara, the Aryan-Slavic nation has been in deep crisis ever since it rejected "prehistoric Vedic principles".[48]

Ethnocentric thinking shapes Rodzima Wiara's ethics.[49] It rejects "[…] mediocrity, ignorance, idleness and frailty, stupidity and fear, laziness and passivity, deceit and betrayal". All of these are negative character traits and consequences of the "unculture" identified by Stachniuk that had purportedly been instilled in the Poles by the process of Christianisation and that should be replaced by an ethical system that is regarded as indigenous, focused on life before death, and characterised by heroism, collectivism, the warrior tradition and creativity.[50]

Like many of his fellow Slavic Neopagan activists in Poland, Rafał Merski – founder, mastermind and leader of the group "Watra" – believes that indigenous Slavic traditions and values have been preserved in traditional Polish customs right up to the present day and were only ever associated superficially with Christianity. In his work *Słowiańskie dziedzictwo. Rodzima religia i filozofia* ("Slavic Heritage. Native Religion and Philosophy"), he set out his version of an indigenous Slavic religion. In it, he writes: "We are still very Pagan, unconsciously linked to our ethnic religion."[51] Belonging to one's native religion, he says, is just as inherent in and natural to a human being as being part of one's ethnic community.[52]

Fundacja Watra's worldview is also heavily influenced by Stachniuk's thinking. In his work *Slavonic ethics*, for example, in which he presents a philosophy characterised by heroism and nationalism, Merski claims that Christianity instilled a slave mentality in the Slavs and that its spread helped bring about various manifestations of "unculture".[53] Now there is the threat of Islamisation, he says: "We have already a destructive Christianization on our Continent, now we have Islamization. Islam grows more and more powerful and is just [as] alien to us Slavs as Christianity." According to Merski, the only thing that can save Europe is a return to its pre-Christian beliefs and system of values: "The Ethos of the warrior, mother, family, community, according to the laws of our Ancestors's laws and fundamentals bequeathed to us by our Ancestors."[54] For him, Christianity and secularism are both products of "Jewish thought":

> Those who promote such vile, subversive ideologies from Saul of Tarsus's racially-subversive and proto-communist Christianity to its modern but equally Semitic secular spawn are the enemies of all European folk in Europe and the world over.[55]

Quoting Rodzima Wiara adherent Antoni Wacyk, Merski calls for the creation of a new legend as an identity-forming narrative to mobilise the members of the community and help to forge a collective consciousness.[56] Merski sees the heroic warriors in the legend as the "archetypes", i.e. the role models that the Slavs – especially the men – are expected to emulate.[57]

Summary and outlook: "Back to one's roots?" – on the essentialisation of ethnicity and religion

Essentialist notions of identity can be found everywhere in the writings of Rodzima Wiara and Fundacja Watra, which advocate a homogeneous ethnoreligious community. Slavic ancestry is an essential prerequisite for membership of both groups, and indeed ancestor worship is a key component of their religious practices.[58] Poland – the native land – is seen as being populated by divine forces, gods and other mythological figures, including the spirits of one's dead ancestors. This connection also gives the community a permanent "post mortem" dimension.[59] Both communities affirm the unity of the Aryan peoples and reject the world's monotheistic religions, which they view as "Semitic". Foreign influences – in the sense of both groups of people and religions – are seen as parasitic and destructive and are blamed for the trauma brought about by partition, oppression, domination by foreign powers, and weakness. According to literary scholar Maria Janion, the destruction of the gods, values and shrines of the old religion also destroyed an entire worldview. Christianisation, she says, brought with it colonialism and contempt for Slavic culture, while the myth of Christian civilisation helped spread an inferiority complex amongst the Slavs.[60] Some Slavic Neopagan activists in Poland also share this view, believing that the country has been and is being invaded by foreign religions and peoples who want to infest it and destroy its indigenous culture – first the Christians, now the Muslim migrants. Yet the enemies also include homosexuals, Jews, liberals, left-wingers and feminists.[61]

Slavic Neopagan activists view the Christianisation of Poland as a catastrophe but also, for that very reason, as an episode that served to forge its identity. This is because, according to Alexandra Wangler, events that a community perceives as traumatic can shape its collective memory and feed into the narrative that creates identity and meaning.[62] The catastrophe thus lays the foundation for the new legend, a narrative that transfigures the pre-Christian past and calls for the establishment of a society structured along authoritarian and collectivist lines and imbued with the tradition of the heroic warrior.[63]

As far as adherents of Rodzima Wiara and Fundacja Watra are concerned, Slavic gods, ancestors, customs and rituals – and indeed everything perceived as being Slavic – can serve as an identity marker. They are the materials needed to build the border wall keeping out an outside world that they see as posing a threat. However, Slavic Neopagan activists disagree on how this system of beliefs should be shaped in concrete terms. Indeed, hardly any two *Rodzimowiercy* ("native believers") worship the same deities if one believes Scott Simpson.[64] The fragments of pre-Christian Slavic beliefs that have been handed down is like a pile of rubble from which everyone can pick the right pieces and assemble them to fit their own ideas. Thus, there are also Slavic Neopagan groups that firmly believe that someone without Slavic ancestry can also assume a Slavic identity and become a member of their community.[65] In other words, even an identity construct built on ethnicity does not necessarily have to be biologically determined. Adam Anczyk has identified the recent emergence of a new generation of *Rodzimowiercy* whom he sees as much less radically minded than their predecessors.[66] Even within the Slavic Neopagan debate, therefore, he believes that, in a pluralist society, it is everyone's right to decide for themselves what they consider to be "Slavic" and "ethnic".[67]

References

1   All of the information presented in this text is taken from my PhD thesis: Schaab, Philipp, *Götter, Ahnen, Blut und Boden? Die Konstruktion ethnischer Identität im gegenwärtigen slawischen Neuheidentum in Polen*, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2019.

2   Wilczak, Dariusz, "Pogańskie kościoły wyrastają jak grzyby po deszczu", newsweek.pl (2010), <https://newsweek.pl/polska/poganskie-koscioly-wyrastaja-jak-grzyby-po-deszczu-swietowit/lxsb3hk> [accessed 2 July 2011].

3   Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, Maria, "Der religiöse und spirituelle Pluralismus im heutigen Polen", in Hainz, Michael, Pickel, Gert, Pollack, Detlef, Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, Maria, and Firlit, Elżbieta, *Zwischen Säkularisierung und religiöser Vitalisierung. Religiosität in Deutschland und Polen im Vergleich*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2014, pp. 289–300 (pp. 289–291).

4   Gajda, Agnieszka, "Romanticism and the Rise of Neopaganism in Nineteenth Century Central and Eastern Europe: The Polish Case", in Aitamurto, Kaarina, and Simpson, Scott (eds.), *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, Durham: Acumen, 2013, pp. 44–61 (pp. 44–46).

5   Grott, Bogumił, "Neopogaństwo w Polsce – jego rola i perspektywy", *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*, 4, 1 (2008), pp. 43–54 (pp. 44–45).

6   Simpson, Scott, *Native Faith. Polish Neo-Paganism at the Brink of the 21st Century*, Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos, 2000, pp. 82–86.

7   Szacka, Barbara, "National Identity and Social Memory", in Balla, Bálint, and Sterbling, Anton (eds.), *Ethnicity, Nation, Culture. Central and East European Perspectives*, Hamburg: Springer VS, 1998, pp. 33–38 (pp. 33–35).

8   Gephart, Werner, "Zur sozialen Konstruktion europäischer Identität", in Gebhardt, Werner, and Saurwein, Karl-Heinz (eds.), *Gebrochene Identitäten. Zur Kontroverse um kollektive Identitäten in Deutschland, Israel, Südafrika, Europa und im Identitätskampf der Kulturen*, Opladen: Leske + Budrich Verlag, 1999, pp. 143–168 (pp. 145–146).

9   Weber, Max, and Mommsen, Walter J. (ed.), *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Die Wirtschaft und die gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen und Mächte: Nachlass*, Max Weber complete edition 22.1, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001, pp. 172–174.

10   Weber and Mommsen, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 138 ff.

11   Coleman, Simon and Collins, Peter, "Introduction: Ambiguous Attachments: Religion, Identity and Nation", in Coleman, Simon (ed.), *Religion, identity and change. Perspectives on global transformations*, Aldershot: Routledge, 2004, p. 2.

12   On Herder's image of the Slavs, cf. Janion, Maria, "Sich selber fremd", in Marszałek, Magdalena (ed.), *Die Polen und ihre Vampire: Studien zur Kritik kultureller Phantasmen*, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014, pp. 55–82, (pp. 72–74). On the role played by Herder in developing constructs of ethnic identity, cf. Eckhard, Dittrich J. and Radtke, Frank-Olaf, "Einleitung. Der Beitrag der Wissenschaften zur Konstruktion ethnischer Minderheiten", in Eckhardt, Dittrich J., and Radtke, Frank-Olaf (eds.), *Ethnizität*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990, pp. 11–40 (pp. 20–22).

13   Gajda, "Romanticism", p. 48.

14   Pełka, Leonard J., "Idee neopogańskie w filozofii narodowej Bronisława Trentowskiego", *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*, 4/1 (2008), pp. 25–34, (pp. 33–34).

15   Potrzebowski, Stanisław, *Zadruga: eine völkische Bewegung in Polen*, Bonn: IaS, 1982, pp. 34–36.

16   Janion, "Sich selber fremd", pp. 62–63.

17   Pełka, "Idee neopogańskie", pp. 28–32.

18   Potrzebowski, *Zadruga*, pp. 42–43.

19   Gajda, "Romanticism", p. 48.

20   Gajda, "Romanticism", pp. 44–45.

21   The term *zadruga* is an academic neologism coined to describe socio-economic structures of South Slavic clan communities in the pre-Christian era. Okraska, Remigiusz, *W Kręgu Odyna i Trygława. Neopoganizm w Polsce i na świecie (zarys problematyki)*, Biała Podlaska: Rekonkwista, 2001, pp. 60–61.

22   Grott, "Neopogaństwo w Polsce", pp. 44–45.

23   Strutyński, Maciej, "Wizja życia politycznego współczesny środowisk neopogańskich w Polsce", *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*, 4, 1 (2008), pp. 65–78, (p. 67).

24   Potrzebowski, *Zadruga*, p. 201.

25   Strutyński, Maciej, "The Ideology of Jan Stachniuk and the Power of Creation", in Aitamurto, Kaarina, and Simpson, Scott, *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, Durham: Acumen, 2013, pp. 283–297 (pp. 293–294).

26   Gajda, Agnieszka, "Neopogaństwo w Polsce", *Alma mater: Miesięcznik Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*, 114 (2009), pp. 97–102 (p. 98). Not all Slavic Neopagan communities in Poland are inspired by Stachniuk's teachings, however, with his ideas holding no significance for groups including *Rodzimy Kościół Polski* ("Indigenous Polish Church") and *Stowarzyszenie "Żertwa". Rodzimowiercy w kujawsko-pomorskim* ("'Żertwa' Association. Indigenous Believers of the Province of Kuyavia-Pomerania"). Cf. Schaab, *Götter, Ahnen, Blut und Boden?*, pp. 178–189, pp. 199–204.

27   Simpson, *Native Faith*, pp. 97–98.

28   Pełka, Leonard J., "Współczesne neopogaństwo słowiański (rodowy – doktryna – kult)", Przegląd Religioznawczy, 193/194 (1999), pp. 115–133 (pp. 122–126).

29   Simpson, *Native Faith*, p. 94. The organisations remain linked to this day.

30   *Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Tradycji i Kultury "Niklot"* ("The Association for Tradition and Culture 'Niklot'"), <http://www.niklot.org.pl/en/> [accessed 25 February 2014].

31   Strutyński, "Wizja życia politycznego", pp. 70–74.

32   Brożyna,Wojsław, "Rodzima Wiara. Podsumowanie 25 lat działalności związku wyznaniowego w Polsce", pp. 1–20 (p. 14), <https://www.research-gate.net/publication/355158790_Rodzima_Wiara_Podsumowanie_25_lat_dzialalnosci_zwiazku_wyznaniowego_w_Polsce> [accessed 18 May 2023].

33   Filip, Mariusz, "Neopogański nacjonalizm jako praktyka: Tożsamość Zakonu Zadrugi 'Północny Wilk'", *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*, 4/2 (2009). pp. 45–57 (pp. 47–48). Cf. Also Filip in this volume.

34   Strutyński, "The Ideology …", pp. 283–284. Dariusz "Wojsław" Petryk, founder and leader of NS Zadruga, spent 15 years as a member of *Rodzima Wiara*. Brożyna, "Rodzima Wiara", pp. 14–15.

35   Gajda, Agnieszka, "Co zostało po Stachniuku? Przykład Nacjonalistycznego Stowarzyszenia 'Zadruga'", *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*, 4, 2 (2009), pp. 79–92 (p. 79).

36   "Odrzucimy to wszystko, co jest mu obce, co go pasożytniczo wyniszcza i jego żywotne energie tłumi. Odrzucimy to wszystko, co zawala drogę jego wielkich przeznaczeń." Grzanka, Stanisław, "Kim Jesteśmy", <http://ns-zadruga-podlasie.blogspot.de/2015_03_01_archive.html> [accessed 14 July 2016].

37   My information on the establishment of Watra comes from Patryk Wierzchoń, who leads the Slavic Neopagan community known as Stowarzyszenie "Żertwa" as its *Żerca* (priest).

38   Filip, Mariusz, "Native Faith (not) only for Men: Gendering Extreme Right- Wing Slavic Neopaganism in Poland", *Pantheon: Religionistický časopis* 10, 1 (2015), pp. 56–78 , <https://amu.academia.edu/MariuszFilip> [accessed 13 July 2016].

39   Gazeta Wrocławska, "Kandydaci do Sejmu: Kukiz'15 (okręg nr 3, Wrocław)", <http://www.gazetawroclawska.pl/artykul/8176457,kandydaci-do-sejmu-kukiz15-okreg-nr-3-wroclaw,id,t.html> [accessed 10 October 2017].

40 "*Świat rozwija się wraz z immanentną Mu Boską Prasiłą – Tym Jednym. Wszystko, co istnieje rozwija się, chce bezustannie doskonalić się, powiększać swoją moc, swój zakres możliwości. [...] To jest ciągły ruch bez początku i kresu [...].*" Pełka, "Współczesne neopogaństwo", p. 126.

41 "Pierwsza z nich, starsza, pochodzi w swych pierwotnych wątkach jeszcze z neolitu, z czasu, gdy nasi najdawniejsi praprzodkowie poczęli osiedlać się na roli. Drugą przynieśli nam Prabałtosłowianie – Indoeuropejczycy. Obie warstwy rodzimej prawiary, prearyjska i aryjska, stopiły się harmonijnie w odległej przeszłości w jedną całość, tak jak ich wyznawcy stworzyli jeden lud." Rodzima Wiara, "Poszerzone wyznanie wiary", <http://rodzimawiara.org.pl/rodzima-wiara/skrocone-wyznanie-wiary.html> [accessed 4 October 2016].

42 "Młodsza warstwa jest zbudowana trójpoziomowo zgodnie z aryjskim wyobrażeniem Świata zbudowanego z Ziemi, Przestworzy i Nieba. [...] Trójpoziomowemu modelowi Świata Bogów odpowiada trójstopniowość społeczeństw aryjskich ludów składających się z duchowych zwierzchników – prawodawców, wojowników i wytwórców." Rodzima Wiara, "Rodzimowiercze wyznanie wiary".

43 "Dążymy do przezwyciężenia utraty pierwotnej zwartości naszych ludów, wyrosłych ze wspólnych korzeni. Dążenie do jedności opiera się na genetycznym pokrewieństwie i wedyjskich źródłach naszej cywilizacji i kultury." Rodzima Wiara, "Rodzimowiercze wyznanie wiary".

44 "W wyniku nakładania się na odziedziczone cechy wychowania, nacisku środowiska naturalnego i wpływu otoczenia powstają charaktery pojedynczych ludzi i narodów. Jeżeli ich pochodzenie i wiara mają te same źródło, są zgodne ze sobą, powstają warunki, aby wytworzył się harmonijny i mocny charakter." Rodzima Wiara, "Rodzimowiercze wyznanie wiary".

45 "Jeśli genotyp pozostaje w sprzeczności z wyznaniem, rodzi się wewnętrzne rozdarcie, charakter człowieka, a zwłaszcza narodu jest chwiejny i słaby, skłonny nawet do samoszkodzenia." Rodzima Wiara, "Poszerzone wyznanie wiary".

46 "Wpierw rozpowszechniła się w Grecji i Rzymie dekadencja, marazm i degeneracja. To one torowały drogę niedobrej nowinie judachrystianizmu, teocentryzmowi w czystej postaci, epidemii totalnej wspakultury, religii o globalnych zamiarach, religii niszczącej samowiedzę narodów o sobie i przyrodzony związek między nimi a Bogami." Rodzima Wiara, "Świat i my", <http://rodzimawiara.org.pl/rodzima-wiara/swiat-i-my.html> [accessed 4 October 2016].

47 "Czy sami skazujemy się na zagładę pielęgnując rozrastającą się w nas dekadencję, działając z rozmysłem na własną szkodę, bo tak nakazuje narzucona nam poprawność, jakieś niby to europejskie wartości. Czy dlatego to mamy stale przyjmować do Europy miliony tzw. uchodźców z Azji i Afryki?" Rodzima wiara, "Świat i my".

48 "Przyczyną tego jest odejście od prawiecznych wedyjskich zasad harmonii i hierarchii, od umiłowania Przyrody, od poczucia związku z Nią, chęć podporządkowania Jej, uczynienia poddaną. To spowodowało spustoszenie w otaczającym nas środowisku i w naszych duszach." Rodzima wiara, "Świat i my".

49 "Odpowiedzialność za własne czyny i zaniechania jest konieczna, cokolwiek czynimy i gdy roztrzygamy – czyn czy zaniechanie. Rzetelność musi stale towarzyszyć wszelkim naszym poczynaniom. Nawet jeden raz zawiedzione zaufanie jest nadzwyczaj trudne do odzyskania." Potrzebowski, Stanisław, "Rodzimowiercza etyka odpowiedzialności, wolności i walki oraz jej wartości", <http://rodzimawiara.org.pl/ksiaznica/artykuly/228-rodzimowiercza-etyka-odpowiedzialnosci-wolnosci-i-walki-oraz-jej-wartosci.html> [accessed 22 February 2014].

50 "Pielęgnując szczególnie cenne wartości należy jednocześnie starać się wytrzebić wspakwartości, które rodzą zło. Miernota, nieuctwo, gnuśność i cherlactwo, głupota i bojaźń, bezwolność i bierność, oszustwa i zdrada są różnymi obliczami zła." Potrzebowski, "Rodzimowiercza etyka".

51 "Mnożyć można przykłady owych tradicji mających swe korzenie wrosłe w tą ziemię i w serca tego ludu tak głęboko, że nie sposób jest je dziś usunąć. Wystarczy uświadomić sobie, że tradycje owe choć pozornie katolickie, tkwią głęboko w słowiańskich obrzędach i mitologii. [...] Dlatego mimo deklarowanej, chrześcijańskiej otoczki, śmiem twierdzić ze byliśmy i jesteśmy nadal narodem bardzo "pogańskim", związanym w sposób nieświadomy z religia etniczną." Merski, Rafał, *Słowiańskie dziedzictwo. Rodzima religia i filozofia*, Wrocław: Fundacja na rzecz Kultury Słowiańskiej "Watra", 2010, p. 13.

52 "My świadomi naszej przeszłości, szukający w niej oparcia, nazywamy siebie wyznawcami religii etnicznej, czyli jedynej, która wyrosła naturalnie wraz z człowiekiem, wiary w celowości naszego bytu oraz wiary w istnienie niepojętej dziś boskości. Napawa nas dumą fakt, że rodzima obrzędowość trwała nieprzerwanie (choć przez setki lat nieświadomie) wśród naszego ludu i że to My jesteśmy już jej w pełni świadomymi kontynuatorami." Rafał Merski, *Słowiańskie dziedzictwo*, p. 14.

53 Merski, Rafał, *Slavonic ethics*, Wrocław: Fundacja na rzecz Kultury Słowiańskiej "Watra", 2015, pp. 45–47.

54 Merski, *Slavonic ethics*, pp. 32–33.

55 Merski, Rafał, "European-wide racial-spiritual resurgence", <https://rafalmerski1.wordpress.com/2015/11/18/european-wide-racial-spiritual-resurgence/> [accessed 23 April 2016].

56 "The myth is the Idea, which the nations lives by, at least its elites. In short we can say that the myth is an ideo-vision of goals and objectives of the nation at a given stage of history, mobilizing activity of its members in an aureole of moral duty, patriotism and heroism." Merski, *Slavonic ethics*, p. 57.

57 "We strive to achieve the myth, to realize it, to return the archetype. To meet its requierements by our actions, our lives, to equal to our HEROES. [...] Being warriors in many fields is natural to us." Merski, *Slavonic ethics*, p. 57.

58 Anczyk, Adam and Vencálek, Matouš, "Coming Home to Paganism: Theory of Religious Conversion or a Theological Principle?", *Studia Religiologica*, 46 (2013), pp. 161–71, <http://www.ejournals.eu/Studia-Religiologica/Tom-46-2013/Numer-46-3-2013/art/2035/> [accessed 8 May 2018].

59 Strutyński, "Wizja życia politycznego", pp. 69–78.

60 Janion, "Sich selber fremd", p. 66.

61 Schaab, *Götter, Ahnen, Blut und Boden?*, pp. 159–170. These are also the enemies of the Catholic nationalists. Cf. Bingen, Dieter, "Die katholische Kirche Polens zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie", in Deutsches Polen-Institut Darmstadt (ed.): *Jahrbuch Polen 2009: Religion*, 20, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009, pp. 7–21 (pp. 15–18).

62 Wangler, Alexandra, *Rethinking History, Reframing Identity. Memory, Generations, and the Dynamics of National Identity in Poland*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2012, pp. 54–56.

63 Merski, *Slavonic ethics*, p. 33.

64 Simpson, Scott, "Only Slavic Gods: Nativeness in Polish Rodzimowierstwo", in Roundtree, Kathryn (ed.), Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Modern Paganism, New York: Springer VS, 2017, pp. 65–86 (p. 65).

65 This applies to the *Rodzimy Kościół Polski* community, for example, which is also open to those on the left wing of the political spectrum. Filip, "Native Faith", p. 5.

66 Anczyk, Adam, "Contemporary Pagans Go into Politics: Workshop 'Paganism and Politics: Neo-Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe'", *Religio: revue pro religionistiku*, 24/2 (2016), pp. 233–236 (p. 235).

67 Simpson, "Only Slavic Gods", pp. 67–68.

Transformation as Repetition

Historicity Among the Pagan Right in Poland

Mariusz Filip

In memory of Genthar

This paper examines the transformation in Poland after 1989 from the perspective of the contemporary Slavic Pagan right. The essence of modern Pagan movements consists in the revitalisation of Pagan spirituality. Although the reconstruction of ethnic religion (and some other aspects of culture) is a global phenomenon, this movement would appear to be especially popular in Central and Eastern Europe. Here, its effects are known as "Native Faith", itself a direct translation of the Slavic concept that in Polish is called "Rodzimowierstwo". Even if the first modern Slavic Pagan groups appeared in Poland as early as in the 1930s or maybe even the 1920s, it is not unreasonable to claim that contemporary Slavic Paganism is a "child of transformation", mostly because, shortly after the fall of communism in 1989, it was permitted the legal status of a religious denomination, i.e. a church. Indeed, the first three contemporary Slavic Pagan churches in Poland were registered in 1995 and 1996. The very notion of *Rodzimowierstwo* appeared at the turn of the 21ˢᵗ century.

While the centre-left faction of contemporary Slavic Paganism in Poland of the late 1990s and early 2000s consciously eschews political activism,[1] its counterpart on the political right does not. Drawing extensively on the thought of the pre-war Ruch Nacjonalistów Polskich Zadruga ("Zadruga Movement of Polish Nationalists"), under the intellectual leadership of Jan Stachniuk,[2] as well as on National Socialism,[3] it has therefore clearly gravitated towards far-right stances[4] and has actively engaged in criticising the course (effects and aims) of the post-socialist transformation in order to protect the national interest.

My knowledge of the groups forming the early contemporary Slavic Pagan (far-)right in Poland (hereinafter abbreviated as the "Pagan right") comes primarily from several years (2004–2008) spent on participant observation in Zakon Zadrugi "Północny Wilk" (the "'Northern Wolf' Zadruga Order", or ZZPW), which was based in Koszalin in the eastern part of Western Pomerania.

I also had quite a few opportunities to meet representatives from other groups representing the Pagan right both during and after my fieldwork. The two most significant ones for the purpose of this analysis are Stowarzyszenie Młodzieży Patriotycznej "Świaszczyca" ("'Świaszczyca' Association of Patriotic Youth"), likewise from Koszalin, and Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Kultury i Tradycji "Niklot" ("'Niklot' Association for Tradition and Culture"), a nationwide organisation based in Warsaw, which had a very strong section in Szczecin in the western part of Western Pomerania. This area of Poland will therefore form the regional focus of this paper. Drawing on existing analyses as well as hitherto unexplored press material, I aim to discuss the views held by the Pagan right in Poland on the transformation that took place from 1989 onwards – with 2004 and Poland's accession to the EU as its symbolic end – in order to explore their sense of historicity. I will argue that politico-economic transformation is not quite a transformation when considered in cultural or religious terms.

From socialism to post-socialism

Even if some pre-war *Zadruga* activists became part of the socialist *nomenklatura* after World War II, the *Zadruga* movement had never generally had any good experiences with socialism.[5] Although Józef Grzanka, the editor of the magazine *Zadruga* who was murdered in Katyń in 1940, deserves mention first and foremost, the most instructive example is probably Stachniuk, since his initial admiration of socialism did not save him from prison, where he was broken physically and mentally (he was released in 1955). In any case, an intellectual rather than a political mode of existence adopted by this milieu in Poland under communism (the Polish People's Republic, or PRL) was not a matter of coincidence.[6]

As regards the second generation of (post-)*Zadruga* activists, their very conversion to Zadrugism was possible

thanks to their nationalist (sometimes even racist) views and previous involvement in the anti-communist opposition in the PRL and, in one case, the Republic of South Africa during apartheid too, as demonstrated by the examples of Andrzej Wylotek, Stanisław Potrzebowski and Tomasz Szczepański – each with a long and unsurpassed record of political activism.[7] In the 1990s, they (co-)founded and led, respectively, the political party Unia Społeczno-Narodowa ("Social-National Union", or USN) with its magazine *Żywioł*, the religious organisation Zrzeszenie Rodzimej Wiary ("Association of Native Faith", or ZRW),[8] and Niklot with its metapolitical magazine *Trygław*.

Founded in 1992, the USN is crucial not because it was one of the oldest *Zadruga*-inspired organisations in post-socialist Poland but because it sought a place on the political scene and did so on its own terms, in contrast to during the socialist period. The USN championed a free market, rejecting the collectivist and nationalist economy put forward by Stachniuk. Its Pan-Slavic and pro-Russian sympathies should be noted.[9] The USN's failure to exert any serious political influence, which led to the party being dissolved on the last day of 1997, was a clear sign that the metapolitical (religious) path chosen a little earlier by the ZRW and, soon afterwards, by Niklot could be more effective.

Although the third generation of *Zadruga* was essentially centred around these two organisations, the USN also had a hand in its formation, having attracted a few young sympathisers with anti-Christian National Socialism from Szczecin in 1996: Mateusz Piskorski (who went on to head up the Pomerania region), Marcin Martynowski and Igor Górewicz[10] – who were editors of the magazine *Odala* and the one-off publication *Wadera* – as well as Ireneusz Woszczyk.[11] In the following years, all of them became prominent figures in the ZRW and Niklot (some more than others, it would seem). Besides the general national socialist leanings in its ideological profile, the anti-communist stance of the group that they represented was also highlighted at the time by the fact that Piskorski became a member of the committee organising the commemorations for the 15th anniversary of the events of December 1981 (when martial law was imposed). The others took part in this celebration, distributing antisemitic materials in collaboration, as was usual, with a number of Christian nationalist organisations.

However, it was too late for the USN to exert any significant influence on young adherents of National

Socialism from Koszalin, who formed the ZZPW[12] in mid-1997. Later that year, they published the magazine *Securius*, which had a strong and fairly original tone.[13] Although the intellectual influence of the ZRW on the ZZPW appeared fairly strong, in organisational terms it was temporary. Neither did the ZZPW engage in any of the initiatives launched by the *Odala* group and Niklot in spite of all the personal connections between them, because it firmly opposed any cooperation with the Christian right and was against political involvement in general, as it essentially aimed to live an underground existence. Even if the ZZPW had a national presence for a time, it generally operated locally in union with Świaszczyca, which was actually registered as an association in the same year as Niklot (1998). The ZZPW accused socialism – be it real socialism or Marxist ideology – of stagnation and egalitarianism[14] and, less directly, with internationalism and an anti-religious attitude. These last two charges were common in Polish society; in fact, together with central control of the economy, they reflect the "three notable legacies" affecting Polish culture that determined Poland's unique situation within the socialist bloc.[15] In this case, however, the charge relating to an anti-religious attitude was not brought from the Catholic perspective but from the contrary, Pagan, position. Nevertheless, the first two charges do seem exceptional, as they grew out of the doctrines of Zadrugism and elitism that inspired the Pagan right.

From its origins in the USN, post-Zadrugism engineered a major transformation in the nationalist scene in Poland, especially by replacing Germanophile national socialism with its Slavophile variant, and fostering the growth of various forms of Slavophile Pagan nationalism. Indeed, some of the forms of inspiration drawn from national socialism became a hallmark of the third generation of *Zadruga* activists, most of whom were born in the second half of the 1970s or later.[16] At this juncture, I should make it clear that, when I speak of national socialism, I have no intention of joining the moralising chorus of its staunch critics; this is not my job as an academic. Instead, I must point out that critics do not care greatly about key differences between national socialism and *Zadruga* nationalism, because they actually object to *any* form of nationalism, be it German or Polish, extreme or moderate.[17] They also often fall into the trap of anachronism by taking for granted the persistence of national socialist and/or nationalist beliefs over the course of one's life, downplaying (if not

completely ignoring) the issues of youthful rebellion and fascinations, the transformation of one's views as well as changes in the world. All this makes the picture incomplete, over-simplified and one-sided. Indeed, many of those who have sympathised with national socialism and/or nationalism in the past might not speak about themselves in the same terms today, and neither these acts of self-identification nor actual changes in their views – however they have been noticed – have been taken seriously by critics.[18] For the sake of clarity, I am not calling for their past to be erased or whitewashed or for every word that comes out of their mouths to be taken as read. What I am saying is that obsession with the national socialist and/or nationalist past makes it difficult to make sound statements about the current state of affairs and processes of change (and persistence).

The *courte durée* of political economy

The Pagan right has never questioned the need to replace socialism with another form of politico-economic system. Since evolution and progress are amongst their fundamental beliefs, a certain teleology inscribed into the transition was not a problem. However, one issue was the very aim of becoming like Western countries. Poland's attempts to join NATO and the European Union were seen as a mistake, since they would result in nothing but losses and were of interest only to external forces.

All the ideological material on this topic, which were published in the abovementioned metapolitical magazines *Odala*, *Trygław* and *Securius*, as well as other materials associated with Niklot, have already been discussed.[19] What scholars have overlooked is that the voice arguing that joining the EU would bring Poland a loss of sovereignty as well as denationalisation, exploitation and moral degeneracy, which was quoted by the ZZPW in *Securius* no. 1 in 1997[20] and by Niklot on its leaflets distributed two years later[21] was identical. And it was reproduced, as it turns out, since it was originally spoken by Jarosław Barski and Kazimierz Lipkowski,[22] the pseudonym used by Filip Adwent,[23] a right-wing politician linked to the Christian nationalist Liga Polskich Rodzin ("League of Polish Families", or LPR) and, ironically, a future Member of the European Parliament. The appropriation of his manifesto was clear evidence that

Fig. 1 Świaszczyca members laying a wreath at the memorial to Józef Piłsudski, Koszalin, 11 November 1997.

the Pagan right espoused fringe yet still relatively widely shared Eurosceptic views.[24] Given that Euroscepticism was coupled with an anti-NATO and anti-multiculturalist discourse (as often implicated by white-supremacist views), its ideological position should be described not as Eurosceptic but rather as anti-Western or, more precisely – considering its respect for ancient Western heritage (associated with the Proto-Indo-European people that they simply call "Aryans") – as taking a negative view of contemporary Western projects.

By drawing on written sources as well as their own observation or engagement of some sort,[25] virtually the same group of scholars also identified a performative dimension as well as the social contexts of this discourse. And, as it turned out, the Pagan right did not abandon its activities on the political scene despite declarations of being metapolitical. The following discussion of material associated with Świaszczyca – most of them never seen before – aims to strengthen this argument.

Fig. 2   "Wedding to the Sea" ceremony performed by Świaszczyca members, Unieście, 11 November 1999.

The most regular activities organised by Świaszczyca in the public sphere were yearly celebrations of 11 November, the Polish Day of Independence, when its representatives laid a wreath at the memorial to Marshal Józef Piłsudski (fig. 1). Even if the appearance of the "patriotic youth" was immediately flagged by the media in 1997[26] and by public registers early in the following year, Świaszczyca remained largely invisible for several months, probably due to their focusing on building their ideology and ritual life.

Their activities stepped up a gear in 1999. In the night from 18 to 19 February, under cover of darkness, two members of Świaszczyca posted some intriguing leaflets. Apart from some with racist or antisemitic content that specifically attracted the attention of the media, there were also others commenting on the politico-economic situation in Poland of the time: promising revenge for poverty, calling for national property to be secured and warning against the EU and the lying media.[27]

At the signing of a town-twinning agreement between Koszalin and Bourges in France on 23 May, Świaszczyca members protested against NATO's ongoing campaign of aerial bombardment against their "Serbian brothers". Their placard compared the NATO attacks to the assault on Poland by Nazi Germany, and they also trampled on the US flag chanting "One, two, three, four, when will you end this damned war?!".[28]

On 4–5 September, during the *II Kongres Opozycji Antysystemowej "Razem Przeciw Unii Europejskiej"* ("Second Congress of Anti-System Opposition 'Together Against the EU'") organised in southern Poland, a representative of Świaszczyca and *Securius* (Adam Cieśluk) as

well as representatives of Niklot, *Trygław*, *Odala* and Rodzima Wiara (Andrzej Zgódka, Tomasz Szczepański, Mateusz Piskorski, Marcin Martynowski, Igor Górewicz) joined with Catholic-conservative, ecological and anarchistic communities to establish a forum entitled Konfederacja dla Naszej Ziemi ("Confederation for Our Land") that opposed Poland's integration into the EU and globalisation in general.[29] But since such a *sojusz ekstremów* ("union of the extremes") was highly contested on the far left, the forum itself was short-lived.[30]

On 11 November, Świaszczyca again celebrated Independence Day.[31] Media attention was drawn mostly by the "Wedding to the Sea" ceremony put into the framework of Pagan religion[32] (fig. 2). However, Świaszczyca members had also been seen earlier on holding a banner with the slogan: "Balcerowicz is the Dr Mengele of the Polish economy" (fig. 3). When asked by journalists, they initially called it "a political commentary on the country's situation"[33] but, a few days later, explained that "it was only our commentary on what is going on in Poland currently. Nothing more".[34] In actual fact, they declared themselves to "be beyond politics" and not even to treat their cooperation with the nationally oriented Polska Partia Socjalistyczna ("Polish Socialist Party", or PPS), which supported Świaszczyca during this campaign as well as during the anti-NATO protest, in political terms. This apparent contradiction is clarified to a certain degree by a ZZPW member who said that he had observed these celebrations. Whilst he admitted that the anti-Balcerowicz slogan had "a strong political tone", he also

Fig. 3   Świaszczyca members criticising Balcerowicz, Koszalin, 11 November 1999.

said that "these people reject politics understood as a pursuit of [high] office and profits. For them, politics is first and foremost an art".[35]

Though Świaszczyca did indeed organise and participate in many metapolitical initiatives in the following year, they also sought to strengthen their political voice by collaborating with the agrarian, populist, nationalist-leftist political party Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej ("Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland", SRP), which was rapidly gaining in popularity in the late 1990s even though – or perhaps because – it had no specific programme, was not avowedly Eurosceptic and did not engage in ideological debates.[36] However, Samoobrona made it clear that it was due to the inept policy of the elites, (their) rotten reforms and corruption that the country was suffering from high unemployment, poverty and was generally in a poor economic state.

As the circumstantial evidence demonstrates, some members of the group might have started working with the SRP before 1 May 2000, when some "young people" distributed presidential election leaflets supporting Andrzej Lepper.[37] The only fact known for sure is that Świaszczyca took part in the march: at least two members were disguised as workers holding either a sledgehammer or a chainsaw, others held a placard saying "7 XII 1970 Thank you Comrade Wiesław".[38] This latter was in praise of Władysław Gomułka, who, as First Secretary of the Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza

Fig. 4 and 5   Świaszczyca members protesting against the opening of a supermarket in Kołobrzeg, with Andrzej Lepper in the foreground, 18 June 2001.

("Polish United Workers' Party"), had played a key role in signing the Warsaw Pact. Cooperation with Samoobrona would have started before 10 May 2001 in any case, since it was on this day that Świaszczyca members were involved in a protest outside of court, demanding Lepper's release.[39]

On 18 June 2001, Świaszczyca took part in the Samoobrona-led protest against the opening of the first supermarket in Kołobrzeg, holding a big placard that read "The authorities found their place in the sun; we are impoverished and have no fun"[40] (fig. 4 and 5).

With their actions, Świaszczyca continued their argument that the common people were not responsible for the deterioration of the economic situation of the country (as neo-liberal politicians were claiming); instead, it was the ruling elites, both centrally (Balcerowicz) and at local level (Mayor of Kołobrzeg Bogdan Błaszczyk and others).

The crucial piece of evidence that all of these actions were something more than metapolitics is the fact that two Świaszczyca members (Marcin Owczarzak, Arkadiusz Jasiński) run on the Samoobrona list in the parliamentary elections on 23 September 2001, albeit without success. The following May, Świaszczyca representatives were also spotted at the congress of Samoobrona's youth wing in Warsaw.[41]

A similar process of political engagement may be observed in the case of Niklot, which started to cooperate with the national democratic Stronnictwo Narodowe ("National Party", or SN) in 2000, supporting General Tadeusz Wilecki in the presidential elections that same year (he lost). Nevertheless, after the SN collapsed in 2001, Niklot's Szczecin division became influential within its regional structures: Piskorski became a deputy leader, and both Martynowski and Górewicz signed an agreement with the agrarian Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe ("Polish People's Party", or PSL). The unfortunate photograph of Piskorski and Martynowski accompanied by some Niklot members making an ironic Nazi salute to protest against the EU[42] – taken in Warsaw on 23 October 1999[43] but not published until more than six months on the cover of *Wprost* (fig. 6) – explains why only Górewicz ultimately ran in the 2001 parliamentary elections, likewise unsuccessfully. In contrast, Szczepański engaged in cooperation with the national democratic LPR, which had been founded in May 2001 by ex-members of the SN (amongst others), being its unsuccessful candidate in local elections in Warsaw on 27 October 2002.

In the meantime, Niklot Szczecin followed in the footsteps of Świaszczyca, turning to Samoobrona, and was even able to gain a few seats on its board. This collaboration not only attracted nationwide media attention[44] but also had an adverse impact on Świaszczyca, since only members of Niklot (Górewicz, Martynowski, Piskorski, Woszczyk) ran in Szczecin's local elections in the end. In spite of the lack of success at this particular point in time, both Piskorski and Martynowski were able to pursue their careers in Samoobrona, which actu-
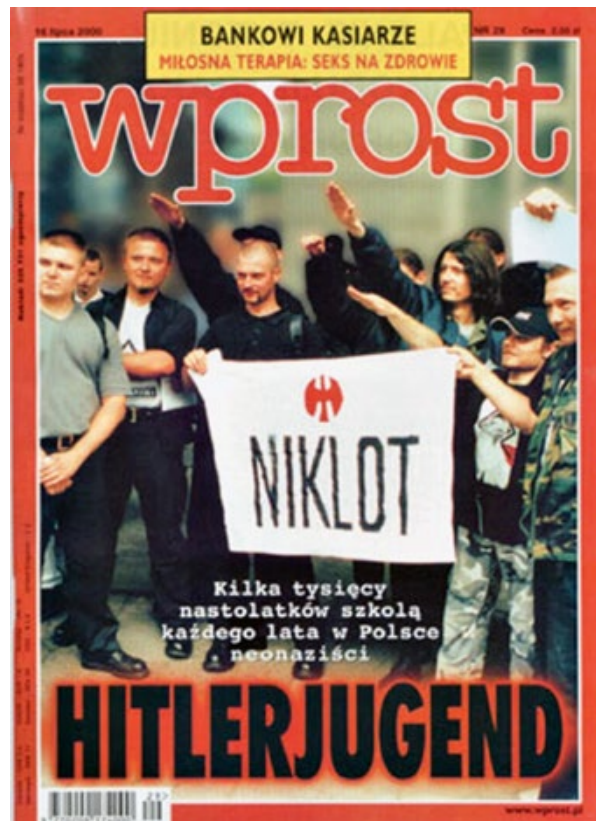

Fig. 6 The cover of *Wprost* from 16 July 2000 showing Niklot members protesting against the EU, Warsaw, 23 October 1999.

ally went on to join the governing coalition after the 2005 parliamentary elections.[45] By that point, however, both men had decided to resign from membership of Niklot (doing so in 2003).

All of this is fairly well known, yet the existing literature often fails to recognise the ground-breaking role played by Świaszczyca in this process.[46] Even Szczepański[47] is wrong in saying that members of Świaszczyca only ran in the 2002 local elections and not the 2001 parliamentary elections as well.[48] Some visual proof of this "overshadowing" by Niklot is the photograph published by *Newsweek*,[49] which was captioned "Neopagans from the association Niklot" but actually showed members of Świaszczyca (fig. 7).

Moreover, the trajectories of political affiliation, and especially the role played by the geographical factor within them, have never been properly interpreted. I shall start with Niklot in Warsaw. Szczepański's collaboration with the SN and LPR might seem surprising due to their strong Christian orientation, but it proved

his tactical support for national democracy to be very consistent. The path taken by Niklot in Szczecin, evolving from the right-wing SN to the agrarian centre-right PSL and then to the leftist agrarian populist SRP, was made possible because of some similarities between these parties, and Samoobrona did indeed consider such partnerships in the run-up to the 2000 presidential elections.[50] Świaszczyca's own path in Koszalin was even more consistent as it stuck rigidly to the left (PPS and SRP).

Considering that I am discussing the Pagan right, the leftist elements (socialism, collectivism, workers' issues) in all three paths may be surprising. However, I should reiterate that there can be divergence on economic and political grounds and, generally, the distinction between the left and right is largely a conventional one. This is why the *Odala* clique identified itself simply as the "national left",[51] and Piskorski explained that he left Niklot soon after joining Samoobrona because Szczepański had decided to collaborate with the unmistakably (far-)right-wing LPR, whilst his own views tended towards the left.[52] The ZZPW identified Świaszczyca – who cooperated with the PPS, adored its leader Piłsudski, glorified Gomułka, celebrated International Workers' Day and collaborated with Samoobrona – as a figure of the "non-Marxist national left",[53] and its own National Socialist doctrine as being opposed to "non-Aryan socialism".[54] Indeed, the leftist views of these groups no longer seem so surprising if we – contrary to what common sense tells us – acknowledge that neither Zadrugism[55] nor National Socialism is a purely right-wing phenomenon, mixing rightist and leftist ideas according to its needs. As it happens, classifying these movements within the traditional left-to-right political spectrum is not an easy task.[56] Therefore, and I am fully conscious of what I am doing in highlighting this, the notion of the Pagan right is nothing but an operational one.

Although the leftist elements in Szczepański's trajectory might be barely visible in the short term, everything changes in the long term. If he was a member of the centre-right Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej ("Confederation of Independent Poland", or KPN) in 1991–1997, shortly before founding Niklot, then he was a founding member of the anti-communist but leftist PPS in 1987–1990 and, before that, his views were even more left-wing.[57] The authoritative figure of Piłsudski links Świaszczyca not only with Szczepański through the PPS and

Fig. 7 Members of Świaszczyca mistaken for their Niklot counterparts, Cedynia, June 2000.

the post-Piłsudskiite KPN but actually with the whole of Niklot through the SN. The latter lionised General Wilecki, who embodied the same "archetype".[58]

Some similarities in trajectories exist only between the Koszalin and Szczecin milieus, as these were based on the agrarianism of the PSL and SRP (despite some key differences) and, later on, only that of SRP. This ideological proximity requires a clear interpretation in terms of politico-economic geography. During socialism, Western Pomerania was dominated by the state-run agricultural farms, whose liquidation caused multiple victims of the transformation – a number that can be measured by the highest unemployment rate in Poland. It was here, and more precisely in Koszalin, that the roots of Samoobrona lay. Indeed, it is specifically these regional and local identities as well as the SRP's open formula that made it a clear target initially for Świaszczyca and then for Niklot too, which were hugely concerned over what the transformation might bring in the future.

In fact, the spectre of a future in which Poland might become economically and politically dependent on Germany (via the EU) as well as on the US (via NATO) was seen by the Pagan right as a replay of history: regardless of whether they thought of it as a re-run of (Nazi) German occupation or the structural transformation of colonisation from the East (i.e. the Soviet Union) into one from the West (i.e. the EU and NATO). Actually, many Eurosceptics shared the feeling that "history repeats itself".[59] The same has to be said about pro-Russian leanings, which should be explained as a consequence of anti-German and anti-Western views[60] rather than simply as nostalgia for communism,[61] since the SRP was the only party longing for a return to that system.[62]

In any case, the claim being made by the Pagan right was not that times were better during the People's Republic of Poland but that Poland should continue to be oriented towards the East in order to defend itself from the West, which was promoting values that ran counter to the Pagan right's vision for human beings and society. Russia was seen as the main bastion of resistance to "demo-liberalism" and therefore as a kind of natural ally in the fight against the alleged moral degeneration of the West. But this strong interest held by the Polish Pagan right in its Russian counterpart – especially through Pavel Tulaev, who visited Poland and hosted members of Niklot, the ZZPW and the ZRW in Moscow[63] (fig. 8, 9) – has not only a metapolitical but also a clearly geopolitical dimension.[64] The ZZPW spoke most directly and most phantasmagorically about it: in the conflict between the powers of the Sea (the West) and the Land (the East), Poland thus ought to align itself with the tellurocratic Russia instead of the thallasocratic US. Yet it is not surprising that these metapolitical and geopolitical (and geoeconomic) goals turned out to be profoundly ethno-cultural in the end. Indeed, the point was that the Land ought to be ruled by a Slavic Empire allied with India,[65] which is clear evidence of neo-Pan-Slavism and some significance attached to India.[66]

The pro-Russian sympathies within the Pagan right in Poland are quite clear, as they have been commented on many times, with this commentary focusing especially on Piskorski as well as Martynowski.[67] Their case suggests a certain gravitation away from the Euro-Russian position adopted by Tulaev and towards the Eurasianism of Aleksander Dugin, as confirmed by the establishment of the European Centre of Geopolitical Analyses in 2007. Even if this means going beyond the

Fig. 8   Pavel Tulaev at the Triglav (Three-Headed God) statue in Wolin, 1999.

timeframe of this analysis, it must be noted that the impression of complete Russophilia comes largely from the long shadow cast by Piskorski, who in 2015 founded a pro-Kremlin party called Zmiana ("Change") and was then jailed for almost three years as an agent of influence for Russia.[68] And, indeed, sympathies for Russia – as a state – are not absolute or unconditional. Niklot is not only "against the devastation by EU and NATO" and globalism but also against Russian or any other European imperialism, supporting all nationalist move-

ments, as it was clearly expressed in and by a number of official documents bearing Niklot's signature and distancing itself from Piskorski and his party[69] or conferences of European nationalists organised by Niklot in Warsaw in 2016 and 2017.[70] Szczepański himself is known for his strong antipathy towards Moscow (he currently works in the Katyń Museum) and his sympathies for the geopolitical plan of Intermarium. For Górewicz, Russia represents a real threat, including militarily, and "speaking about the mission of Moscow is feeding on sentiments".[71] There is also a long history of friendly (intellectual and personal) relationships with Ukrainian Pagans, starting from the publication of the book by Halyna Łozko.[72]

The *longue durée* of culture

Adopting a strongly negative view of the course of the transformation and linking Euroscepticism with pro-Russian views are not unique to the political right in Poland, especially among radicals.[73] To a limited extent, one distinctive feature of Pagan opinions might be the pan-Slavic background of the pro-Russian tendencies. This resembles to some degree the programme adopted by Polska Wspólnota Narodowa ("Polish National Community"),[74] which is loosely associated with the Pagan right.[75] But what really expresses the originality of the Pagan right's view on transformation is a distinct, local religion, which is Contemporary Slavic Paganism. It goes without saying that we are dealing here with the construction of tradition[76] or culture.[77] But what "historicity" drives this particular indigenous epistemology?[78] In other words: what are "the cultural proclivities that lead to certain kinds of a historical consciousness, within which such histories are meaningful"?[79]

To explore interactions between the past, present and future, I shall start by pointing out that what hides behind the idea of politico-economic transformation is nothing but the necessity to modernise the socialist bloc by shaping it in a form of capitalism – that exists currently in the West or existed in the country before 1945 – and thus plugging it into the global flow of goods and services. Even if an expansion of capitalism after the fall of state socialism in Poland raised serious concerns within the Pagan right, a great number of its representatives seemed to be followers of economic liberalism, stressing the importance of free trade and open competition (this idea is extraordinarily dear to them),

Fig. 9   Pagan right activists in Moscow, August 2000.

as demonstrated most clearly in the USN's agenda; in actual fact, Stachniuk himself was not opposed to it either. Therefore, capitalism on its own was not a particularly key issue for the Pagan right. However, the transformation brought something else with it, too, something that had never played a prominent role in any discussions about the transformation of Eastern Europe – Christianity.

As a matter of fact, capitalism – be it secular consumerism or a version shaped by Catholic social teaching – is inextricably linked to Christianity through its origins and present social context, but these connections have seemed to have no particular meaning for the Pagan right, even if they were recognised by Stachniuk. Instead, the crux of the matter is that Christianity has been hostile to Paganism since the very beginning.[80] Indeed, the rejection of the transformation reached much deeper than modern history with its courte durée or even the genesis of capitalism. It is from the early mediaeval period and even older times, when Indo-European religions flourished and defined the lived reality, that the Pagan right seeks to find clues about how they should understand the present and future. Although the Pagan vision is very often some way removed from academic reconstruction, calling it a "[wrong] manipulation of the past"[81] misses the(ir) point. Like virtually all contemporary Pagans in Poland (and elsewhere), the Pagan right still believes that Christianity was not introduced in the course of a voluntary "revelation" but of an involuntary "revolution" (to paraphrase Jean and John Comaroff).[82] According to their vision, then, the medi-

aeval Pagans did not "creatively reconsider their conventional schemes",[83] and conversion was not a way to reproduce culture "in and as change"[84] – instead, it was destructuration[85] or "catastrophe, suffering and destruction".[86]

Unlike all the other actors engaged in the transformation, the Pagan right holds a negative view of Christianity and a positive one of Paganism. This finds expression in a series of oppositions, which should be listed, in line with their logic, as follows: self/other, natural/unnatural, forest/desert, pantheism/monotheism, freedom/slavery, and so on. What is specific to the Pagan right is how this axiology is underpinned, elaborated in a fairly sophisticated way by the aforementioned founding father of *Zadrugan* thought, Jan Stachniuk. According to his teaching, also known as culturalism or evolutionary pantheism, Paganism provides the matrix of "Culture" driven by the "power of creation", which is associated with concepts such as development, fight, power and nature. In turn, Christianity represents "anti-culture" (*wspakultura*), as it is founded on the rules of personalism, universal love, nihilism, hedonism, moralism or spiritual-magical thought. To frame this opposition in racial terms: Aryan/Semitic was a later development, yet nonetheless equally important, as the common label "Judeo-Christianity" reminds us. In sum, the criticism of the course of transformation was a simple consequence of assuming a *longue durée* perspective, which includes a negative view of the course of history, a victorious one for Christianity for over a thousand years (in the Polish context). Thus, regardless of whether we are speaking about restoring the high status in the public sphere of the Catholic Church, which had been depreciated by the state under socialism, or the expansion of perceived anti-cultural values with post-Christian consumerism, according to the rules that structure this "vision of the vanquished",[87] it means and always will mean a regression and not progress. It is not a system change but a restoration of a long-lasting hegemony.

Therefore, even if Niklot collaborated for strategic reasons with Catholic national democrats, radicals or conservatives such as Młodzież Wszechpolska, Stronnictwo Narodowe, Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski, and Liga Polskich Rodzin – all of this for the national cause and against EU and NATO – it was nonetheless deeply engaged in attacking Christianity along with the rest of the Pagan right, something that is hard to miss in the magazines produced within this milieu. After all, Paganism is one of the things that makes the Pagan right the Pagan right. But the links between Christianity and the transformation have actually been left unexplored,[88] as if demonstrating the destructive role of "Judeo-Christianity" in the past has always been enough to imply the same for the future. As for actions, they were oriented against Christianity implicitly rather than explicitly, focusing on the propagation of Pagan history, the celebration of Pagan rituals and an affirmation of the Pagan way of life. One of the most direct anti-Christian initiatives pre-dated the formation of Niklot: in the run-up to the 1997 parliamentary elections, posters appeared on the streets of Szczecin calling for voters not to vote for Catholics. Some of these posters had been stuck over those of Catholic nationalist candidates.[89] To conclude this section, however, it is important to mention that Świaszczyca never cooperated with Christian radicals, preferring the anti-clerical PPS and secular SRP (despite some references to Catholic social teaching),[90] and the ZZPW argued against Christian national radicals (on the last page of *Securius* no. 5) and, specifically, against Niklot because of this cooperation.[91]

When looking for a model for the future, the Pagan right decided not to rely on the past reality as defined in terms of Christian hegemony but instead to look further back in time and adopt the social order of Paganism as they conceived it. This structural nostalgia,[92] powering their calls for returning to old Pagan values or tradition and to nature, makes the project of the Pagan right sound anti-modern, because other projects of the future are too modern for them – this refers especially to post-modernism, despite the ironic fact that Paganism conceals at least a modicum of post-modernism within itself. Even if the transformation should to some extent turn into a "de-modernisation" – and, as it happens, this has been experienced by many groups[93] – it still does not mean that the Pagan right have rejected the current achievements of technology or practised an old-fashioned, polytheistic brand of Paganism. On the contrary, restoring the past in its "original" form would be a form of devolution and backwardness. Rather than reviving a primitive form of religion and culture, they are devoted precisely to evolutionary pantheism or culturalism – which sets them apart from other Pagans in Poland – and have sought to live in a way that they imagined Poles who had not yielded to Christianisation would live. Then, they were not simply anti-modern but

"alter-natively" modern[94] as regards both their religiousness and their understanding of divinity and of material aspects.

The Pagan right (and Pagans in general) are not interested in events (*courte durée*) or conjunctures (*conjonctures*) but instead are concerned by the long term (*longue durée*), to recall the well-known distinction made by Fernand Braudel.[95] This stems from their historicity, from their special way of understanding change and comprehending history, where "all is execution and repetition, as in the classic *pensée sauvage*".[96] No wonder, then, that the process of transformation that reproduces more or less willingly the Christian order of things was not viewed by Pagans through the lens of change and newness but rather one of continuity and persistence. For them, transformation was not a profound change in the nature of the system but merely a superficial modification, a structural variation and repetition. Pagans have no shortage of models to follow in the contemporary world (especially the still-extant Indo-European religions), but they clearly prefer to explore the imagined past for clues and answers about what is going on in the present. Their fixation on the past bears an extraordinarily close resemblance to the Māori people and many other indigenous societies, which makes their "Native Faith" truly "native" in the sense that "the 'past' in indigenous epistemologies is where one looks for the 'future'".[97]

In any case, the Pagan logic holds that the only possible way of introducing a change would be to reject Christianity – understood here not only as the religion itself but also, more broadly, as culture (or anti-culture as they would say) – and to forge society as rooted in the Pagan cosmology (or culture, as they would say). Trying to put this idea into practice, the Pagan right did not limit its actions to metapolitics, but its circles decided to offer their support to some political parties that were critical about the course the transformation was taking, especially of Poland joining the EU, in exchange for getting their candidates on the lists for parliamentary and local elections in 2001 and 2002 respectively. However, this direct involvement in politics was and still is socially significant, the results were disappointing for the groups of the Pagan right. Although the case of Martynowski and, especially, Pikorski might suggest otherwise, it evidently brought success to individuals rather than to Niklot or the Pagan right in general. Leaving Niklot was a clear message that sharing the views of the
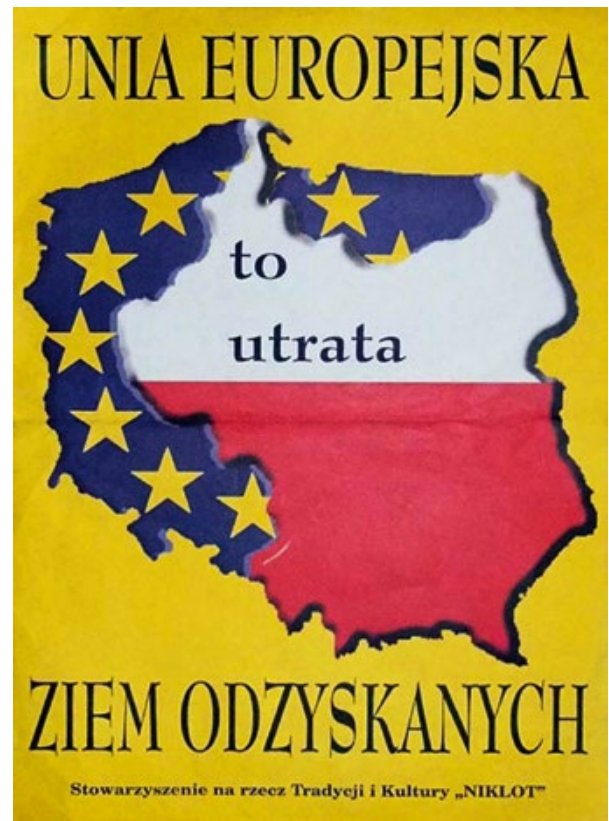
Fig. 10   Anti-EU poster distributed by Niklot before the referendum in 2003.

Pagan Right had become their private issue. Even more disappointing was the outcome of the referendum of 7–8 June 2003 despite all the efforts that they made, right up until the last moment. This is illustrated by the five members of Świaszczyca who violated pre-referendum purdah by putting up posters proclaiming that the "European Union is the loss of the Regained Lands"[98] (fig. 10) and were caught.[99]

Although the political activities of the Pagan right did not spark a revolution, its activists have still not abandoned their dreams of doing so.[100] Conscious of the ineffectiveness of their tactics, however, the Pagan right have moved away from politics, turning once again towards metapolitics. Yet they continue to express their opposition to NATO and the EU. They have focused on both organic and individual work and are counting on small-scale evolutionary changes that will not destroy the present cultural order in one fell swoop but that will pile up gradually and either result one day in a change of system or stand as an alternative after the system has

fallen by other means.[101] The strategy of this quiet revolution corresponds well to the concept of change as a "mutation", as described perfectly by Marshall Sahlins.[102]

It may be seen as a historical irony that the next parliamentary elections in 2005 brought a kind of anti-modern revolution driven clearly by Polish Catholicism. A year later, the nationalist-conservative Prawo i Sprawiedliwość ("Law and Justice") party was able to strike a *coalition* deal with the populist Samoobrona (with Lepper becoming Deputy Prime Minister) and the nationalist LPR. Although this majority government did not last long, the Christian (far-)right grew significantly during this period. Nevertheless, this made it obvious that, in a society dominated by Catholic values, the very Pagan project of radical social engineering constitutes a revolution in its own right.

References

1   Kończal, Marcin, "Unia Europejska w oczach nowych ruchów religijnych", *Człowiek i Społeczeństwo* 23 (2004), pp. 102–112 (p. 104).

2   Strutyński, Maciej, "The Ideology of Jan Stachniuk and the Power of Creation", in Aitamurto, Kaarina, and Simpson, Scott (eds.), *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, Durham: Acumen, 2013, pp. 283–297.

3   Strutyński, Maciej, "Pogański narodowy socjalizm w Polsce współczesnej", in Pasek, Zbigniew (ed.), *Ezoteryzm, okultyzm, satanizm w Polsce*, Kraków: Libron, 2005, pp. 157–179; Grott, Olgierd, *Faszyści i narodowi socjaliści w Polsce*, Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos, 2007; Rogowska, Barbara, "The State as Represented in the Political Thought of the Extreme Right-Wing, National Socialist, and Neo-Pagan Groups in Poland at the End of the 20th/Beginning of the 21st Century", in Sula, Piotr (ed.), *Political Science: An Anthology*, Wrocław: Institute of Political Science, University of Wrocław, 2013, pp. 187–203. The divisions that Rogowska makes are debatable. More importantly, however, she is mistaken about the connection between the centre-left Rodzimy Kościół Polski ("Polish Native Church") and the magazine *Menhir*, which indisputably represents a right-wing milieu.

4   Globally, far-right Paganism combines religious ideas with more or less extreme ethnic nationalism as well as racism. Shnirelman, Victor A., "Russian Neo-pagan Myths and Antisemitism", *Acta. Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism* 13 (1998). The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism (SICSA), The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. <https://www.civic-nation.org/publications/russian-neo-pagan-myths-and-antisemitism-/?CODE=russian-neo-pagan-myths-and-antisemitism-%2F> [accessed 8 August 2024]. The distinction between left- and right-wing contemporary Paganism is key to understanding the dynamics of social boundaries. Cf. Strmiska, Michael F., "Pagan Politics in the 21st Century: 'Peace and Love' or 'Blood and Soil'?", *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 20/1 (2018), pp. 5–44. For a local perspective see: Filip, Mariusz, "Polityka tożsamości we wspólnotach neopogańskich. Przykład Zakonu Zadrugi 'Północny Wilk'", in Dohnal, Wojciech and Posern-Zieliński, Aleksander (eds.), *Antropologia i polityka: Szkice z badań nad kulturowymi wymiarami władzy*, Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology PAN, 2011, pp. 175–188.

5   Dymek, Mariusz, and Szczepański, Tomasz, *ZADRUGA. Słownik Biograficzny Uczestników Ruchu Zadrużnego w XX wieku*, Warsaw: Trygław – kwartalnik metapolityczny, 2019. This would also hold true for other milieus

that came together to form the first generation of modern Pagan activists in Poland. Szczepański, Tomasz, '"Ruch zadrużny i rodzimowierczy w PRL w latach 1956–1989", *Państwo i Społeczeństwo* 9/4 (2009), pp. 59–77.

6   Łapiński, Michał, and Szczepański, Tomasz, "Czciciele Polski pogańskiej", *Karta*, 19 (1996), pp. 104–117.

7   E.g. Dymek, Szczepański, *ZADRUGA*, pp. 170–171; Szczepański, Tomasz, "Rozmowa z dr. Stanisławem Potrzebowskim, naczelnikiem Rodzimej Wiary", *Trygław*, 12 (2010), pp. 24–30. See also Szczepański's Website <http://web.archive.org/web/20160907214722/barnimregalica.pl/zyciorys.html> [accessed 11 September 2024].

8   The full name of the ZRW was shortened a few years later to Rodzima Wiara ("Native Faith").

9   Strutyński, Maciej, "Wizja życia politycznego współczesnych środowisk neopogańskich w Polsce", *Państwo i Społeczeństwo* 8/4 (2008), pp. 65–78 (pp. 65–67).

10   Kornak, Marcin, "Casus Casus Belli", *Nigdy Więcej*, 13 (2003), p. 11; Kornak, Marcin, "Słowiańskie nadużycie", *Nigdy Więcej*, 17 (2009), pp. 16–29; Pankowski, Rafał, "Podpis posła ze swastyką", *Nigdy Więcej*, 15 (2006), pp. 13–17. Cf. Witkowski, Przemysław, "Żywot Mateusza", *Krytyka Polityczna*, 30 May 2018 <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/zywot-mateusza-witkowski-piskorski> [accessed 31 July 2024]; Witkowski, Przemysław, "Wielka Aryjska Lechia, czyli nacjonaliści-neopoganie", *Krytyka Polityczna*, 8 October 2018 <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/wielka-aryjska-lechia-czyli-nacjonalisci-neopoganie> [accessed 31 July 2024]; Witkowski, Przemysław, "Smarzowski, turbolechici i cień swastyki", *Krytyka Polityczna*, 21 October 2019 <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/smarzowski-slowianie-gorewicz-rodzimowiercy> [accessed 31 July 2024].

11   Redakcja, "Nieudana prowokacja", *Nigdy Więcej*, 5 (1997).

12   The ZZPW's ideological roots stretch back to a skinhead organization, Thule, formed in 1995 (cf. (pik), "Potyczki ze swastyczką", *Głos Koszaliński*, 12 October (1995), p. 1), which was followed a year later by the similarly oriented Othala.

13   E.g. Filip, Mariusz, *Zakon Zadrugi "Północny Wilk". Nacjonalizm jako pierwiastek konstruujący tożsamość współczesnych neopogan (rodzimowierców) polskich*. MA thesis, Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University, 2006, pp. 40–56. Grott, *Faszyści i narodowi socjaliści w Polsce*, pp. 275–310; Strutyński, "Wizja życia politycznego współczesnych", pp. 72–74.

14   Afield, "Narodowy Socjalizm – założenia społeczne", *Securius* 1–4 (2001), pp. 27–29.

15   Buchowski, Michał, *Rethinking Transformation. An Anthropological Perspective on Postsocialism*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Humaniora, 2001, pp. 79–81.

16   One notable exception, however, was Świaszczyca's Arkadiusz Jasiński, who was born in 1973.

17   As a matter of fact, the similarity between these movements is largely structural – the only way out of the logical trap set by the apparent contradiction between Christian and secular nationalism is Pagan nationalism. Although there are many other possibilities for a nationalism that is anti-Christian but still religious – Islamic, Buddhist, etc. – none of them represented a real option in anthropological terms, as history has shown.

18   E.g. Mucha, Ambroży, "Poganizm, new age i narodowa prawica," *Stop Nacjonalizmowi*, 4 April 2018 <https://stopnacjonalizmowi.wordpress.com/2018/04/04/poganizm-new-age-i-narodowa-prawica/> [website no longer active, archived material]. Witkowski, "Żywot Mateusza". Witkowski, "Wielka Aryjska Lechia". Witkowski, "Smarzowski, turbolechici i cień swastyki".

19   Kończal, "Unia Europejska". Zimniak-Hałajko, Marta, "'Przeciw unijno-natowskiemu spustoszeniu': postawa Stowarzyszenia na Rzecz Tradycji i Kultury 'Niklot' wobec idei zjednoczonej Europy", *Studia Laurentiana* 5/1 (2005), pp. 53–69. Filip, *Zakon Zadrugi*, pp. 40–56. Filip, "Polityka tożsamości", pp. 178–179. Strutyński, "Wizja życia politycznego współcz-

esnych". Szczepański, Tomasz, "Rodzimowierstwo polskie a życie publiczne po 1989 r. Próba szkicu", *Państwo i Społeczeństwo* 8/4 (2008), pp. 79–87. Note the "insider scholar" role being performed by Szczepański, who is not only a (meta-)politician but also a historian (PhD) exploring the more or less distant history of the Pagan movement (especially its right wing). A similar point could be made about Potrzebowski (PhD in history) as well as Piskorski and Górewicz (PhD and MA in political science respectively).

20 Kończal, "Unia Europejska", p. 108. Filip, *Zakon Zadrugi*, pp. 43–44.

21 Isakiewicz, E, "Weźcie byka za rogi", *Gazeta Polska*, 27 October (1999), p. 24.

22 Barski, Jarosław and Lipkowski, Kazimierz, *Unia Europejska jest zgubą dla Polski*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Polskie Sp. z o.o., 1996.

23 Adwent, Filip, *Dlaczego Unia Europejska jest zgubą dla Polski*, Kraków: Antyk, 2003.

24 Unsurprisingly, the easiest way to see the scale of Euroscepticism in Poland is to look at the results of the country's 2003 referendum on EU membership, in which 22.55 % voted against (on a turnout of 58.85 %).

25 Zimniak-Hałajko, "'Przeciw unijno-natowskiemu spustoszeniu'", pp. 65–67. Filip, *Zakon Zadrugi*, pp. 57–64. Szczepański, "Rodzimowierstwo polskie". Antosik, Grzegorz, "Obraz neopogaństwa słowiańskiego na łamach polskiej prasy na początku XXI w.", *Państwo i Społeczeństwo* 8/4 (2008), pp. 123–140.

26 Kobalczyk, Piotr, "Bóg, Honor, Ojczyzna", *Głos Pomorza*, 12 November 1997, p. 1. (sza, gr, lmw), "Patriotyzm krótko ostrzyżony", *Głos Koszaliński*, 12 November (1997), p. 1; (sz), [Untitled], *Głos Koszaliński*, 14 November (1997), p. 5.

27 (pol), "Żydzie, uśmiechnij się!", *Głos Pomorza*, 19 February (1999), p. 1; (zas), "Nocne klejenie", *Głos Koszaliński*, 19 February (1999), p. 1; PAP, "Policja schwytała mieszkańca Koszalina", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19 February (1999), p. 4. The description of the leaflets as "fascist" seems to be more a moralising interpretation than a factual description of their content.

28 Ogonowski, Tomasz, "Są bliźniaki", *Gazeta Wyborcza (Szczecin)*, 24 May (1999), p. 4. Cf. Szumowska, Monika, "Zbliźniaczeni narzeczeni", *Głos Pomorza*, 25 May (1999), p. 14.

29 E.g. Jakubowski, Rafał et al., "Oświadczenie", *Wspólnota*, 3 (1999), p. 4.

30 Tomasiewicz, Jarosław, "Kwiaty Ziemi Jałowej. Wybrane alternatywne programy polityczne w Trzeciej Rzeczpospolitej", *Fronda*, 41 (2006), pp. 58–84 (pp. 68–69).

31 (pol), "Chwała Trygławowi!", *Głos Pomorza*, 12 November (1999), p. 1. Miller, Wiesław, "Patriotyczna Świaszczyca", *Kurier Szczeciński*, 12 November (1999), p. 7. Cf. (grs), [Untitled], *Głos Koszaliński*, 20–21 November (1999), *PoGłoski* supplement, p. 2. (has, grs), "Radość, duma, honor", *Głos Koszaliński*, 12 November (1999), p. 1.

32 The first ceremony symbolising the "union" with the Baltic Sea was held in 1920, essentially by General Józef Haller. However, one very important element was the sermon given by Reverend Józef Wrycza cf. "Poles symbolize union with the sea", The New York Times, 13 February (1920), p. 15. The ceremony was repeated a few times in 1945.

33 Miller, "Patriotyczna Świaszczyca".

34 Polechoński, Piotr, "Ręce Boga", *Głos Pomorza*, 20–21 November (1999), p. 3.

35 Racibor, "Triumf Woli. Pogańska Artystyczna Polityka", *Securius*, 5 (2000), pp. 41–42.

36 Piskorski, Mateusz, "Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej – między lewicą a agraryzmem", in Kowalczyk, Krzysztof, and Sielski, Jerzy (eds.), *Partie i ugrupowania parlamentarne III RP*, Toruń: Dom Wydawniczy Duet, 2006, pp. 156–191; Pankowski, Rafał, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The patriots*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 132–150.

37 Presidential elections were held on 8 October 2000; Lepper lost.

38 (grs), "We wspólnym pochodzie", *Głos Koszaliński*, 2–3 May (2000), p. 1; (pol), "Czas korekty? 'Środkowe Pomorze wciąż jeszcze może'", *Głos Pomorza*, 2–3 May (2000), p. 1; SYBI, "SLD gra na środkowopomorskie", in *Gazeta Wyborcza (Szczecin)*, 2 May (2000), p. 2.

39 (bog), "Dlaczego Lepper?", *Głos Koszaliński*, 11 May (2001), p. 1; (PU), "'Samoobrona' pikietowała sąd w Koszalinie", *Głos Pomorza*, 11 May (2001), p. 1.

40 Dubois, Ewa, "Prezesów zabrali na komendę", in *Głos Pomorza*, 19 June (2001), p. 1; (ED), "Obrona interesów", *Głos Pomorza*, 19 June (2001), p. 6.

41 Lizut, Mikołaj, "Wódz łudzi młódź", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13 May (2002), p. 1; Anders, Elżbieta, "Jak zostałam delegatem Samoobrony", *Życie*, 13 May (2002).

42 Identifying EU and/or NATO with the Third Reich (via Germany) is a common motif on the (far-)right, be it Pagan or Christian, both in Poland and abroad. The ironic meaning of such gestures is regularly ignored. E.g. de La Baume, Maïa, "MEPs suspended for making Nazi gestures", in *Politico*, 17 October (2015) <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-meps-suspended-for-making-nazi-gestures> [accessed 31 July 2024].

43 Szczepański, "Rodzimowierstwo polskie", p. 85. Cf. Isakiewicz, "Weźcie byka za rogi".

44 E.g. Rzekanowski, Jakub, "Neopoganie u Leppera", *Trybuna*, 28 June (2002), p. 6; Zadworny, Adam, "Lepper wśród pogan", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2 October (2002), p. 4; Karnowski, Michał, and Łukasiak, Amelia, "Jesienny zaciąg Leppera", *Newsweek*, 13 October (2002), pp. 20–23.

45 Pankowski, "Podpis posła ze swastyką"; Kornak, "Słowiańskie nadużycie".

46 Pankowski, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland*; Shekhovtsov, Anton, "Far Right Election Observation Monitors in the Service of the Kremlin's Foreign Policy", in Laruelle, Marlene (ed.), *Eurasianism and the European Far Right*: *Reshaping the Europe-Russia Relationship*, London: Lexington Books, 2015, pp. 223–244.

47 Szczepański, "Rodzimowierstwo polskie", p. 84.

48 Cf. <https://wybory2001.pkw.gov.pl> [accessed 31 July 2024]; <https://wybory2002.pkw.gov.pl> [accessed 31 July 2024].

49 Karnowski and Łukasiak, "Jesienny zaciąg Leppera", p. 22.

50 Piskorski, "Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej", p. 163.

51 [Redakcja], "Wadera", *Peron* 3 (1998), pp. 32–34 (p. 32).

52 E.g. tres, "Wywiad z Mateuszem Piskorskim: 'PPP, po odejściu Andrzeja Leppera i zmierzchu Samoobrony, wydaje się być jedyną propozycją na organizowanie politycznego protestu'", *Władza Rad*, 4 October (2011) <https://web.archive.org/web/20111006173055/http://1917.net.pl/?q=node/6578> [accessed 31 July 2024]; Piskorski, Mateusz, "List otwarty do przyjaciół z lewicy", in *Blog Mateusza Piskorskiego*, 11 December (2016) <https://web.archive.org/web/20161214212510/http://mateuszpiskorski.blog.onet.pl:80/2016/12/11/list-otwarty-do-przyjaciol-z-lewicy> [accessed 31 July 2024].

53 Racibor, "Triumf Woli", p. 41.

54 Afield, "Narodowy Socjalizm", p. 27.

55 Tomasiewicz, Jarosław, "Jan Stachniuk — nazista czy 'narodowy bolszewik'?", *Żaden*, 15 (1997), p. 4.

56 By pointing out the leftist ideas present within phenomena typically classified as right-wing, I am staying as far away as possible from obscuring or ignoring (as well as moralising on) the differences between right and left. What I am trying to say is only that neither these differences nor the phenomena themselves are simply clear-cut; on the contrary, however, they are all fuzzy concepts. Academically speaking, it is no secret that fascism was influenced by socialist or liberal ideas. E.g. Watson, George, "Was Hitler a Marxist? Reflections About Certain Affinities", *Encounter* 63/5 (1984), pp. 19–25; Goldberg, Jonah, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the*

American Left, from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning, New York: Double-day, 2008; Bartyzel, Jacek, "Próba teoretyzacji pojęcia "prawica", in Łętocha, Rafał (ed.), *Religia – Polityka – Naród. Studia nad współczesną myśl polityczną*, Kraków: Nomos, 2010, pp. 47–69. What could not go unnoticed on the post-1989 political scene in Poland was precisely the "right-wing nationalism containing a genuinely left-wing economic agenda". Wertenstein-Żuławski, Jerzy, *Między nadzieją a rozpaczą*, Warsaw: Instytut Kultury, 1993, p. 202.

57   Sołtysiak, Grzegorz, "Epizod warszawskiego anarchizmu i trockizmu w latach osiemdziesiątych (relacja Tomasza Szczepańskiego)", *Inny Świat*, 13 (2000), pp. 39–42.

58   Szczepański, "Rodzimowierstwo polskie", p. 84.

59   Kalb, Don, "Conversations with a Polish populist: Tracing hidden histories of globalization, class, and dispossession in postsocialism (and beyond)", *American Ethnologist*, 36/2 (2009), pp. 207–223 (p. 210).

60   Jajecznik, Konrad, "Wizje Europy w polskiej myśli nacjonalistycznej po 1989 roku", in Maj, Ewa, Dawidowicz, Aneta, Lewkowicz, Łukasz, and Szwed, Anna (eds.), *Europejskie inspiracje myśli politycznej w Polsce od XIX do XXI wieku. Recepcja – kontynuacja – interpretacja*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2013, pp. 441–475 (pp. 456–467).

61   E.g. Brocki, Marcin, "Nostalgia za PRL-em. Próba analizy", *Konteksty* 65/1 (2011), pp. 26–33.

62   Piskorski, "Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej", pp. 187–188. Pankowski, "Podpis posła ze swastyką", pp. 16–17. Kornak, "Słowiańskie nadużycie", p. 19.

63   MaT, "Atak i zwycięstwo każdego dnia. Wywiad z Pawłem Tułajewem, redaktorem rosyjskiego pisma Nasledie Predkow (Наследие Предков)", *Odala*, 5 (1999), pp. 22–26; Redakcja Nasledie Predkow, "Dziedzictwo Przodków rośnie w siłę", *Odala*, 5 (1999), pp. 26–27; Тулаев, Павел, "WCER в России. Польские правые радикалы в Москве", Атеней, 1 (2001), pp. 4–5; Пискорский, Матеуш, "Новый славянский национализм в Польше", Атеней, 1 (2001), pp. 58–72; Red., "Północny Wilk u przyjaciół w Rosji", *Securius*, 6 (2002), p. 76.

64   Ingvar, "Polska w NATO – oblicze Paktu, odrobina geopolityki", *Odala* 5 (1999), pp. 49–54; Świaszczysław, "Geopolityka", *Securius*, 6 (2002), pp. 2–3.

65   Świaszczysław, "Przestrzeń i Krew. Droga ku Imperium Sławii", *Securius*, 6 (2002), pp. 4–19 (pp. 17–19).

66   Cf. Potrzebowski, Stanisław, "Znaczenie 129 hymnu X Mandali Rygwedy dla odrodzenia Rodzimej Wiary", paper presented at the conference *Europa przez tysiąclecia – języki, rasy, kultury, wierzenia*, Łódź, 25–26 June 2004; Górewicz, Igor. "Rodzima Wiara w Indiach. Raport zastępcy naczelnika", *Taraka*, 12 April (2006) <https://www.taraka.pl/rodzima_wiara_indiach> [accessed 31 July 2024]. This significance is rather symbolic and cannot be compared to the case of Lithuania. Strmiska, Michael F., "Romuva Looks East: Indian Inspiration in Lithuanian Paganism", in Ališauskienė, Milda, and Schröder, Ingo W. (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society: Ethnographies of Catholic Hegemony and the New Pluralism in Lithuania*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, pp. 125–150. Please note that the World Congress of Ethnic Religions transformed after twelve years into the European Congress of Ethnic Religions after all. The reality of Indo-European links has brought nothing similar to Hungarian Turanism. Kürti, László, "Neoshamanism, National Identity and the Holy Crown of Hungary", *Journal of Religion in Europe* 8/2 (2015), pp. 235–260.

67   E.g. Pankowski, "Podpis posła ze swastyką"; Wójcik, Teresa and Zambrowski, Antoni, "Prorosyjski poseł", *Gazeta Polska*, 26 September (2007), p. 6; Kornak, "Słowiańskie nadużycie"; Shekhovtsov, "Far Right Election Observation".

68   E.g. Aro, Jessikka, *Trolle Putina: Prawdziwe historie z frontów rosyjskiej wojny informacyjnej*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo SQN, 2020, pp. 101 f. Lewandowski even argues that the whole of "anti-American neo-Nazism" is inspired by Russia. Lewandowski, Konrad T., "Antyamerykański neonazizm w Polsce jest zjawiskiem inspirowanym przez Rosję", *Portal społeczno-polityczny Jagiellonia.org*, 19 October (2020) <https://jagiellonia.org/antyamerykanski-neonazizm-w-polsce-jest-zjawiskiem-inspirowanym-przez-rosje-konrad-t-lewandowski> [accessed 31 July 2024].

69   Zarząd Główny Stowarzyszenia na rzecz Tradycji i Kultury "Niklot", "Oświadczenie w sprawie Mateusza Piskorskiego", *Niklot* (2015) <http://www.niklot.org.pl/147-oswiadczenie-w-sprawie-mateusza-piskorskiego.html> [accessed 31 July 2024]. Przewodniczący Zarządu Głównego "Niklot", "Żądanie sprostowania", *Niklot* (2017), <http://www.niklot.org.pl/?start=20> [accessed 31 July 2024].

70   Niklot also co-signed a statement condemning the Russian Federation for its aggression towards Ukraine in 2022: Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Tradycji i Kultury "Niklot", Redakcja magazynu *Szturm*, and Autonomiczni Nacjonaliści, "Oświadczenie polskich środowisk narodowo-społecznych z powodu agresji Federacji Rosyjskiej na Ukrainę", *Szturm*, 25 February (2022) <https://szturm.com.pl/index.php/oswiadczenia/item/1498-oswiadczenie-polskich-srodowisk-narodowo-spolecznych-z-powodu-agresji-federacji-rosyjskiej-na-ukraine> [accessed 31 July 2024]. On 24 February 2022, Potrzebowski was actually awoken by missiles, as he was sleeping in Kyiv that night. Soon after, still based in Kyiv, he called on Polish patriots to support Ukraine in its fight against the invading Putinist aggressors <https://www.facebook.com/RodzimaWiaraPL/posts/2081537662027657> [accessed 23 February 2024]. A year later, I had the opportunity to accompany Potrzebowski during a protest outside the Russian Consulate General in Poznań and listen to the speech that he gave (albeit as a private individual) (cf. <https://www.facebook.com/100088697199457/videos/157319 6926514844> [accessed 8 August 2024]). Obviously, however, there are also some groups that sympathise with Putin's politics. Anon., "Zadrużny Krąg – polscy nacjonaliści w służbie Putina", *161 Crew* (2022) <https://161crew.bzzz.net/zadruzny-krag-polscy-nacjonalisci-w-sluzbie-putina> [accessed 31 July 2024]. Although Kośnik and Stasiorczyk have measured the level of friendship/hostility towards Ukraine after the start of the war in Donbas, the results are unfortunately very vague in methodological terms, and we can only talk about impressions here. Kośnik, Konrad, and Stasiorczyk, Jacek, "Psycho-kulturowe uwarunkowania poglądów geopolitycznych. Polscy rodzimowiercy słowiańscy a wojna w Donbasie", *Contemporary Trends in International Relations: Politics, Economics, Law*, 6/18 (2016), pp. 238–248.

71   Ingvar, "Polska w NATO".

72   Łozko, Halina, *Rodzima wiara ukraińska*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Toporzeł, 1997.

73   Jajecznik, "Wizje Europy w polskiej".

74   E.g. Jajecznik, "Wizje Europy w polskiej".

75   Łapiński and Szczepański, "Czciciele Polski pogańskiej"; Szczepański, "Rodzimowierstwo polskie", pp. 82–83.

76   Handler, Richard and Linnekin, Jocelyn, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious", *The Journal of American Folklore* 97/385 (1984), pp. 273–290. The historical approach taken by Hobsbawm and Ranger is much more limited than the anthropological one followed here. The Hobsbawmian distinction between "custom" and "tradition" seems itself to be "an invented tradition". Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

77   Hanson, Alan, "The Making of the Maori: Culture Invention and Its Logic", *American Anthropologist* 91/4 (1989), pp. 890–902.

78   Clifford, James, "Indigenous Articulations", *The Contemporary Pacific* 12/2 (2001), pp. 468–490.

79   Whitehead, Neil, "Introduction", in Whitehead, Neil (ed.), *Histories and Historicities in Amazonia*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003, pp. vii–xx (p. xi). Cf. Sahlins, Marshall, *Islands of History*, Chicago/London:

The University of Chicago Press, 1985; Hirsch, Eric and Stewart, Charles, "Introduction: *Ethnographies* of *Historicity*", *History and Anthropology* 16/3 (2005), pp. 261–274.

80   The reverse would also be true.

81   Sołtysiak, Arkadiusz, "Jak neopoganie manipulują przeszłością", in Axer, Jerzy, and Olko, Justyna (eds.), *Dawne kultury w ideologiach XIX i XX wieku*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2007, pp. 49–63.

82   Comaroff, Jean and Comaroff, John, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. I. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

83   Sahlins, *Islands of History*, p. vii.

84   Sahlins, *Islands of History*, p. xii.

85   Wachtel, Nathan, *The Vision of the Vanquished: The Spanish Conquest of Peru through Indian Eyes, 1530–1570*, Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1977.

86   Ekholm-Friedma, Kajsa, *Catastrophe and Creation: The Transformation of an African Culture*, Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991, p. 6. At the same time however, they argue that the process of replacing the Pagan order was long-lasting.

87   Wachtel, *The Vision of the Vanquished*.

88   Note, however, the condemnation of a decision made by the Roman Catholic Church in Poland to support EU membership. Afield, "Katolictwo niezmienne", *Securius* 4 (1999), pp. 13–15.

89   Pankowski, "Podpis posła ze swastyką", p. 14.

90   Cf. Piskorski, "Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej", p. 187.

91   Racibor, "Triumf Woli", p. 41.

92   Herzfeld, Michael, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics and the Real Life of States, Societies, and Institutions*, London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 147–182.

93   Brandstädter, Susanne, "Transitional Spaces: Postsocialism as a Cultural Process", *Critique of Anthropology* 27/2 (2007), pp. 131–145 (p. 134).

94   Knauft, Bruce (ed.), *Critically Modern. Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. Minkenberg came to similar conclusions: "The new right-wing radicalism is not anti-modern *per se*. It is selectively anti-modern but in radical opposition to post-modernity and its political and social project." Minkenberg, Michael, "The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-modernity", *Government and Opposition* 35/2 (2000), pp. 170–188 (p. 187).

95   Braudel, Fernand, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II,* vol. I–II. Harper & Row, 1972–1973.

96   Sahlins, *Islands of History*, p. xii.

97   Clifford, "Indigeneous Articulations", p. 475. Cf. Wagner, Roy, "The Talk of Koriki: A *Daribi* Contact Cult", *Social Research* 46/1 (1979), pp. 140–165.

98   Putting up posters with this slogan was actually initiated by Niklot but the slogan may have its origins within LPR. Szczepański, "Rodzimowierstwo polskie", p. 85, fig. 10; (PAP), "Tylko nie do Unii!", in *WP Wiadomości*, 2 March (2003), <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/tylko-nie-do-unii-6108727 305839745a> [accessed 31 July 2024].

99   [Redakcja], "Witaj, Unio!", *Głos Słupski*, 9 June (2003), p. 3; akr, ell, am, "Kot wyborczy", *Głos Szczeciński*, 9 June (2003); KOV, MA, END, AZ, EP, MARC, "Dwa gorące dni", *Gazeta Wyborcza (Szczecin)*, 9 June (2003), p. 3.

100   Szczepański, Tomasz, "Najbliższe perspektywy ruchu zadrużnego", *Trygław*, 8 (2004), pp. 32–34 (p. 34).

101   Górewicz, Igor, "Doktryna tworzenia rzeczywistości równoległej", *Trygław* 8 (2004), pp. 35–39.

102   Sahlins, *Islands of History*.

Performing Paganism

Popular History Practices as Doing Metapolitics in Poland

Karin Reichenbach

A new wave of fascination with the early Middle Ages, the pre-Christian times of the Vikings and Slavs, reached Poland after the end of state socialism in the 1990s. It tied in with an increasingly resurgent interest in Nordic myths and a search for national roots in a remote ancestral past. Though it connected in many ways with former nationalist-cum-romantic perceptions of history, tradition and continuity as well as with pre-war politico-cultural, anti-Catholic and nationalist movements, it was in these early post-socialist days that the Pagan past became a screen onto which ethnic identification and political reorientation could be projected.

The Neopagan or "Native Faith" movement, the musical genre of black metal and the field of historical reenactment emerged as practices engaging with pre-Christian history and as popular media responding to a growing fascination with all things mediaeval. However, the overlapping milieus of their enthusiasts and audiences at the time were evidently inclined towards extreme-right-wing ideologies and formed small networks engaged in political activism.[1] Yet, these radical political efforts declined soon after the turn of the new millennium, while the level of seemingly unpolitical, cultural engagement in the abovementioned fields increased.

Wolin – "the best place for the meeting of our movement"

[CN: the following quotation contains a racial slur and provocative language]

We are all against the modern system, especially Democracy and the nigger-loving system. We hate Christianity. We see [Democracy] as Z.O.G and Jew occupation. Wolin is a historical site of ancient pagan civilization. […] Here in Wolin, we feel the spirit of our ancestors. It is the best place for the meeting of our movement.[2]

This statement is taken from a report on the Festival of Slavs and Vikings, an international festival reenacting early medieval battles that has been held in Wolin, northwestern Poland, almost every summer since 1993. It consists of tournaments in which reenactors compete in individual duels or smaller groups, the highlight being a large-scale battle reenacting the Jomsvikings' defence of their stronghold against the Piast troops of Poland.[3] It is accompanied by a large market where traditional crafts are demonstrated and products are sold as well as by a programme of events such as the staging of Pagan rituals, musical performances and informative talks, occasionally even given by academic historians.

The report cited appeared in the 2001 winter issue of the *Resistance Magazine*, a music magazine linked to the white supremacist record label Resistance Records. At the time, it was owned by William Luther Pearce, who during his lifetime was head of the US neo-Nazi organization National Alliance and author of the infamous *The Turner Diaries*. The statement above quotes Igor D. Górewicz, by now head of a commercially successful Szczecin-based reenactment troupe and a publishing company, (former) long-time representative of the Polish Native Faith organisation Rodzima Wiara and collaborator on several musical projects inspired by Viking or Pagan history. He belonged to overtly extreme-right-wing Neopagan groups around the turn of the millennium but later abandoned political activism and distanced himself from any radical views.[4]

The *Resistance Magazine*'s feature is based on conversations with Polish representatives of the Wolin festival and what they said about uniting the Polish National Socialist skinhead scene with Neopagan/reenactment/black metal groups to work towards their common political goal of "preserving their heritage and building a better future for those who share their pure European bloodlines".[5] They describe the festival as a meeting place for the radical right in Europe that is centred on a Neopagan, nationalist and racist identity. As a "child of transformation", to borrow Mariusz Filip's description

from elsewhere in this volume, this movement attempted to gain political influence in Poland in the late 1990s. Instead, however, it was met with public indignation, and, as described in the *Resistance* report also with increased countermeasures by the police and state security, especially in the run-up to Poland joining the European Union. As a result, some of their supporters focussed rather on metapolitical activities from this point onwards instead of openly engaging in politics.[6] In a right-wing context, the term "metapolitics" refers to a cultural struggle (*Kulturkampf*) designed to influence the social consciousness from below in order to lay the ground for the radical right's expansion of political power.[7] Even if the focus is often placed on recent history and other areas of culture, the early Middle Ages are of particular relevance as well. Statements by actors involved in the radicalised Polish Neopagan scene made it clear, that the popularisation of history and the embracing of indigenous Pagan religion and Pagan-related music were regarded as metapolitical fields of action (see below). This suggests that this interplay between Pagan spirituality, warrior reenactments and mediaevalising music would seem to hold a certain appeal for right-wing extremists. As shown in this volume, this phenomenon can be observed in several countries, although Poland lends itself particularly well to a description of its development and current situation. Here, this triad of reenactment, Paganism and music scene, with its core discourse on nativeness and primordiality – whether deliberately pursuing a political aim or not – inherently connects to radical-right ethnicist and antimodernist patterns of thought and thus might, even unwillingly, produce metapolitical effects for extreme-right-wing agendas.

In all three of these areas, groups engage with the early Middle Ages through performance, and the broad extent to which these three scenes overlap can be seen in certain places, especially festivals such as Wolin, where mediaeval battles and the mediaeval lifestyle are reenacted, Neopagan rituals are practised, and folk bands play music (fig. 1 and 2). Many participants are active in all three fields at the same time: many modern Pagans are also historical reenactors, reenactors are fans or even members of folk or metal bands, and there are musicians who also perform rituals as *żercy*, as the Slavic priests are called. The three fields are also united by a specific look in terms of their clothing, gear, symbols and jewellery flitting between mediaeval markets

and black metal concerts, and even the names of the various groups reference a common pool of myths and legendary figures.

Though a tendency towards right-wing extremism has been observed in parts of this specific milieu since the 1990s, it is difficult to assess how intense or how marginal this tendency is today, since the relationship with right-wing extremism has undergone a shift from radicalisation to an apparent de-radicalisation or de-politicisation. Nevertheless, elements in the appropriation of history that are compatible with right-wing ideologies remain and continue to attract right-wing extremists to this scene.

From national romanticism to turn-of-the-millennium right-wing extremism

Some ideas about pre-Christian Slavic societies have followed a longer trajectory in Poland, stretching back to the national romanticism and Slavophilia of the 19th century, when, especially during the time of partition, an intensifying interest in ethnogenesis and national roots had led people to explore folk traditions and attempt to trace them far back into premodern times.[8] According to Agnieszka Gajda, this – coupled with the reception of Johann Gottfried Herder's works – cemented "the perception that the Slavs represented a single people who were only temporarily kept apart".[9] A number of ethnographers, writers and artists, such as Adam Czarnowski alias Zorian Dołęga-Chodakowski, Bronisław Trentowski, Juliusz Słowacki, Stanisław Wyspiański, Ryszard Berwiński or Marian Wawrzeniecki, were inspired by these ideas and became precursors and founding figures of a romanticised concept of Slavic Paganism set against Christianity, which was presented as a foreign denomination causing fragmentation and deterioration from a primordial ideal and a united community.[10]

Although the Slavic spirit had grown in Poland during the 19th century, its currents did not give rise to any broader movements or organisations. The first groups in which Slavophile adherents of Pagan spirituality and heritage gathered did not emerge until the early 20th century and, even then, remained fairly loose associations and networks without any formal structures.

Fig. 1   Battle reenactment at the Festival of Slavs and Vikings in Wolin, Poland, 2017.

At least two of them still form ideological and aesthetic reference points for contemporary ethnicist Pagan identifications. The one that is probably most influential developed around the magazine *Zadruga* and its editor Jan Stachniuk in the 1930s. Even today, Stachniuk is described as an "almost legendary figure" who "continues to tower over the landscape of the Polish Neopagan movement".[11] His philosophy is very complex and his attitude towards Slavic Pagan faith ambivalent. Both seem to stem more from a strong criticism of Catholicism and its perceived negative impact on Polish society than from a connection to Slavic heritage or ancestral spirituality. Yet his concept of *wspakultura*, which translates as "un-" or "anti-culture", became important for the Neopagan movement and especially for right-wing groups connected to this "Zadrugian" tradition. It describes and criticises processes that work against and hinder cultural development if people do not actively help to create and develop the nation. Stachniuk and his adherents regarded the contemplative character of Ca-

tholicism as *wspakultura* and campaigned for its abolition.[12] His followers included Slavophiles but also supporters of racist ideas, and together they formed an ideology based not only on anti-Catholicism and *Rodzimowierstwo* – the Polish Native Faith – but also on a strong sense of Polish nationalism. Furthermore, Stachniuk's idea of an endeavour that was always active, progressive, developing and useful married up very well with National Socialist thought patterns, i.e. primarily Social Darwinist ideas all the way through to eugenics, and hence they formed a common point of reference for the radical-right Neopagan groups of the late 1990s and early 2000s.[13] Although a great variety of Neopagan orientations developed after the Second World War, including some branching into more folkloristic and/or ecological movements as well, various groups still follow the *Zadruga* spirit to this day. These include Rodzima Wiara, one of the major Native Faith organisations in Poland. Others, such as Toporzel Publishing, the "Niklot" Association of Tradition and Culture, the Zakon Zadrugi

Fig. 2   Polish Pagan Folk band Percival performing at the Festival of Slavs and Vikings in Wolin, Poland, 2018.

"Północny Wilk" and the Nationalist Association Zadruga, continue the tradition of a more pronounced combination of religious and political engagement.[14]

Back in the early 20th century, the fascination with Slavic folk culture and antiquity also captured the imagination of poets and artists, as shown in particular in the works of Zofia Stryjeńska, Stanisław Jakubowski and especially Stanisław Szukalski. The latter founded the artists' collective Szczep Rogate Serce („The Tribe of the Horned Hearts") with its periodical *Krak* (fig. 3), which was another important group, and Szukalski's works are still popular amongst present-day adherents of the Polish Native Faith.[15] His rich artistic oeuvre as well as his historical theories and his journalistic and political activism make him, with Stachniuk, another significant point of reference. Though spending most of his life in the USA, where his family had emigrated in his early youth, he studied and worked in Poland on numerous occasions, frequently depicting historical and mythological themes and figures, so his art appears as a "knot

of currents where history, mythology, literature, political thought, art and sculpting and patriotism meet with a finally looming vision of national revival".[16] It is therefore not surprising that it features in many releases in the scene described here, including the covers of self-published political magazines or black metal albums and even on tattoos.

Only a few of the pre-war Slavophile- and Pagan-minded groups outlasted the Polish People's Republic, because, unlike in a few other socialist countries to some extent, these currents were suppressed, and some of their representatives, including Stachniuk himself, were prosecuted or even imprisoned.[17] Although the Polish government's history policy in the 1950s and 1960s did focus on the Middle Ages, it was only the period of the first emergence of the Polish state under the Piast dynasty, rather than the pre-Christian Middle Ages, that received major attention.[18] Nevertheless, the seeds of a fascination with Pagan mediaeval history, and the Vikings in particular, were sown amongst many young
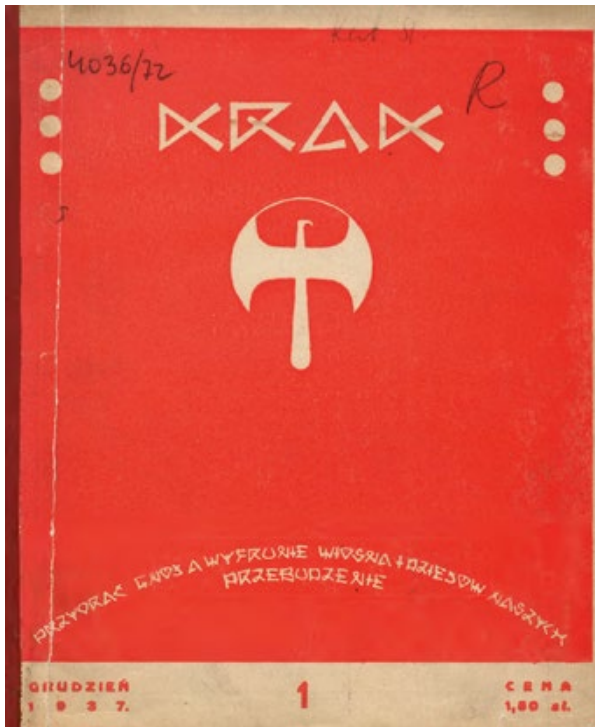
Fig. 3 Cover of *Krak* magazine (December issue 1937)
edited by Stanisław Szukalski.

people of the late 1970s and the 1980s through the *Thorgal* comic series and similar pop-culture influences.[19]

The closely interrelated fields of Slavic Neopaganism and black metal music gained momentum after the end of state socialism as described elsewhere in this volume by Mariusz Filip for the Pagan movement and by Ryan Buesnel for the black metal scene. Both, like other scholars before them, identify the 1990s as a kind of (trans-)formation phase. However, this also holds true for early mediaeval reenactments of Slav and Viking battles, which, in Poland, developed alongside the Wolin festival.[20] Apart from a number of previous local initiatives, the festival began in earnest in 1993, when Scandinavian reenactment groups performed there. It eventually became a permanent annual event, for which an association was founded, and an open-air museum established.[21]

Historically and archaeologically speaking, mediaeval Wolin was home to Scandinavian trading settlements and one of the multicultural emporia in the Baltic region. However, it is usually also interpreted as being the location of Jomsborg, a legendary place on the southern shore of the Baltic Sea that various Icelandic sagas present as the fortress of the fabled Jomsvikings. This story forms the background narrative for the festival, providing the idea of a Viking stronghold on Slavic soil and thus uniting Slavic and Viking history. Furthermore, the Jomsviking saga portrays the Jomsviking warrior group as a particularly heroic community of men that was organised according to fixed social rules.

Though observers and chroniclers of the Wolin festival rarely discuss its political ambiguity in any great detail, a certain affinity has been discernible from the early years onwards. Apart from the prominent coverage in the *Resistance Magazine*, there were also reports from the early 2000s of violent and openly extreme right-wing visitors to the festival, such as neo-Nazis who inflicted severe beatings on people on the train heading to the festival because they did not look "Polish enough" to them and members of the Polish branch of the international extremist organisation Blood and Honour who visited the festival and chanted right-wing slogans.[22]

For these radical-right segments of the Pagan-mediaevalist milieu, the most important medium for the exchange of political ideas at this time were self-printed magazines ("zines") in which theories of the European New Right were discussed. Some of the actors mentioned and quoted in the *Resistance Magazine* report were also actively involved in editing and contributing to these zines. It even seemed as if the faction that described itself there as *Narodowy Socjalizm* ("National Socialism") was primarily Neopagan in character at that time.[23] During the transformation period, this movement arose due to the air of political resignation triggered by the social and economic problems caused by the transition to capitalism, coupled with euroscepticism and a new sense of nationalism. This led people to hark back to the culturalist and nationalist ideology of the interwar *Zadruga* group.

One of the political concepts discussed in these zines was that societies should be organised hierarchically and that elites are necessary in order to lead a nation, referring more or less directly to concepts proposed by Vilfredo Pareto and Julius Evola.[24] In particular, the latter's social ideal of a caste system, which framed racial and class-specific elitism as an Indo-Aryan tradition to be restored, is echoed in some of the statements made. This formed one of the key elements of Evola's anti-modernism, which was heavily inspired by the ideas of French intellectual René Guénon in many ways.[25] In order to establish "the ideal state", Igor Górewicz suggested,

for example, to form an "aristocracy as a group that possesses special qualities in terms of mind, spirit, character and body […]. An aristocracy with a sense of duty and service to the state".[26] Elsewhere, he stated:

> Our task is not to reverse Mieszko's action and to re-baptize the Christians, to become 'pagans', but to long work to change the prevailing standards of organization and cultural activity, and at the same time researching, developing and propagating the Native Tradition and Culture [*sic*] in all their manifestations, so that in time to create a large social group that will be ready to take the role of a guide of Polish culture.[27]

Amongst other things, these elites were also given the task of ensuring a metapolitical reorganisation of social consciousness. The zines explicitly discuss "metapolitics" as a way to bring about "civilizational and historical changes",[28] referring to the approach conceived of by the *Nouvelle Droite* as a strategic pre-political phase for changing the collective awareness in a cultural revolution driven from the right by circulating and normalising ideas.[29] According to Strutyński,[30] this emphasis on a long-term approach to shaping public opinion and the formation of elites can be understood in the context of the unsuccessful attempts made to become a serious player in national politics. In this sense, Górewicz suggested at the time

> mastering the 'inner area', i.e., spiritual culture, to later transfer the action to the outer area, i.e., social life, politics. This is the task of preparing the ground. It consists of the idea that each participant in the 'Zadruga embryo' prepares the field in his own section, shaping the attitudes of co-workers, subordinates, acquaintances, in the field of views on history, politics.[31]

Also related to history as a field where attitudes can be changed was his previous involvement with the *Zadrugian* "Niklot" Association of Tradition and Culture. Being "a member of the leading board", he described his activism in 2001 as "not purely political, but [it] deals with a number of issues influencing political choices (this is metapolitics), such as the shaping of Polish and Slavic awareness and identity".[32] Similarly, he saw black metal music, too, as a "very suitable media to spread […] ideas".[33]

Whilst those actors representing the far-right wing of the overlapping scenes of Neopaganism, reenactment and musical culture openly expressed themselves politically at the turn of the millennium, a change took place in the late 2000s. They either distanced themselves and emphasised a rejection of previous attitudes, as Igor Górewicz did, or they stopped expressing themselves in a manner that was clearly recognisable as extreme right-wing.

Consequently, religious studies scholars have described this move away from overt political activism for the Polish Native Faith movement as a shift "away from the unquestioned inclusion of politics in the sacred circle and toward more cultural and artistic expression".[34] What is more, the increasing intertwining of Neopaganism with historical reenactment and Pagan metal/folk music cultures was seen here as a cause or symptom of this supposed shift away from political activism towards seemingly apolitical cultural activities. Following this line of argument, music and the popularisation of history had helped to "keep political slogans away from the sacred" because of a "growing interest in Polish Rodzimowierstwo" in areas that were described as "not primarily politically-oriented, such as the Polish metal scene or historical reenactment groups",[35] i.e. areas that had evidently had some very political tendencies indeed. This shows that these interlinked fields and their historical practices have not yet been examined in their entirety in terms of their obvious common features and their politicisation. With regard to the metapolitical strategies discussed around the turn of the millennium, this also raises the question of whether there has indeed been a shift towards this scene having an un-political – or at least a less political – character, or whether it is merely that the means have become more subtle and the images of history conveyed may still perform a metapolitical function.

Popularising Paganism and right-wing links in the present day

Visiting the festival in Wolin today, which now attracts up to 2,500 reenactors and tens to dozens of thousands of visitors each year,[36] one might notice that there are still many visitors wearing clothes, jewellery or tattoos bearing right-wing symbolism. Here, but also at other reenactment festivals most of the major "patriotic" clothes labels in Europe that are popular with extreme-right-

Fig. 4   Flag showing a swastika at reenactment festival Najazd Barbarzyńców ("Invasion of Barbarians"), Ogrodzieniec, Poland, July 2024.

wing groups are present, as are the equivalent Polish brands and band merchandise promoted by right-wing black metal and white power music artists. Symbols that are intrinsically linked to the aesthetic language used by the far right, such as different types of swastika (fig. 4, cf. also fig. 1), Celtic crosses, depictions of the Irminsul and even black suns are used by members of reenactment groups performing at the festival or appear on goods sold by traders running the numerous stalls.

Although the regulations applicable to the reenactment groups taking part in the festival, which the organising association posts on its website, aim to prohibit the use of offensive language or symbols and, ex-

plicitly, racism as well,[37] the organisers – the Centrum Słowian i Wikingów – do not appear to make any serious effort to apply these rules consistently. They do not intervene when visitors openly display unmistakably extreme-right-wing statements and symbols (fig. 5). On the contrary, folk bands belonging to the right wing of the political spectrum are sometimes even included in the festival's programme, and the Centrum provided their premises as the backdrop for a music video released in 2018 by the extremist hate-core band Legion Twierdzy Wrocław.[38]

Nonetheless, the right-wing connections have become vague over the past 20 years and, in particular,

definite links to extreme-right-wing organisations and networks are no longer clearly discernible. The groups taking part present themselves as apolitical. They regard observations of this kind as exceptions and defend themselves against accusations that the scene has a problem with right-wing extremism. This is even though several actors have been involved with this event since it became more politicised around the turn of the millennium and – as shown – have contributed to making the Wolin Festival an attractive meeting place for adherents of right-wing extremism.

Exploring how the early Middle Ages are understood and interpreted in practice at reenacts, Neopagan rituals or black metal concerts nowadays might therefore provide some valuable insights. How are early mediaeval Pagan societies, such as the Slavs and Vikings, seen by reenactors, musicians and adherents of Native Faith? Are their representations of the Pagan past and their performances of history still compatible with far-right ideologies? Could this explain the enduring appeal that festivals like Wolin still hold for the right? Three aspects of how early mediaeval Slavic and Scandinavian communities are depicted related to their ethnicity, social orders and religiosity would seem to confirm this.

First of all, ethnic identification with the Slavs in particular or with a (Nordic-)European common descent continues to play an important role. Concepts of community and group identity, particularly of ethnic identity or even biologistic/racist identity, can be recognised in self-descriptions but also in both verbal and visual symbolism, when "roots", "heritage" or "ancestors" are emphasised over and over again, and this sense of identity also provides motivation for engaging with the early Middle Ages. As an example, a statement on the website of the Triglav publishing house run by Igor Górewicz describes why it is named after Triglav, a Slavic deity worshipped as a war god and tribal deity:

> By choosing Triglav as our patron, we linked our activities to that part of Slavic culture for which he is responsible – knowledge, memory and identity. These are best sustained by the instrument of publishing, and Triglav, as the guardian of wisdom and souls, is the best expression of the efforts to preserve, deepen and spread the knowledge of the culture of our Ancestors [sic]. These elements are the pillars of the Triglav publishing house's mission to

Fig. 5 Visitor of the Festival of Slavs and Vikings in Wolin, Poland, 2023.

popularise knowledge, promote the memory of past generations and present topics related to our indigenous heritage in an accessible way.[39]

There are similar and even more pronounced identification statements made by reenactment and Neopagan groups that are discussed in the articles by Schaab and Pawleta in this volume and that likewise make reference to Slavic, Indo-European or Aryan ancestors. One of these is the Native Faith community Rodzima Wiara, whose set of religious beliefs (e.g. as presented on its website[40]) sees Poles and other Slavs as relatives and descendants of "the ancient Aryans". Their creed follows unquestionably essentialist and even racial patterns of thought when it states that "[g]enes transmit our basic, psycho-physical characteristics countless times from generation to generation. Genes bind past generations to the living and to those yet unborn"[41] or calls "Judo-christianism" a negative influence that "led to a discrepancy between origin and confession, between inherited genetic record and imposed foreign values".[42]

Fig. 6 Chain pendants in the shape of Kolovrat and other stylised swastika symbols, sold at the Festival of Slavs and Vikings in Wolin, Poland, in 2023.

The visual icon conveying a similar identificational value of "Slavic ancestry" that appears most often is the Kolovrat symbol, an eight-armed swastika, which is believed to be an ancient Slavic spiritual sign and has become very fashionable, even outside reenactment and Neopagan communities (fig. 6). Nevertheless, it is also very popular amongst Slavic right-wing extremists, and its historic authenticity has to be questioned. Indeed, it would seem rather to be an invented tradition that became artificially linked to early Slavic culture only recently – a few decades ago, to be precise.[43] Images and symbols representing Slavic gods are other visual demonstrations of identification with Slavic "nativeness". In particular, symbols representing the deities Perun, Veles or Mokosh, the Mother Goddess, are increasingly gaining popularity as motifs for jewellery, tattoos or clothes (fig. 7). The same applies to replicas or images of archaeological finds that are interpreted as depictions of gods, with a statue from Zbrucz, today Ukraine, that is often interpreted as an idol of the Slavic god Svetovit seeming to hold a particular fascination.[44]

These references are based on the assumption of a long and unbroken line of ethnic descent passing down inherent characteristics continuously through blood. This kind of essentialist thinking, which also sees early mediaeval societies as existing in modern nation-state-like patterns of homogenous peoples has long been called into question by scholars.[45] Muting the diversity that also characterised the Middle Ages – as indeed it has every premodern era – soon leads to alleged differ-

ences and incompatibilities between nationalities being emphasised, which may thus fuel resentment against multi-cultural communities.

Secondly, staging the Pagan past by presenting it in reenactments, in Neopagan practices and even at Pagan-inspired metal or folk concerts often reveals conceptions about mediaeval societies that romanticise and idealise social structures and virtues ascribed to pre-Christian times. They imagine people's lifestyle and relationships to have been simple and clear-cut and emphasise warriorship, comradeship, hierarchies, heroism and "natural" gender roles. They also seem to glamourise violence as an effective means of resolving conflicts and asserting one's interests. Associating these social ideals with a distant past, they are portrayed as something primordial and thus ultimately as a natural state from which modernity has deviated and which consequently needs to be restored. Engagement with the past is sought as an escape from the present and hence can present an anti-modern, anti-pluralistic alternative to the complexities of today's world.

This is mirrored in the distribution of roles between men and women (with other genders still generally being left out). Even though there are now a number of

Fig. 7 Reenactor tattooed with symbols representing the Slavic deities Perun and Veles. Festival Najazd Barbarzyńców, Ogrodzieniec, Poland, July 2024.

Fig. 8   Female reenactors carrying group flags onto the battlefield while warriors line up for the fight.
Festival of Slavs and Vikings in Wolin, Poland, 2018.

female reenactors who fight in battles and women who lead Pagan rituals, these domains are clearly dominated by men (fig. 8). For some of them, transporting themselves back into the early Middle Ages is like a return to traditional gender roles, an escape to a place where men can be real men and women are allowed to "celebrate their position".[46] This idea is stressed even more clearly by a Native-Faith priest from the reenactment group Utlagar Hirde from Warsaw, who described a woman's role as being "to bear and raise children and take care of the household" while men had "to defend the household and provide for the family". He also believes that these "natural roles [...] make us better people" and feels "happiest when he does what comes naturally to him". [47]

While recent developments in archaeology and historical sciences, and especially in feminist and queer archaeology, have begun to call some beliefs concerning prehistoric and mediaeval gender roles into question,[48] what seems more problematic is the fact that gender and other social orders are assumed to be archaic and natural even though they are the result of historical developments and are situated in a specific context rather than being something that is essentially inherent in human behaviour.

Lastly, people often ignore the fact that much of what is referred to in rituals, texts, symbols and other representations already has a Christian background or originates from an era in the Middle Ages in which Christianisation was already present. This applies to some of the symbols used and to most of the relevant written sources but also to the phenomenon whereby secular folk traditions from rural areas without any obvious connection to pre-Christian Slavic practices are integrated into current reenactment practices and Neopagan rituals simply because they seem native and premodern.[49]

A rather ethno-centric, anti-modernist and anti-Christian view of the early Middle Ages is thus emerging that narrows the past down to a narrative of ancestry and primordiality framing certain historical factors, such as Christianity, as something "foreign" that adulterated the

original. While the material side of the way history is represented in this field often adheres very accurately to archaeological finds or visual sources and thus relies on recent research, the general idea of the mediaeval past and, especially, of how its society was organised is not informed by current academic discourse. It rather gives the impression that the prevailing understanding of history in this context has remained stuck in the era of national romanticism, as a history conception of 19th and early 20th century frozen in the minds of contemporary enthusiasts of the Pagan Middle Ages.

Conclusion

Although an explicit and conscious extreme-right-wing stance can currently only be seen in some cases in terms of the popular appropriation of the Pagan past analysed in this article, the concept and images of history that they reproduce are, in their conservatism, still highly compatible with extreme-right-wing thought patterns. Invoking ancestral traditions and heritage implies the glorification of ethnic purity, while the glorification of allegedly primordial social orders implies a criticism or even rejection of changes and achievements of later eras and, especially, of the present day.

Finally, placing an emphasis on Paganism not only represents a choice between different religions but also criticises Christianity by giving it the negative label of something "foreign". By setting it apart from "nativeness", or "indigeneity", it condemns developments and factors in history that have shaped today's societies and, at times, even condenses into an antisemitic attitude towards "Judeo-Christianity". Consequently, even though the actors in this milieu have ceased their overt political activism, ideas, symbols and concepts of the extreme right allegedly legitimised historically are brought into the mainstream via the discursive, aesthetic and symbolic overlaps between the various groups. The past would thus appear to be a powerful resource for interpreting conflicts of the present.

References

1 Cf. Mariusz Filip's article in this volume on the Pagan far right during the transformation period post-1989.

2 Hubert, Kurt, "Viking Festival: Rediscovery and Cultivation of the European Spirit", *Resistance Magazine*, 14 (2001), pp. 6–12.

3 Cf. Filipowiak, Wojciech, Bogacki, Michał, and Kokora, Karolina, "The Center of Slavs and Vikings in Wolin, Poland. History, scenography, story and effect", *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana*, 29/1 (2021), pp. 89–113 <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu19.2021.106> [accessed 24 April 2024].

4 As e.g. quoted in this blog entry from 2009 <https://inicjacja.wordpress.com/slowianstwo/> [accessed 20 January 2024].

5 Hubert, "Viking Festival", p. 6.

6 See e.g. the Neopagan group Zakon Zadrugi Polnocny "Wilk" (ZZPW) as described by Filip, Mariusz, "Polityka Tożsamości We Wspólnotach Neopogańskich: Przykład Zakonu Zadrugi "Północny Wilk", in Dohnal, Wojciech, and Posern-Zieliński, Aleksander (eds.), *Antropologia i polityka: Szkice z badań nad kulturowymi wymiarami władzy*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IAE PAN, 2011, pp. 175–88 (pp. 183 f.).

7 See Griffin, Roger, "Between Metapolitics and Apoliteia. The Nouvelle Droite's Strategy for Conserving the Fascist Vision in the 'Interregnum'", *Modern & Contemporary France* 8/1 (2000), pp. 35–53 <https://doi.org/10.1080/096394800113349> [accessed 8 August 2024].

8 Gajda, Agnieszka, "Romanticism and the Rise of Neopaganism in Nineteenth-Century Central and Eastern Europe: the Polish Case", in Aitamurto, Kaarina, and Simpson, Scott (eds.), *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2013, pp. 44–61.

9 Gajda 2013, "Romanticism and the Rise of Neopaganism in Nineteenth-Century", p. 46.

10 Gajda 2013, "Romanticism and the Rise of Neopaganism in Nineteenth-Century", p. 56; Janion, Maria, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna: fantazmaty literatury*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006; see also Schaab in this volume.

11 Strutyński, Maciej, "The Ideology of Jan Stachniuk and the Power of Creation", in Aitamurto, Kaarina, and Simpson, Scott (eds.), *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, Studies in contemporary and historical paganism, Durham: Acumen, 2013, pp. 283–97 (p. 283).

12 Cf. Strutynski, "The Ideology of Jan Stachniuk", and Filip in this volume. Detailed introductions to Stachniuk's philosophy are provided by Grott, Bogumił, *Religia. Cywilizacja. Rozwój. Wokół idei Jana Stachniuka*, Kraków: Nomos, 2002; and Siedliński, Radosław, *Człowiek – mit – kultura. Filozofia społeczna Jana Stachniuka*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2008.

13 Strutyński, Maciej, "Pogański Narodowy Socjalizm", in Pasek, Zbigniew (ed.), *Ezoteryzm, Okultyzm, Satanizm w Polsce*, Kraków: Libron, 2005, pp. 157–79 (pp. 161 f., 167 f.); Strutyński, Maciej, "Wizja życia politycznego współczesnych środowisk neopogańskich", *Państwo i Społeczeństwo* 8/4 (2008), pp. 65–78 (p. 77).

14 Cf. Filip in this volume.

15 Strutyński, "The Ideology of Jan Stachniuk and the Power of Creation", p. 288. See also: Gajda, Agnieszka, "Neopogaństwo w Polsce", *Alma Mater*, 114 (2009), pp. 97–102.

16 Kargol, Anna, "Stanisław Szukalski's Neoslavic Art and Politics", *Państwo i Społeczeństwo* 13/4 (2013), pp. 23–37 (p. 24). See also relevant articles in Schmid, Ulrich (ed.), *Estetyka dyskursu nacjonalistycznego w Polsce 1926–1939*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2014.

17 Rudling, Odeta, "The Cult of the Balts: Mythological Impulses and Neo-Pagan Practices in the Touristic Clubs of the Lithuanian SSR of the 1960s and 1970s", *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and*

Central Asia 6/1 (2017), pp. 87–108 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26377362>, and relevant articles in Aitamurto, Kaarina, and Simpson, Scott (eds.), *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2013.

18   Reichenbach, Karin, "The Research Program on the Beginnings of the Polish State between Polish Western Thought and Historical Materialism: Structural Developments and Political Reorientation", *Przegląd Archeologiczny*, 65 (2017), pp. 19–34.

19   Gardeła, Leszek, "Współcześni wikingowie. Wojownicy, metalowcy i tak zwani poganie", in Stępień, Urszula (ed.), *Współczesna przeszłość*, Poznań: Koło Naukowe Studentów Archeologii. Instytut Prahistorii UAM, 2009, pp. 387–403; Gardeła, Leszek, "(Re)discovering the Vikings in Poland: From Nineteenth-Century Romantics to Contemporary Warriors", in Birkett, Tom, and Dale, Roderick (eds.), *The Vikings Reimagined: Reception, Recovery, Engagement*, Berlin, Boston: Medieval Institute Publications, 2020, pp. 44–68. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501513886-004 [accessed 8 July 2024]; Gardeła, Leszek, "Vikings Reborn: The Origins and Development of Early Medieval Re-enactment in Poland", *Sprawozdania Archeologiczne*, 68 (2016), pp. 165–182; Szlendak,

20   Gardeła, "Vikings Reborn", 170–172.

21   Filipowiak, Bogacki and Kokora, "The Center of Slavs and Vikings in Wolin", 93–95.

22   Kornak, Marcin, and Stowarzyszenie "Nigdy Więcej", *Brunatna Księga 1987–2009*, Chodzież: Poligraf, 2009.

23   Strutyński, "Pogański Narodowy Socjalizm", pp. 160, 169–174.

24   Strutyński, "Pogański Narodowy Socjalizm", pp. 163 f.

25   Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity*. New York: New York University Press, 2002, pp. 52–71.

26   "Stan idealny, do którego dążymy, wytwarza arystokrację, jako grupę posiadającą szczególne przymioty umysłu, ducha, charakteru i ciała [...]. Arystokracja w poczuciu obowiązku i służby wobec Państwa.", Górewicz, Igor D., "Polityczność panteistów", *Odala*,7, (2001), p. 7, quoted after Strutyński, "Wizja życia politycznego", p. 77.

27   "Nasze zadanie polega więc nie na odwróceniu akcji Mieszka i ponownym kąpaniu chrześcijan, by stali się "poganami", ale na długiej pracy dążącej do zmiany panujących standardów organizacji i aktywności kulturowej, a jednocześnie na badaniu, rozwijaniu i propagowaniu Rodzimej Tradycji i Kultury we wszelkich ich przejawach, tak by z czasem stworzyć dużą grupę społeczną będącą gotową do podjęcia roli przewodnika polskiej kultury." Wywiad z Igorem D. Górewiczem dla pisma "KADUK" [Interview with Igor D. Górewicz for "Kaduk" journal] (re)published on <www.rodzimawiara.org.pl> [accessed 12 July 2020, website not working anymore].

28   Dołęga, A., "Uwagi o perspektywach rozwoju ruchu zadrużnego po akcesji Polski do Unii Europejskiej", *Trygław* 8 (2004) p. 43 quoted after Strutyński, "Wizja życia politycznego", pp. 70 f.

29   Cf. e.g. Griffin, "Between Metapolitics and Apoliteia".

30   Strutyński, "Wizja życia politycznego", pp. 69 f.

31   "[...] opanowaniu 'obszaru wewnetrznego', czyli kultury duchowej, w celu późniejszego przeniesienia akcji na obszar zewnętrzny, czyli życie społeczne, politykę. Jest to zadanie przygotowania gruntu. Polega to na tym, iż każdy uczestnik 'embrionu zadrużnego' przygotowuje pole na swoim odcinku, kształcąc postawy współpracowników, podwładnych, znajomych, w dziedzinie poglądów na historię, politykę" Górewicz, Igor D. "Siódmy grzech śmiertelny – psycha", *Trygław*, 7 (2003), p. 20, quoted after Strutyński, "Wizja życia politycznego", p. 69.

32   "Moja codzienna aktywność skupiam na Stowarzyszeniu na rzecz Tradycji i Kultury Niklot. Którego jestem członkiem władz naczelnych, które ze swej zasady nie jest czysto polityczne, ale zajmuje się szeregiem zagadnień wpływających właśnie na wybory polityczne (to owa metapol-

ityka), jak kształtowanie świadomości i tożsamości polskiej i słowiańskiej." Anonym, "Wywiad z Igorem Górewiczem", *Aryan Pride. Pismo Narodowych Socjalistów*, 2/113 (2001).

33   Moreno Atienza, Emilio J., "Interview with Igor Górewicz of Casus Belli" <http://www.rusmetal.ru/vae_solis/casusbelli.html> [accessed 12 June 2021].

34   Simpson, Scott, "Only Slavic Gods: Nativeness in Polish Rodzimowierstwo", in Rountree, Kathryn (ed.), *Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Modern Paganism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2017, pp. 65–86 (p. 76); also Anczyk, Adam, "Contemporary Pagans Go into Politics: Workshop 'Paganism and Politics: Neo-Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe'", *Religio: revue pro religionistiku*, 24 (2016), 233–236, and Schaab, Philipp, *Götter, Ahnen, Blut und Boden? Die Konstruktion ethnischer Identität im gegenwärtigen slawischen Neuheidentum in Polen*, Berlin: LIT, 2019, p. 169. Anczyk and Schaab both follow Simpson.

35   Simpson, "Only Slavic Gods", p. 71; Anczyk, "Contemporary Pagans Go into Politics", p. 234.

36   Cf. e.g. Kalisiński, Marek, "The Centre of Slavs and Vikings Jomsborg – Vineta Wolin", *travel.lovePoland Magazine,* 12/1 (2020), 5-31 (p. 9).

37   "In the following cases, entry to the Festival will be denied or the participant will be escorted out: [...] A person using offensive language or symbols such as hate speech, racism, obscene or vulgar content." <https://jomsborg-vineta.com/regulamin-terms-and-conditions/> [accessed 15 April 2024].

38   Cf. Legion Twierdzy Wrocław, *Hymn Berserkera*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G43nVDGLchM [accessed 12 April 2024].

39   "Obierając więc Triglava za patrona, powiązaliśmy swoje działania z tą częścią słowiańskiej kultury, za którą postać ta odpowiada – wiedzę, pamięć i tożsamość. Ich podtrzymaniu zaś najlepiej służy właśnie instrument wydawnictwa, a Triglav jako opiekun mądrości i dusz, jest najpełniejszym wyrazicielem dążeń do zachowania, pogłębiania i upowszechnienia wiedzy o kulturze naszych Przodków. Te elementy stanęły jako filary misji wydawnictwa Triglav, chcącego popularyzować wiedzę, krzewić pamięć dawnych pokoleń oraz w sposób przystępny ukazywać tematy związane z rodzimym dziedzictwem." <https://triglav.com.pl/o-wydawnictwie.html>; also <https://www.facebook.com/triglav.books/about_details> [both accessed 30 May 2024].

40   <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/rodzima-wiara/poszerzone-wyznanie-wiary.html> [accessed 20 September 2021], transferred by now to <http://rodzimawiara.com.pl/wyznanie-wiary/> see also the summary by Schaab, *Götter, Ahnen, Blut und Boden*, pp. 189–197.

41   "Geny przenoszą psychofizyczne cechy niezliczoną ilość razy z pokolenia na pokolenie. Geny wiążą minione pokolenia z żyjącymi i z jeszcze nienarodznymi.", Rodzima Wiara, "Zasady Wiara" <http://rodzimawiara.com.pl/wyznanie-wiary/> [accessed 8 August 2024].

42   "Nas Polaków i pozostałych Słowian dotknęło odejście od rodzimych wierzeń [...]. To spowodowało nie tylko zerwanie kulturowej ciągłości, oderwanie od rodzimego podglebia, ale i głęboki negatywny przewrót duchowy. Przyjęcie judochrystianizmu doprowadziło do rozdźwięku między pochodzeniem, a wyznaniem, między odziedziczonym genetycznym zapisem, a narzuconymi obcymi wartościami.", Rodzima Wiara, "Dlaczego istniejemy?" <http://rodzimawiara.com.pl/dropdown2/> [accessed 8 August 2024].

43   Reichenbach, Karin, "Spurensuche Kolovrat", *Mitropa* 10 (2018), 21–23; cf. also https://sagy.vikingove.cz/hledani-puvodu-kolovratu/ [accessed 28 May 2024].

44   Cf. Olszewska, Anna, and Simpson, Scott, "Are Wooden Pixels More Pagan Than Plastic Pixels? The Case of the Światowid Idol." <https://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/legacy/mit6/papers/Olszewska.pdf> [accessed 5 March 2024].

45 Cf. e.g. Brather, Sebastian, *Ethnische Interpretationen in der früh-geschichtlichen Archäologie. Geschichte, Grundlagen und Alternativen*, Berlin: De Gruyter 2004/2008; Curta, Florin, *The Making of the Slavs. History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500–700 A. D.*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; Brather, Sebastian, Victor Spinei, and Rubel, Alexander, *Archaeology and Identity: Central and East Central Europe in the Earlier Middle Ages*, Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Române, 2008; Pohl, Walter: *Eastern Central Europe in the Early Middle Ages. Conflicts, migrations and ethnic processes*, Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Române, 2008; Mühle, Eduard: *Die Slawen im Mittelalter zwischen Idee und Wirklichkeit*, Köln et al.: Böhlau, 2020.

46 Górewicz, Igor D., *Mieczem pisane. Odtwórcologia*, Szczecin: Triglav, 2013, p. 6.

47 "'Moim zdaniem człowiek jest najszczęśliwszy kiedy robi to, co dla niego naturalne' – mówi. Rolą kobiety jest więc rodzenie i wychowywanie dzieci oraz opieka nad ogniskiem domowym. Odpowiedzialnością mężczyzny jest zaś obrona domostwa i zapewnienie dobrobytu. – 'Naturalne role człowieka nie są ani przyjemne dla mężczyzn ani dla kobiet, ale to jest to co sprawia że jesteśmy lepszymi ludźmi' – uważa." Wiejski, Paweł, "Nie nazywajcie nas poganami", *Cafébabel* August 16, (2017) <https://cafe-babel.com/pl/article/nie-nazywajcie-nas-poganami-5ae00bdaf-723b35a145e7fed/> [accessed 24 June 2024].

48 Cf. e.g. Coltofean-Arizancu, Laura, Gaydarska, Bisserka, and Matić, Uroš (eds.), *Gender Stereotypes in Archaeology. A short reflection in image and text*, Sidestone Press 2021. <https://www.sidestone.com/openaccess/9789464260250.pdf> [accessed 24 June 2024].

49 Simpson, Scott, "Strategies for Constructing Religious Practice in Polish Rodzimowierstwo", in Anczyk, Adam and Grzymała-Moszczyńska, Halina (eds.), *Walking the Old Ways: Studies in Contemporary European Paganism*, Katowice: Sacrum Publishing House, 2012, pp. 11–36 (p. 18).

The Restaged Past Is a "Dirty Business"

The Politicisation of Historical Reenactment in Present-Day Poland[1]

Michał Pawleta

Historical reenactment is an increasingly popular way for people nowadays to engage with the past. This means of practising history is clearly visible in the public sphere and can be observed not only through the number of recreations of historical events that are staged or people involved in reenactment activities but also in the diverse nature of this movement. It currently takes the form of various activities undertaken by a fast-growing number of groups and associations, covering various fields of collective life and forms of reenactment, with a noticeable emphasis on reenacting battles. Since the formal and objective aspects of historical reenactment have been thoroughly examined elsewhere,[2] there is no need to duplicate these analyses here. This article will discuss the statement that associations and informal groups involved in reenacting the past are "absolutely free from political, social, religious or doctrinal ideas".[3] By taking historical reenactment in present-day Poland as a case study, it will thus address the issue of its politicisation. My investigation will be based on selected examples from Poland and will mainly include reenactments of the early mediaeval period and/or prehistoric times, for which archaeology and archaeological data are a major source of knowledge. I will then use these as a basis for presenting several elements that I consider indicative of a "politicisation" of this movement.

Historical reenactment

Pinning down a precise concept of historical reenactment is no easy task due to its dynamic and varied character. Polish historian Michał Bogacki defined it as

> […] a set of activities based on the visual presentation of various areas of life in the past by people dressed in costume using objects relating to a given period in the past (replicas or occasionally reconstructions), or even original artefacts.[4]

Generally speaking, it denotes all actions that recreate certain aspects of the past – historical events, recreations of battles or scenes from everyday life – by reenactors who use modern props, appropriate costumes and scenery.[5] Past events are staged in order to present the past based on historical or archaeological facts; it is not a truthful recreation of the past "as it really was", as this is not possible. Although reenactment shares links with the concept of living history,[6] as both have an interest in historical accuracy and immersion, they differ in their primary goals, settings and audience engagement. Living history emphasises a broader understanding of daily life in a specific time period, while reenactment focuses on recreating specific historical events, often placing greater weight on historical accuracy in terms of uniforms and equipment. It can be further divided into two main domains, namely battle (combat) reenactment, which reconstructs battle scenes, and recreation of aspects of everyday life – presenting either a full picture or only part of it.[7]

Historical reenactment covers a variety of activities, which are inextricably linked and complementary. These include: (1) the production of items, i.e. manufacturing replicas of artefacts, weapons, historical costumes, etc.; (2) the reenactment of social events and different practices of various human groups from the past; (3) historical staging, focusing on recreating specific events from the past, such as those documented by written sources.[8] Historical reenactment activities thus concentrate mainly on two important aspects: recreating the material culture of the past and presenting an image of what life was really like in that past.[9]

As a widespread form of presenting and disseminating knowledge about the past and an attempt to make it tangible in the present, historical reenactment has increasingly shaped people's knowledge and ideas of times past. As a phenomenon, however, reenactment is not confined merely to the present day, since the practice of recreating historical events actually dates back to

Fig. 1 Warriors preparing for the battle at the early medieval reenactment festival Najazd Barbarzyńców ("Invasion of Barbarians") in Ogrodzieniec, Poland, July 2024.

ancient times. Nevertheless, there are two differences between these re-creations and contemporary reenactments.[10] Firstly, rather than setting out to recreate the past in faithful detail, the former were occasionally used by governments for propaganda purposes (e.g. the *naumachiae*, naval battles staged in Ancient Rome). That they can be classified as historical reenactments is down to their use of authentic clothing. The main purpose of contemporary re-creations – and I will not address the question of whether they are capable of presenting the past objectively – is "to re-create the past for itself, to show the truth about a specific moment in the past",[11] i.e. to put the past on stage, underpinned by the latest research findings. Secondly, these performances differ in terms of their scale. Those in the past did not take the form of a bottom-up social movement as is the case today, where historical reenactment is a spontaneous activity undertaken by a fast-growing number of groups and associations and

covering various fields of collective life and forms of reenactment.

The areas of interest covered by reenactment groups in Poland vary significantly, with the cultures of the early mediaeval Slavs and Vikings (fig. 1 and 2), mediaeval knights, mercenaries, 17th-century armies, Napoleonic soldiers, World War II troops and the most recent military conflicts being fairly popular. The largest number of historical reenactors are involved in groups focusing on the 20th century, especially the Second World War period. There is a close link between these events and historical reenactors' staging of the battles fought by the anti-communist underground against the new communist political system imposed on Poland in 1945.[12] They refer to episodes in history that are particularly relevant for the self-image of the Polish people.

Reenactors meet at gatherings and history-themed events held in the open air such as archaeological festivals, mediaeval tournaments and reenactments of bat-

tles. The largest and most famous of these in Poland is the restaging of the Battle of Grunwald (see below). It is hard to estimate how many are involved in historical reenactment in Poland, but the core of the movement is made up of people of varying ages, levels of education and motivations, all of whom share an interest in the past. Most of the initiators and many of the longstanding leaders of the movement once studied history or archaeology or, having cultivated their passion over many years, have now acquired an extensive knowledge of technologies, techniques of warfare or everyday life in the eras that they reconstruct.[13] Estimates suggest that there are several thousand people who take part in reenactments. For example, the report prepared at the request of the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage[14] states that, in 2016, there were at least 458 active reenactment groups in Poland but concluded that the number of historical reenactors may actually be as much as twice as high, ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 people, due to the lack of specific information available.[15]

It is generally agreed among scholars that the reenactment movement is associated with people's fascination with the past but also with the commercial dimension of events related to reenactment.[16] It can thus be identified partly with historical culture[17] and partly with popular culture.[18] However, the incentives that are leading more and more people to join the historical reenactment movement are complex and manifold. Krzysztof Olechnicki and Tomasz Szlendak[19] identify several distinct reasons why people engage in reenactments, including: a fascination with history and the military; an escape from the dullness of everyday life; tradition and fascination with the achievements of one's ancestors; patriotism and love for local heritage; building new relationships and ties; the pursuit of extreme experiences; showing off and "self-promotion"; the pursuit of economic motives; or simply as a way to spend one's free time. However, the reenactors' motivations do not exist in isolation, as a reenactor will often cite several reasons for joining their group.

Historical reenactment is a very effective and appealing way of presenting history vividly and interactively for a live audience through the attractive transmission of information that gives them the impression of being in direct contact with the past. This is largely done by having actors impersonate individual figures from the past, participation in larger reenactments and the staging of certain events, customs, etc., using modern reproductions of artefacts.[20] At the same time, it

Fig. 2   Sales stall offering pottery products at the festival Najazd Barbarzyńców in Ogrodzieniec, Poland, July 2024.

reflects a process that caused "history [to] come out into the streets".[21] It is connected with the democratisation of history and the rise of public history[22] and should be seen as a shift in history's centre of gravity caused by public (mis-)uses of history in the recent past, including its political exploitation – both by the state and by individuals for the purposes of their own political narrative. This shift can be observed not only in the proliferation of varied and often disputed interpretations of past events in the public sphere but also in an increase in the volume of different media enabling people to experience history: the proliferation of museums, the development of cultural and/or heritage tourism, the popularity of historical documentaries and series on television, video games, comics and fantasy literature as well as historical reenactment events.

Although historical reenactment can be a valuable tool for education and engagement when done thoughtfully and responsibly, it also attracts criticism, with the quality of the presentations and educational activities offered during reenactments quite often being called into question. Critics also argue that the superficial nature of the events being staged risks educational ideas being lost in favour of entertainment. In other words,

form trumps content, and spectacle and visual appeal trump scientific reliability.[23] It is here that the real danger lies, especially for uninitiated members of the audience, who may well end up with an image of the past, based on the information that they are given, that is incorrect from an academic perspective. Criticism is also levelled at the commercialisation of this form of activity (i.e. that it serves purely commercial aims), an excessive focus on the military aspect and the possibility of it being hijacked for political ends.[24]

The politicisation of historical reenactment

As already mentioned, Tomasz Szajewski[25] characterises associations and informal groups reenacting the past as being "absolutely free from political, social, religious or doctrinal ideas". I would argue that this somewhat idealistic statement does not hold water for many reasons, most obviously because reenactors usually have a fixed outlook or ideological, political and religious sympathies and, logically, this political mindset informs their view of history. Thus, they might express their support for certain political activities or – being inspired by politicians – participate in various public events.[26] Numerous elements of a broader phenomenon, namely the politicisation of history, heritage and the past, are also clearly discernible within historical reenactment. I would therefore agree with Vanessa Agnew's assertion that "the thrall of reenactment cannot be attributed merely to an interest in colorful, familiar history. Rather, its excursions are justified on political grounds."[27]

The politicisation of historical reenactment in Poland is fairly evident when one looks at re-creations of recent history such as World War II and events in Poland under the communist regime post-1945. For example, Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska has recently identified the instrumentalisation of reenactment, especially that of World War II history, by Poland's ruling elite.[28] Symptomatic of these reenactments is how they refer to a history that is still fresh in many people's memories – mostly traumatic ones – and that needs to be reworked and subjected to serious public debate. Reenactments of prehistoric and early mediaeval times in Poland have not yet been thoroughly researched, and this article aims to fill this gap.

First of all, however, the term "politicisation" needs to be briefly defined. In its broadest sense, "to politicise" means to bring a political character or flavour to something, to make something political or to manipulate research findings for political ends. More specifically, "politicization in general terms means the demand for or the act of transporting an issue into the fields of politics – making previously unpolitical matters political",[29] which includes presenting an issue as open and as a matter for (political) discussion.[30] Michael Zürn goes on to argue that the agents of politicisation can be all individuals or groups who participate in the political process.[31] In line with this definition, "politicization also incorporates the communicative tactic to produce doubt regarding a scientific consensus […] This can be implemented by either (1) citing experts or scientific knowledge to legitimate the opposing viewpoint or (2) by discrediting and criticizing the scientific consensus or its representatives."[32] The politicisation of research and its findings is considered to be the inevitable process of transforming what researchers produce into an ideology and, in this respect, also refers to the influence exerted on research findings or how they are disseminated, reported or interpreted.

There are three different ways in which historical reenactment can be politicised.[33] Firstly, some of the performers openly support their vision of the past, promoted by specific political groups. Secondly, politicians at various levels – from local to state-level authorities – invite reenactors to take part in commemorative celebrations, anniversaries of battles and state holidays, and their presence at such events is interpreted as a politicised move. Thirdly, the top-down historical policy, topics and historical events that come to the forefront of public discourse influence what themes historical reenactors choose to present. This sometimes happens because certain events from the past become fashionable, often attracting sustained media coverage, and sometimes because it is easier to secure public funding to organise historical reenactment on a specific theme.

It is important to bear in mind that, rather than being a purely receptive phenomenon that reflects a specific attitude towards the past, reenactment "is thoroughly performative, shaping perceptions of history affecting cultural and social phenomena, including personal and national identity."[34] Besides being a framework in which knowledge of the past is conveyed, it also appeals to and is experienced by the senses and is performed physi-

cally. The interpretation of the past events being portrayed in historical reenactments also gives people a sense of truth, a kind of knowledge of the past,[35] and may have considerable potential for influencing others by exerting a certain effect on shaping national identity and binding people together.

Selected examples of politicised historical reenactment

Although reenactment can be seen as an expression of a genuine fascination with history, some researchers have noted its politicisation, a phenomenon that can be observed at different levels.[36] Following this line of argument, therefore, historical reenactment should not be regarded as an apolitical movement. The following arguments set out to demonstrate the politicisation of historical reenactments of the prehistoric and early mediaeval periods in Poland. Unavoidably, they are generalisations rather than specific indicators because reenactors themselves are a very heterogeneous group, as are the motives behind their involvement in this activity.

(1) Historical reenactment groups usually aim to recreate the history of the community with which they themselves often identify. In certain situations, their reenactment may have political overtones, especially when they choose to reenact certain interpretations of the history of a certain region or country.[37] Thus this identification is political as it usually involves putting a positive spin on the past of one's own nation and promulgating particular national values, which often leads reenactors to believe that they can make better statements about the past because they come from that past community.[38] It is often connected with an uncritical adoption of concepts combining past ideas of ethnicity (e.g. Slavic, Germanic), language and culture.[39] Belonging to a reenactment group also "offer[s] comradeship as well as identification with past cultures like the Celts, Vikings, Germanic, or Slavic people, who are regularly claimed to be national or at least regional ancestors".[40] Being a specific form of making reference to the past, reenactments thus provide a direct, communal way to bring the past up to date in order to voice in public the need for a shared identity amongst particular groups and individuals.[41]

For instance, groups recreating the period of the early mediaeval period adopt ethnic names related to, for example, the culture of the Slavs (e.g. Bielska Drużyna Najemna 'Svantevit' ("Bielsko Mercenary Squad 'Svantevit'"[42]) or the Vikings (e.g. Nordelag[43])). Meanwhile, Drużyna Wojów Piastowskich 'Jantar' ("Squad of Piast Warriors 'Jantar'") provides a good example of how reenactors relate to and identify themselves with ethnic groups and the culture to which they feel close. On their website, the group declares that:

> [...] just like every other social group, our druzhina is centred around one major, common goal. This goal, and thus the activity aimed at popularising the cultural heritage of our Slavonic and Indo-European ancestors, emerged out of our passion for what over the centuries has become our common property, which defines us and sets us apart from other equally valuable cultures.[44]

Like Jantar, many members of the reenactment movement, especially those focusing on the early mediaeval period, are also adherents of *Rodzimowierstwo*, the "Polish Native Faith", thus combining the recreation of the lives of the old Slavs with recreating their religious practices as spiritual experiences.[45] The Sventowie group provides another illustrative example – they are a brotherhood of reenactors as well as being declared practitioners of *Rodzimowierstwo*. On their website, we learn that:

> SVENTOWIE was originally established as a druzhina of Slavic warriors in 2003. The druzhina's name derives from the adjective SVENTO, which means 'powerful', 'strong'. [...] As a brotherhood, they try to bring the pre-Christian culture of our Slavic ancestors closer to us, both the traditions of the art of warfare and the hardships of everyday life. [...] The group does not exist as a separate brotherhood at present but seeks to bring together the followers of the Slavic native faith who also engage in historical reenactment.[46]

That both aspects, i.e. the interest in reenactment and the conscious reference to Neopagan ideas, interweave in the lives of the group's members would not seem to be accidental. The situation is complicated by the fact that most historical reenactors declare themselves to be apolitical, seeing reenactment as a hobby detached from any patriotic motivations. Another symptomatic aspect that stands in the way of a direct link with patriotism is

the fact that a considerable number of reenactors of the early mediaeval period openly declare themselves to be Neopagans and to reject the Roman Catholic view of Polish history and identity. As Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska writes:

> contemporary Paganism in Poland in its particular manifestations also offers a political ideology that is often related to right-wing nationalism […] The involvement of some Polish Pagans (mostly those with a connection to the native faith) in history and politics is often identified with nationalism, even though the attitudes that Pagans display towards the past, national identity or political ideology are very diverse. For the purposes of the present analysis, however, it is crucial to consider the fact that Pagans have constructed their own visions of national identity. [47]

If they talk about any sense of "Polishness", therefore, then it is about a concept thousands of years old, in other words a Pan-Slavic one. They thus put forward an alternative to the Roman Catholic vision of Polish identity and consequently imply a different understanding of history.

Producing a definitive answer to the question of whether historical reenactment helps to build national identity and maintain patriotism[48] would therefore seem to be no easy task, even if it undoubtedly holds true in many cases. In a 2016 survey of 400 visitors and 204 reenactors conducted by the social research agency Biuro Badań Społecznych Question Mark, respondents identified patriotism as an important element. Asked whether they were proud of being Polish, 68.4 per cent of reenactors answered, "very proud", 26.5 per cent said that they were "fairly proud", and only 3.1 per cent answered "no" (the figures for visitors were 64.4 per cent, 28.7 per cent and 2.8 per cent respectively). Another question related to the most important values in people's lives, to which 24.9 per cent of reenactors answered that they were patriotism and serving their country. When asked "What is the main aim of historical reenactments?", 16.5 per cent of respondents replied that it was to promote patriotism and 14 per cent to promote Poland. Aside from fostering a patriotic attitude, other important motives behind their involvement in reenactment that they cited also included maintaining tradition and honouring their ancestors.[49] Some reenactors

are thus more likely to be guided by a love of and attachment to their homeland and the cultivation of the values and memory of their local history, heritage and the people who inhabited particular regions than they are by any nationalistic or patriotic motivations.

(2) Reenactors form their own subculture within society that is most often based on a positive view of Poland's past and an affirmative approach to the country's history. Thus, they reenact selected events and episodes from the history of their own nation as collective deeds of heroism, glorious events from times past or heroic victories from history. One prime example is the annual reenactment of the 1410 Battle of Grunwald between the troops of the Teutonic Order and the combined armies of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The defeat of the Order is recorded in Polish historiography and in Polish historical memory "as a symbol of the victorious struggle against the threat of German expansion to the East. It is also widely considered the most important battle in Polish medieval history"[50] and a source of pride in belonging to the Polish nation. The reenactment attracts an estimated audience of around 100,000 people every year and the message that it conveys is clear. It features experiences, emotions and knowledge transmitted in an attractive, media-friendly and spectacular way, which undoubtedly serves to strengthen the message being projected.

Another example is the reenactment of the Battle of Cedynia, near the River Oder, which was fought in 972 CE between the army of Poland's first Christian ruler, Mieszko I, and the forces of Hodo I of Lusatia. The battle is held to be one of the first major battles contested by the Polish state (after uniting the various Polish tribes) and resulted in Hodo's army being encircled and defeated. Tasked with justifying the country's post-war borders, contemporary Polish historiographers turned the encounter of 972 into the first mediaeval battle between Poles and Germans. It was lent further mythical weight and harnessed by post-war Polish propaganda to justify the choice of the Oder-Neisse Line as the German-Polish border and turned into a battle between the two nations to underline the doctrine of "eternal German-Polish enmity".[51] Several memorials thus came to be erected near Cedynia, including a 15-metre-tall concrete statue of a Polish eagle atop a sword that looks down over the town and the Oder. Although the propagandistic approach was discarded after the fall of communism in 1989, the battle retained some of its

prominence and features on modern Polish curricula.[52] The memory of the battle is now preserved with an annual festival and reenactments, but some political overtones are still clearly discernible.

Presenting events in a positive light in this way serves to enhance the prestige of the glorious history of one's own nation and drum up interest in it, as can be observed during the Grunwald and Cedynia reenactments. By contrast, past failures and defeats are usually presented as a moral victory over the enemies and as a symbol of heroism and devotion. In many cases, such a way of celebrating national anniversaries and creating historical memory is undoubtedly an expression of the politics of history[53] or "history politics" (*Geschichtspolitik*), which is understood here as an intentional "storytelling", a narration of the past by state institutions. The means to this end are historical narratives that are consciously selected and interpreted. Regardless of the current political system in a country, there is always a purpose behind such narratives, the primary one being a desire to influence the behaviour and attitudes of people so that they make the right political decisions in the future, e.g. in elections. To a certain extent, therefore, the management of history is by its nature inscribed in the process of governing and requires appropriate instruments that are selected and adapted to best suit the current political situation.[54] This aligns with the politics of history (of the Polish state), which should be seen mainly as an element of educating the next generations of Poles and also as a conscious and purposeful activity conducted by the authorities in order to preserve a certain image of the past in society, shaping historical consciousness and strengthening public discourse about the past.

(3) More often than not, participation in a reenactment movement is about not only being together (fellowship) but also sharing a particular ethos and transfer of values. Based on certain components – values, personal patterns, norms or goals – the reenactors construct their identity and lifestyle and lend them legitimacy within particular groups or circles.[55] Involvement in reenactment activities produces certain attitudes in the reenactors that are manifested in their everyday lives (e.g. the knight's or warrior's ethos), especially amongst those who regard reenactment not only as an occasional hobby or a way to make money but also as a way of life.[56] This often takes the form of discovering traditions and re-living stories and related ideas, values and concepts. At the same time, as a kind of "invented tradition" (*sensu*

Hobsbawn and Ranger),[57] historical reenactment is a special form of return to an imagined past.

Participation in reenactment movements and in the spectacles that they put on can serve as a vehicle for transferring not only certain knowledge about the past but also particular values, while at the same time being a manifestation of such values as patriotism, homeland, loyalty, heroism, attachment to one's homeland, respect for tradition, honour, the cult of national or local heroes, the cult of particular personal attitudes, building national and/or local identity, and honouring the memory of one's ancestors. Historical reenactment can thus be seen as a repository of certain norms and values that are fundamental to the preservation of group identities, including national identity, such as how people feel a sense of community by simultaneously experiencing the past and the present with a given event, a person or institution of their own choosing.[58] Although this transfer of values can differ in terms of the individual historical reenactors and members of the audience watching their spectacles, and not all viewers of historical reenactments agree with the interpretation of history they are being presented with, this kind of activity can nevertheless play a significant role in the education process,[59] as it is a fairly appealing way to learn more about the history of one's own country and become more interested in national or local history.

(4) It seems obvious that the increasing popularity of historical reenactment events could not go unnoticed by politicians. As a way of commemorating the past and educating people about it, reenactment is a useful tool from the perspective of various authorities, including such at national level. The most obvious sign and most utilitarian aspect of the politicisation of historical reenactment thus relates to the cooperation of reenactors with politicians and local authorities.

Numerous celebrations and national holidays with a glorious or martyrological character become attractions for locals and tourists alike thanks to reenactments. Demand amongst local communities for this type of activity and the popularisation of history is steadily growing, and local governments are beginning to notice the benefits of promoting their city, municipality or region in this way or because it can help to develop tourism in a given region.[60] Performances of this kind are also welcomed by local communities and local government authorities at municipal or city level as well as by state authorities at the highest level, probably for

Fig. 3   Battle reenactment at the Festival of Slavs and Wikings in Wolin, Poland, 2019.

purely utilitarian reasons such as the benefits of promoting tourism.[61] It is their commercial character that makes them so attractive to a mass audience. Besides attracting a large number of spectators and significant media interest in historical reenactments, their appropriate educational effects can be achieved easily and immediately since they are products that can be implemented anywhere and in almost any setting.

Moreover, local governments and authorities often work as a primary and natural partner of historical reenactors on practical and organisational grounds. This is because every event of this kind requires cooperation with administration in order to, for example, get permission to organise a public event, hold a festival or ensure its security. Local politicians, members of parliament and high-ranking state dignitaries often appear at reenactment festivals or reconstructions of battles, especially when such events are associated with celebrations of important national anniversaries. In addition, they often assume patronage of the reenactment event, raising its profile and thus making it easier to secure sponsors and funding. For instance, the 2018 reenact-

ment of the Battle of Cedynia was held under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland, while the then President Bronisław Komorowski was joined by Polish and foreign dignitaries to watch the reenactment of the Battle of Grunwald on its 600th anniversary in 2010. The event was also given strong support by the Polish state, including the government and President, the National Bank of Poland and public TV stations, while a regular election campaign was conducted in the fields around Grunwald. The 2021 reenactment of the Battle of Grunwald was organised by a number of groups, including the local government of the province of Warmia-Masuria, the Grunwald Foundation, the Battle of Grunwald Museum in Stębark and the National Cultural Center – a government agency forming part of the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.[62]

For political decision-makers in Poland, helping to organise various entertainment events, festivals, open-air concerts, etc. has become the basic means of communicating with their voter base and an opportunity to present themselves as a politician who listens to people and their needs or as a local administrator who is will-

ing to spend money on an event.[63] Although authorities' participation at reenactment events proves that they are seen as highly attractive by the political class, it often provokes a sense of aversion and embarrassment amongst reenactors.[64] They are convinced that politicians actually have minimal interest in their activities and that the true reason for their attendance at reenactment events is the large number of people gathered there – i.e. people who might vote for them.[65] Reenactors often complain about the partnership and are dissatisfied with the amount of financial assistance provided by local government. They are also dismayed that politicians at all levels are only eager to get involved in the final phase of the event, with reenactors unable to count on their help while all the preparations are being done. Another bone of contention between reenactors and politicians is the latter's interference in the staging of reenactment events. This can cause awkward situations if, for example, the schedule for the event has to be changed due to the planned arrival of some VIPs. All these elements often lead many reenactors to feel exploited by politicians and to disassociate themselves somewhat from political parties and their policies.

(5) Finally, the most controversial element that is argued to be the most obvious emblem of the politicisation of reenactment relates to its links to radical right-wing ideologies and nationalist and populist movements, which often use the past and heritage to lend their ideologies legitimacy.[66] It has been observed that reenactment groups connected to right-wing extremists or containing far-right elements of Neopaganism sometimes hold their meetings at open-air museums or archaeological festivals.[67] Besides many successful reenactment ventures based on cooperation, therefore, there are others where the reenactors display problematic political views and dubious political or other symbols.[68] In Poland – as Ralf Hoppadietz and Karin Reichenbach point out – "dark alliances of this type also seem to have emerged. […] Suffice it to say that the swastika sign in all its different shapes is quite popular among Polish reenactors, too. Especially an eight-armed, doubled swastika, sometimes called *kolovrat*, is believed to be an ancient Slavic pagan symbol".[69]

Alliances between reenactors and nationalistic and right-wing extremists are often picked up on by the press and media. In 2017, for example, the German weekly *Der Spiegel* published an article entitled "Neonazis unter Nordmännern"[70] ("Neo-Nazis amongst

Northmen") that complained that the annual Festival of Slavs and Vikings in Wolin, held since 1993, attracts neo-Nazis. Its authors – Maik Baumgärtner and Max Holscher – observed the participation of "right-wing extremist" parties and their supporters from all over Europe. For example, the authors highlighted swastika symbols (present on shields, clothes, banners or pieces of jewellery worn by reenactors or sold as souvenirs), which they regarded as being associated with neo-Nazi organisations and promoting Nazism. They also emphasised the fact that many visitors to the festival were dressed in "extreme right-wing clothing brands" such as Thor Steinar or were tattooed with Nazi symbols. The authors of the article also indicated a degree of acceptance of neo-Nazis amongst certain of those in power. In their opinion, Poland's conservative right-wing government (i.e. the Law and Justice party) accepted and tolerated the organisation of such events. They bemoaned the fact that this was on show during the event, which had been financed by the museum and with public money and where visitors could reasonably expect historical accuracy and authenticity.

An article striking a fairly similar tone was published in 2016 by the Polish anti-fascist magazine *Nigdy Więcej* ("Never Again"), entitled "Pomiędzy festynem a zlotem nazistów – Festiwal Wikingów w Wolinie" ("Between a festival and a Nazi reunion: the festival of Vikings in Wolin"). It likewise pointed out the increased presence of Nazi symbolism at Wolin, something that had been observed by both reenactors and visitors to the festival. The article ended with these words:

> Given the atmosphere saturated with masculinity, fighting and anti-modernism, it is not surprising that Wolin has long been a meeting place for fanatics of 'real' Vikings and Slavs from all over Europe. The swastikas displayed everywhere are an additional attraction for the extreme right.[71]

A reader unfamiliar with the topic might get the impression that the festival in Wolin is nothing other than a meeting place for neo-Nazis and ultranationalists. This would be something of an exaggeration, as it overlooks the fact that, as a key part of the work done by the Slavs and Vikings' Center Wolin – Jomsborg – Vineta, its Wolin festival aims to share knowledge about and raise awareness of the past lives of Slavs and Vikings by presenting everyday life, workshops and shows to the gen-

eral public (fig. 3). However, the presence of these decidedly politically charged symbols and these images of history with no grounding in scientific fact and their impact on the public must not be neglected. It is especially alarming because they are visible to a wide audience and can easily slip into the cultural mainstream.[72] Thus open-air museums and other institutions that provide their facilities as a stage for reenactment events must act to "supervise such performances and offer dialogue with performers and the audience in order to prevent the perpetuation of narrow-minded conceptions of history that invite comparisons with extreme right-wing views".[73]

Conclusion

As far as the reenactment of prehistoric and early mediaeval events is concerned, historical reenactment is not an apolitical phenomenon in Poland. Since reenactment performs a political and cultural role, there are numerous political elements to it and thus a statement about its politicisation can thus be made. Although clearly not absent, it is not as omnipresent or evident as in reenactments of events related to World War II or later military conflicts, which have strong links to political history as an element of the creation of national visions of the past, something for which historical reenactment is a very efficient medium for conveying relevant messages.

Despite many reenactors having no direct links to politics and many reenactment groups adopting an apolitical stance, they inevitably operate within the sphere of politics, including policy-making at national government level. Consequently, most reenactment performers are not devoid of any political or religious ambitions, be this their identity or political orientation, their sense of political or religious mission, their patriotism, their veneration of their ancestors or whatever. It is an unavoidable consequence of an obvious fact that politics is not just confined to government but is practiced everywhere in a society. As such, every action that takes place in the public sphere is unavoidably political and inseparable from politics in a broad sense. Although many reenactment associations claim political indifference, therefore, the ideas, knowledge or the image of the past that they propose will have clear political implications, whether or not this is intentional.

References

1   Some of the ideas presented in this article have been published elsewhere – cf. Pawleta, Michał, "*Theatrum Archaeologicum*: Staging the Past via Archaeological Fêtes and Historical Reenactment", *Sprawozdania Archeologiczne*, 69 (2017), pp. 33–53; Pawleta, Michał, "Historical Re-enactment as a New Form of Contemporary People's Relation to the Past", *Sprawozdania Archeologiczne*, 70 (2018), pp. 147–167.

2   Radtchenko, Daria, "Simulating the Past: Reenactment and the Quest for Truth in Russia", *Rethinking History*, 10/1 (2006), pp. 127–148; Bogacki, Michał, "Wybrane problemy odtwórstwa wczesnośredniowiecznego w Polsce", in Bogacki, Michał, Franz, Maciej, and Pilarczyk, Zbigniew (eds.), *Kultura ludów Morza Bałtyckiego, t. II. Nowożytność i współczesność*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2008, pp. 219–269; Bogacki, Michał, "Wżywanie' się w przeszłość – odtwórstwo historyczne a nauka", in Obremski, Krzysztof, and Wenta, Jarosław (eds.), *Recepcja kultury średniowiecznej w humanistyce*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2010, pp. 153–196; Bogacki, Michał, "O współczesnym 'ożywianiu' przeszłości – charakterystyka odtwórstwa historycznego", *Turystyka Kulturowa*, 5 (2010), pp. 4–27; McCalman, Iain, and Pickering, Paul A. (eds.), *Historical Reenactment. From Realism to the Affective Turn*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; Szlendak, Tomasz, Nowiński, Jacek, Olechnicki, Krzysztof, Karwacki, Arkadiusz, and Burszta, Wojciech J., *Dziedzictwo w akcji. Rekonstrukcja historyczna jako sposób uczestnictwa w kulturze*, Warsaw: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2012; Górewicz, Igor, *Mieczem pisane: odtwórcologia*, Szczecin: Triglav, 2013; Kobiałka, Dawid, "The Mask(s) and Transformers of Historical Re-enactment. Material Culture and Contemporary Vikings", *Current Swedish Archaeology*, 21 (2013), pp. 141–161; Kobiałka, Dawid, "Archaeology and Communication with the Public: Archaeological Open-air Museums and Historical Re-enactment in Action", *European Journal of Postclassical Archaeologies*, 4 (2014), pp. 359–376; Van der Plaetsen, Peter, "When the Past Comes to Life", in Egberts, Linde, and Bosma, Koos (eds.), *Companion to European Heritage Revivals*, Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht, London: Springer Open, 2014, pp. 151–166; Olechnicki, Krzysztof, Szlendak, Tomasz, and Karwacki, Arkadiusz, *Grupy rekonstrukcji historycznej. Edukacja i konsumowanie przeszłości*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2016; Baraniecka-Olszewska, Kamila, *Reko-rekonesans: praktyka autentyczności. Antropologiczne studium odtwórstwa historycznego drugiej wojny światowej w Polsce*, Kęty: Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki, 2018; Agnew, Vanessa, Lamb, Jonathan, and Tomann, Julianne (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies*, London, New York: Routledge, 2020; Olechnicki, Krzysztof, and Szlendak, Tomasz, "Historical Re-Enactment in Poland: Between Faithfulness to History and the Imperative of Spectacularity", *Polish Sociological Review*, 209 (2020), pp. 3–21; Baraniecka-Olszewska, Kamila, *World War II Historical Reenactment in Poland: The Practice of Authenticity*, London, New York: Routledge, 2022.

3   Szajewski, Tomasz, *Konno w boju: od czasów antycznych do schyłku średniowiecza*, Warsaw: Agencja Wydawnicza Egros, 2005, p. 55.

4   Bogacki, "Wybrane problemy", p. 222: "[...] zbiór działań polegających na wizualnej prezentacji różnego rodzaju dziedzin życia człowieka w przeszłości przez osoby przebrane w stroje i posługujące się przedmiotami nawiązującymi (replikami lub rzadziej rekonstrukcjami) do wybranej epoki, względnie nawet oryginalnymi zabytkami".

5   Regiewicz, Adam, *Mediewalizm wobec zjawisk audiowizualnych i nowych mediów*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2014, p. 178.

6   Dean, David, "Living history", in Agnew, Vanessa, Lamb, Jonathan, and Tomann, Juliane (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies*, London, New York: Routledge, 2020, pp. 120–124.

7   Bogacki, "O współczesnym 'ożywianiu'", p. 17; Kwiatkowski, Piotr T., *Pamięć zbiorowa społeczeństwa polskiego w okresie transformacji*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2008, pp. 110–185.

8   Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa*, p. 113.

9   Regiewicz, Adam, "Rekonstrukcje historyczne jako edutainment. Przypadek powstania styczniowego", *Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie*, 13 (2013), pp. 87–104 (p. 91).

10   Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa*, pp. 112–113; Skórzyńska, Izabela, *Widowiska przeszłości: alternatywne polityki pamięci (1989–2009)*, Poznań: Instytut Historii UAM, 2010, p. 195; Baraniecka-Olszewska, Kamila, "Naprzód do przeszłości! Rekonstrukcje historyczne między historią a teraźniejszością", *Etnografia Polska,* 59/1–2 (2015), pp. 87–96 (pp. 87–88).

11   Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa*, p. 11.

12   Wolański, Filip, "The Historical Reenactment Movement in Poland and Its Specificity", in Wojdon, Joanna (ed.), *Public History in Poland*, London, New York: Routledge, 2021, pp. 218–231 (p. 222).

13   Burszta, Wojciech J., "Teraz i wtedy. Tożsamość nasycana imitacją przeszłości", in Szlendak, Tomasz, Nowiński, Jacek, Olechnicki, Krzysztof, Karwacki, Arkadiusz, and Burszta, Wojciech J., *Dziedzictwo w akcji. Rekonstrukcja historyczna jako sposób uczestnictwa w kulturze*, Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2012, pp. 143–157 (p. 153).

14   Biuro Badań Społecznych Question Mark, *Grupy rekonstrukcji historycznych – działania oddolne na rzecz krzewienia kultury narodowej. Raport z badań*, Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2016 <https://www.nck.pl/badania/raporty/raport-grupy-rekonstrukcji-historycznych-dzialania-oddolne-na-rzecz-krzewienia-> [accessed 21 April 2022].

15   Wolański, "The Historical Reenactment", p. 218.

16   Wolański, "The Historical Reenactment", p. 222.

17   Szpociński, Andrzej, "Widowiska przeszłości. Pamięć jako wydarzenie", in Hałas, Elżbieta (ed.), *Kultura jako pamięć. Posttradycjonalne znaczenie przeszłości*, Kraków: Nomos, 2012, pp. 63–75.

18   Kobiałka, "The Mask(s) and Transformers".

19   Olechnicki and Szlendak, "Historical Re-Enactment in Poland", p. 8; cf. Szlendak, Tomasz, "Wehrmacht nie macha. Rekonstrukcyjna codzienność jako sposób zanurzenia w kulturze", in Szlendak, Tomasz, Nowiński, Jacek, Olechnicki, Krzysztof, Karwacki, Arkadiusz and, Burszta, Wojciech J., *Dziedzictwo w akcji. Rekonstrukcja historyczna jako sposób uczestnictwa w kulturze*, Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2012, pp. 7–70 (pp. 13–22).

20   Pawleta, Michał, *Przeszłość we współczesności. Studium metodologiczne archeologicznie kreowanej przeszłości w przestrzeni społecznej*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2016, p. 265.

21   Kula, Marcin, "Historia wyszła na ulice", *Historia i Kultura*, 53/3 (2009), pp. 3–15.

22   De Grott, Jerome, *Consuming History. Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*, London, New York: Routledge, 2009.

23   Hoppadietz, Ralf, and Reichenbach, Karin, "In Honor of the Forefathers – Archaeological Reenactment between History Appropriation and Ideological Mission. The Case of Ulfhednar", in Agnew, Vanessa, Tomann, Julianne, and Stach, Sabine (eds.), *Renactment Case Studies. Global Perspectives on Experiential History*, London, New York: Routledge, 2023, pp. 77–104 (p. 80).

24   Karwacki, Arkadiusz, "Rycerstwo między komercją a integracją. Analiza wielowymiarowych efektów funkcjonowania grup odtworzeniowych", in Szlendak, Tomasz, Nowiński, Jacek, Olechnicki, Krzysztof, Karwacki, Arkadiusz, and Burszta, Wojciech J., *Dziedzictwo w akcji. Rekonstrukcja historyczna jako sposób uczestnictwa w kulturze,* Warsaw: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2012, pp. 111–140.

25   Szajewski, *Konno w boju*, p. 55.

26   Szczecińska-Musielak, Ewa, "Odgrywanie powrotów do przeszłości w rekonstrukcjach historycznych", in Rancew-Sikora, Dorota, Woroniecka, Grażyna and Obracht-Prondzyński, Cezary (eds.), *Kreacje i nostalgie. Antropologiczne spojrzenie na tradycje w nowoczesnych kontekstach*, Warszawa: Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne, 2009, pp. 209–218 (p. 211).

27   Agnew, Vanessa, "History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and its Work in the Present", *Rethinking History*, 11/3 (2007), pp. 299–312 (p. 327).

28   Baraniecka-Olszewska, Kamila, "On the Performative Power of Stereotypes: WWII Historical Reenactment and National Identities", *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes*, 57/1–4 (2019), pp. 51–61 (p. 52). Cf. also Baraniecka-Olszewska, *Reko-rekonesans: praktyka autentyczności*; Baraniecka-Olszewska, *World War II Historical Reenactment in Poland*.

29   Zürn, Michael, "The Politicization of World Politics and Its Effects: Eight Propositions", *European Political Science Review*, 6/1 (2014), pp. 47–71 (p. 50).

30   Schmid-Petri, Hannah, "Politicization of Science: How Climate Change Skeptics Use Experts and Scientific Evidence in Their Online Communication", *Climatic Change*, 145 (2017), pp. 523–537 (p. 525).

31   Zürn, "The Politicization of World Politics", p. 51.

32   Schmid-Petri, "Politicization of Science", p. 525.

33   Baraniecka-Olszewska, "On the Performative Power", p. 53.

34   Baraniecka-Olszewska, "On the Performative Power", pp. 51–52.

35   Baraniecka-Olszewska, "On the Performative Power", pp. 58–59.

36   West, Brad, "Historical Re-enacting and Affective Authority: Performing the American Civil War", *Annals of Leisure Research*, 17/2 (2014), pp. 161–179.

37   Szczecińska-Musielak, "Odgrywanie powrotów", p. 211.

38   Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "In Honor of the Forefathers", p. 80 and 98.

39   Hoppadietz, Ralf, and Reichenbach, Karin, "Nationalist Appropriations of Open-Air Museums and Prehistory Re-Enactment in Germany and Poland: Past and Current Trends of the Politicisation of Archaeological Heritage", in Kusek, Robert, and Purchla, Jacek (eds.), *Heritage and Society*, Kraków: International Cultural Centre, 2019, pp. 207–232 (p. 230).

40   Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "Nationalist Appropriations", p. 231.

41   Skórzyńska, *Widowiska przeszłości*, p. 7.

42   Cf. <http://svantevit.eu/> [accessed 21 April 2022].

43   Cf. <http://nordelag.org/> [accessed 21 April 2022].

44   "[...] jak każdą chyba grupę społeczną charakteryzuje swoisty łącznik skupiający jej członków wokół jednego, przewodniego celu. Cel ten, a więc działalność na rzecz popularyzowania spuścizny kulturowej naszych słowiańskich i indoeuropejskich przodków wyłonił się na podstawie zamiłowania do tego co na przestrzeni wieków stało się naszą wspólną własnością określającą i wyróżniającą nas spośród innych równie wartościowych kultur", <http://livehist.blogspot.com/p/wczesne-sredniowiecze-do-xi-wieku.html> [accessed 21 April 2022].

45   Simpson, Scott, "Polish Rodzimowierstwo: Strategies for (Re)Constructing a Movement", in Aitamurto, Kaarina, and Simpson, Scott (eds.), *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, Durham: Acumen, 2013, pp. 112–127 (p. 118); Simpson, Scott, "Only the Slavic Gods: Nativeness in Polish *rodzimowierstwo*", in Rountree, Kathryn (ed.), *Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Modern Paganism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 65–86.

46   "SVENTOWIE pierwotnie jako drużyna wojów słowiańskich powołana została do istnienia w 2003 roku. Drużyna miano swe wywodzi od przymiotnika SVENTO~ co oznacza mocny, silny. [...] Jako bractwo starają się przybliżyć przedchrześcijańską kulturę naszych słowiańskich przodków; zarówno tradycje sztuki wojennej jak i trudy dnia codziennego. [...] Obecnie grupa nie stanowi fizycznie istniejącego, odrębnego bractwa lecz stara się zrzeszać rodzimowierców słowiańskich, jednocześnie czynnie zajmujących się historycznym odtwórstwem", <https://www.facebook.com/SVENTOWIE/> [accessed 21 April 2022].

47   Baraniecka-Olszewska, Kamila, "The State Historical Policy and the Default Religious Heritage in Poland: On Introducing Pagan Heritage to the Public Sphere in Kraków", *Etnografia Polska*, 63/1–2 (2019), pp. 155–168 (p. 164).

48   Regiewicz, "Rekonstrukcje historyczne", p. 103.

49   Biuro Badań Społecznych Question Mark, *Grupy rekonstrukcji history-cznych*, p. 67.

50   Wolański, "The Historical Reenactment", p. 220.

51   Samp, Mariusz, *Bitwa pod Cedynią: wielkie zwycięstwo polskiego oręża*, Warszawa: Lira Wydawnictwo, 2022.

52   Gerstenberg, Julia, and Migdalski, Paweł, "Cedynia: eine unschein-bare Stadt am Rande Polens, die alle Polen kennen", in Vogenbeck, Bernd, Tomann, Julianne, and Abraham-Diefenbach, Magda (eds.), *Terra Trans-oderana: zwischen Neumark und Ziemia Lubuska*, Berlin: Be.bra Wissen-schaftsverlag, 2008, pp. 79–85 (pp. 82–83).

53   Wolański, "The Historical Reenactment", p. 228.

54   Kącka, Katarzyna, "Polityka historyczna: kreatorzy, narzędzia, mecha-nizmy działania – przykład Polski", in Kącka, Katarzyna, Piechowiak-Lam-parska, Joanna, and Ratke-Majewska, Anna (eds.), *Narracje pamięci: między polityką a historią*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2015, pp. 59–80 (p. 59).

55   Szczecińska-Musielak, "Odgrywanie powrotów", p. 217.

56   Nowaczyk, Szymon, "Odtwórstwo historyczne jako forma populary-zacji archeologii", in Nowaczyk, Szymon, Grossman, Anna, and Piotrowski, Wojciech, *IV Sprawozdanie Biskupińskie*, Biskupin: Muzeum Archeologiczne, 2016, pp. 371–378.

57   Hobsbawn, Eric, and Ranger, Terence (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

58   Kurczewska, Joanna, "Dwa spotkania międzykulturowe – przedsta-wienia i konteksty", *Górnośląskie Studia Socjologiczne. Seria Nowa*, 6 (2015), pp. 28–55 (p. 38).

59   Markowski, Szymon, "Rekonstrukcje historyczne w wychowaniu młodzieży", *Zeszyty Naukowe WSOWL*, 1/51 (2009), pp. 68–81.

60   Wolański, "The Historical Reenactment", p. 225.

61   Wolański, "The Historical Reenactment", p. 228.

62   Wolański, "The Historical Reenactment", p. 223.

63   Olechnicki and Szlendak, "Historical Re-Enactment in Poland", p. 12.

64   Szlendak, "Wehrmacht nie macha", p. 37.

65   Karwacki, "Rycerstwo między komercją a integracją", p. 124.

66   Niklasson, Elisabeth, and Hølleland, Herdis, "The Scandinavian Far-right and the New Politicisation of Heritage", *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 18 (2018), pp. 121–148.

67   Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "Nationalist Appropriations", pp. 217–222.

68   Banghard, Karl, *Nazis im Wolfspelz*: *Germanen und der Rechte Rand*, Oerlinghausen: Archäologisches Freilichtmuseum Oerlinghausen, 2016, pp. 3–10.

69   Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "Nationalist Appropriations", p. 229.

70   Cf. <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/polen-im-wikinger-tr-eff-in-wolin-mischen-sich-neonazis-unter-nordmaenner-a-1160934.html> [accessed 21 April 2022].

71   Nowak, Rafał, "Pomiędzy festynem a zlotem nazistów – Festiwal Wikingów w Wolinie", *Nigdy Więcej*, 22 (2016) <https://www.nigdywiecej. org/pdf/pl/pismo/22/pomiedzy_festynem_a_zlotem_nazistow.pdf> [accessed 21 April 2022]: "W obliczu atmosfery przesyconej męskością, walą i antymodernizmem nie dziwi, że Wolin od dłuższego czasu jest miej-scem spotkań fanatyków 'prawdziwych' Wikingów i Słowian z całej Europy. Wszechobecnie eksponowane swastyki stanowią dodatkową atrakcję dla skrajnej prawicy."

72   Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "In Honor of the Forefathers", p. 81.

73   Hoppadietz and Reichenbach, "In Honor of the Forefathers", p. 98.

Eastern Hate

Antisemitism and the Development of Polish Black Metal

Ryan Buesnel

The historiographical emphasis on Norway as the birthplace of the so-called "Second Wave of Black Metal" risks overshadowing the contributions of other countries to the formation of the genre.[1] As musical and ideological innovations were taking place throughout Norway an equally vibrant black metal scene was emerging in Poland. From its earliest inceptions, Polish black metal reflected a musical aesthetic that set it apart from its Norwegian contemporaries. Although operating within the general musical and thematic framework of Norwegian black metal, Polish bands such as Taranis and Graveland contributed a sonic intensity and rawness that was distinctive. Moreover, many musicians within the Polish black metal community added to its contextual uniqueness through their incorporation of Slavic themes within their lyrics and melodic structures. However, from its foundational years in the early 1990s, many Polish black metal bands also evidenced a preoccupation with National Socialism and far-right ideologies. While these themes were also present in some strands of Norwegian black metal (i.e. Varg Vikernes and Burzum), their intensity and prevalence within Polish black metal suggest something more than mere flirtation or shock tactics. It is the ongoing presence of such ideologies in the evolution of Polish black metal that points to a more systemic and cultural issue that has, thus far, largely eluded closer scholarly scrutiny.

Black metal historian Dayal Patterson describes Polish black metal bands Graveland (fig. 1) and Behemoth as two of the most influential groups to emerge from within the black metal movement – a view that acknowledges the significance of Poland as a major contributor to black metal history. Yet despite its influence and notoriety, it remains comparatively rare to find scholarly treatments which explicitly deal with Polish black metal as a self-contained context within black metal historiography. The following chapter situates National Socialist-associated Polish black metal in its historical environment, beginning with the early 1990s movement the Temple of Fullmoon – an association of black metal musicians and bands that became more politically radicalized over time. It next analyses emerging trends within the contemporary Polish black metal scene and explores potential evidence of networking and collaboration. Finally, I will discuss the concepts of misanthropy and hyper-individuality, and question whether these aspects of black metal philosophy help enable the ongoing association of National Socialism, antisemitism, and other forms of extremism within the broader scene.

Political context and the Temple of Fullmoon

In his study of the history of antisemitism within Poland in the post-Holocaust era, Leo Cooper notes that the relative absence of Jews within Poland since 1968 has led to the phenomenon of "antisemitism without Jews". According to Cooper, while three and a half million Jews lived in Poland before the war, approximately five to ten thousand remained as of the year 2000.[2] The absence of a significant Jewish presence within Poland meant that antisemitic attitudes remained unchallenged and tended to reinforce historic myths associated with a global conspiracy of Jewish economic dominance.[3]

Such antisemitic feelings saw a resurgence in the period following the collapse of Communism in 1989. In 1995, the Polish journalist Jerzy Turowicz wrote an article for the nationwide newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza discussing what he believed to be an increasing tolerance toward antisemitism in Polish society. For Turowicz, antisemitism operated within a generally accepted rubric of beliefs and attitudes that, while often unspoken, was nevertheless discernible in the ebb and flow of everyday life:

> Antisemitism or more precisely anti-Jewishness lies slumbering in the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviour of the so-called man in the street. What we are witnessing today is not only antisemitism but a general tolerance of its symptoms.[4]

Fig. 1   Graveland live at Kolovorot Festival in Kyiv, Ukraine, in 2017.

As Turowicz understood it, antisemitism within Polish society had become pervasive enough for it to be considered mainstream, rather than the proclivity of an extreme minority. Certainly, the issue of antisemitism within Poland had been one vigorously debated throughout the 1980s – debates made more complex amid ongoing internal political conflicts. As Kostanty Gebert writes, the accusation that antisemitism continued to plague Poland came largely from the international Jewish community rather than internal protest.[5] In response to such claims, representatives from the Polish government tended to downplay the issue, while members of Poland's Jewish community sat on the fence. Formal groups and associations arose within the Polish United Worker's Party (PZPR) and its oppositional forces that sought to address the perceived undermining of Polish society via Jewish influence. One such organization was Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne "Grunwald" ("Patriotic Union 'Grunwald'"), which had its origins in the PZPR.[6] Such groups frequently emphasized zealous nationalism with an attendant antisemitism as a core element of their platform.

Turowicz made his observation with the benefit of some hindsight: Communism had fallen in 1989, and yet the past five years had continued witnessing a rise in antisemitic activity, particularly in the political arena. In 1990, clear signs of emboldened antisemitic sentiment were felt when Warsaw's Umschlagplatz Holocaust memorial was defaced with the slogan "a good Jew is a dead Jew". Response to this crime was lukewarm at best. Although the government Minister Aleksander Hall had expressed disgust at the act and pledged police protection for Jewish memorial sites, this failed to materialize. As Konstanty Gebert observes in his analysis of antisemitic sentiment surrounding the 1990 presidential elections, the repair of the site was mired in bureaucratic stagnation and attempts to minimize the significance of the attack.[7]

The flames of antisemitic feeling were further stoked in political debates leading up to the presidential elections of 1990. Campaigning for the presidentship under the slogan "I don't want to, but I have to", the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Lech Wałęsa attracted controversy for his opening speech to the Citizen's Committee on 12 June. In it, Wałęsa expressed a degree of concern toward new members of the government who were of Jewish origin, a view he supplanted with a paranoid call for Polish Jews to publicly declare themselves – as if there existed a covert ploy for Jewish domination through subterfuge.[8] Despite the controversy his tactless language attracted, Wałęsa would ultimately win the presidential elections and serve in this role from 1990–1995, a period which coincided with some of the most formative activity in the Polish black metal scene. Wałęsa's term as president was marked by further tensions concerning Polish and Jewish relations, as documented by Peggy Simpson.[9]

Such was the unsettled political and cultural environment in which Polish black metal music evolved. While Norway has been referred to as the "spiritual home" of black metal,[10] Poland's role has tended to be overlooked within the scholarly literature. One potential reason for this is that what one finds in the early examples of Polish black metal is an alignment with racial and political themes that were not as consistently present in the Norwegian context. Indeed, Michelle Phillipov observes that aside from a few violent incidents that occurred in the Norwegian scene in the early 1990s, much of its ongoing development has been relatively benign.[11] The example of political extremism in Polish black metal, however, raises a different set of questions as to whether the Norwegian example can truly be considered sufficient to define the thematic and ideological content of the genre. In a contemporary scene often anxious to disavow any foundational links between black metal and far-right extremism, this reality can be disconcerting.

Early records produced within the Polish scene reinforce such links. In 1995, the band Fullmoon released *United Aryan Evil*, which opens with the instrumental Aryans Ride over Falling Israel.[12] The original cover art features a group of young men parading down a local street holding an eagle and swastika flag standard while performing the Sieg heil salute. Such public explicit endorsement of National Socialism was rarely matched by their Norwegian contemporaries. In 1994, the Wod-

Fig. 2   A 1918 depiction of the Slavic god Veles in the form of a Wolf. Gray, Louis H., *The Mythology of All Races*, Vol. 3, Boston: Marshall Jones, 1918.

zisław Śląski band Veles released their debut demo titled *Triumph of Pagan Beliefs* on the label Dead Christ Commune.[13] The reference to the Slavic God in the band's name pointed to the growing individuation of the Polish scene as self-contained, and one which saw redemptive value in the evocation of Slavic Pagan mythology as an antidote to the crisis of modern existence (fig. 2). Veles remain an important band in the history of Polish black metal whose lyrics expressed a desire to revert to a glorified version of a Pagan past. This vision of the past was contrasted with the contemporary world, which was mired in materialism and racial intermixing. The song Millennium of Disgrace from their 1997 full-length album *Black Hateful Metal* captured something of this idea:

Where's your pride, White man?
Has the cross veiled your eyes?

Loyalty is our honour – loyalty to blood
Awake, Aryan, and handle the sword
The time has now come
Thousands of years of disgrace to erase![14]

Similar to their Norwegian counterparts, Veles decried the influence of Christianity due to its historical expansionism that was perceived as causing the forced demise of local cultures and religions. Yet the frequent admonitions to remain loyal to one's blood reflect an intensified focus on the role of race as determinative in the struggle for national existence.[15] This is especially clear in the allusion to the SS mantra "Meine Ehre heisst Treue" ("My Honour is Loyalty"), which links the contemporary struggle for Polish emancipation with that undertaken by Himmler's "black corps".[16]

Other notable examples within the early to mid-1990s that displayed an affinity for nationalistic and racial themes include Thor's Hammer, Legion, Kataxu, and Capricornus – many of whom shared members. The first demo cassette produced by solo project Capricornus in 1995 is a particularly egregious demonstration of antisemitic vitriol set within the familiar call to a glorified Pagan past. In the song Blut und Ehre ("Blood and Honour"), Capricornus suggests that the modern world had lost all its spiritual values due to the machinations of an international Jewish conspiracy. Despite what seems like an irreversible decline into materialism and decadence, Capricornus maintains that a faithful remnant "from the heart of the Aryan tribe" will usher in a new world order:

The nation heard Wotan's voice!
The warrior's ethic has been reborn!
Blood and honor is our motto

The recordings associated with the Capricornus project are undoubtedly some of the most overt displays of pro-Nazi sentiment in the Polish black metal canon. Later in the same song, the Waffen SS are praised for their sacrifices in battle:

Brave and young were the warriors in black uniforms
In Russia's snow as in the heat of Africa

They sacrificed their lives for the greatest of all ideas,
The elite of the great nation, SS- pride of Wotan!

Vikings of the modern world, invisible force…
They shed their Aryan blood with honor and pride
Jewish lies can never cover the truth in our hearts …
We praise the mighty SS, last defenders of our race![17]

The aforementioned examples are not intended to suggest all Polish black metal was exclusively racial or nationalist in origin. They do, however, demonstrate certain consistency of emphasis that should not be overlooked in the historiography of black metal. Not only were individual bands and musicians giving expression to the necessity of cultural and racial restoration, but such ideas were achieving collective representation via loosely organized networks. One way this was manifest was through the formation of the so-called Temple of Fullmoon – a cooperative of musicians who, at least initially, shared similar views surrounding the intersection of black metal and far-right politics.[18] Founded by musician Jacek "Venom" Szczepański of Kutno band Xantotol, the Temple of Fullmoon has been compared to Norway's "The Black Circle", although the two associations had a different emphasis despite some aesthetic similarities.[19] The two artists most commonly associated with this short-lived organisation are Robert "Rob Darken" Fudali of Graveland and Adam "Nergal" Darski of Behemoth. Both are responsible for some of the most influential recordings in Polish black metal history, although Darski would eventually dissociate from the group allegedly due to its emerging right-wing political agenda.

Darken, who has since sought to de-emphasize his earlier antisemitic statements, was a key figure in the Temple of Fullmoon.[20] As late as 2003 he would state that "I am a Pagan and I hate Christianity, Jews, and others that would like to destroy my Pagan identity."[21] Reflecting on its history, Darken describes the years 1995–1997 as particularly troublesome for those associated with the group, including false accusations of murder and church burnings. Under growing pressure from the government and police, the movement disbanded. During a gathering in Szklarska Poręba in 1995, the police conducted arrests of its members and confiscated many of its resources.[22] As a result, the authorities were able

to gain valuable information as to the networking activities of extremists associated with the Polish black metal scene. After the arrests, the majority of those formerly involved went their separate ways, however, a remnant of those devoted to its beliefs remained, with Darken praising these individuals for their ideological steadfastness in the face of external pressure:

> At that time many people that were too weak to deal with such problems left the underground, and others disassociated themselves from us. But those who stayed in the underground despite all difficulties and danger are now stronger and very valuable for neo-Pagan movements.[23]

Despite such optimism, the influence of the Temple of Fullmoon would eventually wane. In 2007, Raborym from Wrocław band Dark Fury indicated that the movement was a "song of the past." Nevertheless, he also maintained that during its most influential period, the Temple of Fullmoon spread "real terror" throughout their community.[24] Actions undertaken included spraying swastikas and racial slogans throughout their city, as well as defacing a local Synagogue. A 1994 interview with musician Capricornus also alludes to possible church burnings, although these are not directly attributed to Temple of Fullmoon members.[25]

It is difficult for outside commentators to glean a true insight into the scope and activities of this movement, as the majority of source material documenting this period stems from a limited range of interviews with the bands involved. Because of this, the act of determining fact from idealized myth is a complex endeavour. Unlike the activities of the so-called Norwegian "Black Circle", the Temple of Fulllmoon did not garner extensive international coverage in the media, further complicating the quest to obtain an external account of its history. It is difficult to speculate as to why this might be the case, although it is certainly possible that due to the history of antisemitism within Poland, the ideology of the Temple of Fullmoon did not appear as especially outlandish or transgressive. By 2017, the European Jewish Congress observed that antisemitism had continued to permeate "many layers of Jewish society," and that in the preceding year no senior government official had met with representatives of the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland.[26] Against this historical development, one cannot but wonder whether the

thought-world inhabited by groups like the Temple of Fullmoon was especially unique. It is also noteworthy that, at least initially, the movement valued its hermetic exclusivity. In general, its members did not actively court press coverage in the same way as figures like Varg Vikernes.[27]

Instead of attempting to outline a rigorous historiography of this period, the interpretation of this movement should focus on how the memory of the Temple of Fullmoon functions in the minds of those involved. A recurring element in the available interviews is an appeal to this era as the symbol of a time in which the spiritual essence of black metal was at its most pure. As Darken recalls: All that is left are the memories full of emotions and adventure... all failures and misfortunes are not able to stop the longing for those years.[28]

In stating this, the artists frequently contrast the "purity" of the early movement with the commercialized, politically correct trajectory of the genre in later years, which often sees concerts cancelled due to the perceived far-right sympathies of musicians.[29] This, it is believed, represents a betrayal of the original transgressive ethos of black metal.[30] The ongoing significance of the Temple of Fullmoon and its associated bands within Polish black metal history is that it can serve as a barometer against which the legitimacy of emerging black metal bands is measured. As Darken put it back in 1996, "the only true black metal bands in Poland belong to the Temple of Fullmoon."[31] As much as the passing of time may have matured the outlook of many of the musicians involved, aspects of this sentiment continue to be expressed in contemporary Polish black metal discourse.

Emerging trends in Polish black metal

A 2014 study undertaken by Marek Kucia, Marta Duch-Dyngosz, and Mateusz Magierowski suggests that while Jews remain largely absent in contemporary Poland, antisemitic attitudes persist.[32] Such attitudes continue to derive from historic myths and stereotypes that go largely unchallenged in the absence of significant Jewish representation that could offer a counter-narrative. The authors draw attention to several factors that influence the formation and intensity of antisemitic positions, namely "insufficient education, lack of interest and a desire to learn about the history and culture of

others, lack of inter-group contact, and the stereotypes present in daily life".[33] Such attitudes and beliefs still have the potential to cross over into violence. According to the Never Again association, over 600 cases of hate crimes and hate speech occurred in 2011–2012.[34] Interestingly, Rafał Pankowski and Marcin Kornak note that the majority of these crimes do not occur against minorities (e.g. Jews), but against political opponents, homosexuals, and smaller religious organisations.[35] Much of this agitation is in response to nationalist debates about ethnicity and Polish identity, according to which being a true Pole means being Catholic. This demonstrates a certain irony, in that while figures such as Rob Darken from Graveland could bemoan the ongoing influence of the Catholic church in Poland, it was Catholicism itself that was contributing to Poland's antisemitic climate.[36] In this sense, at least, there was a vague commonality.

Pankowski describes Polish black metal as "the main cultural resource for the contemporary extreme-right neopagan movement."[37] As of 2005, Christian Dornbusch and Hans-Peter Killguss also noted a resurgence of nationalistic and racist black metal within Poland. This was observed in the lyrical themes and imagery of bands such as Selbstmord, Antisemitex, and Othar, amongst others.[38] While a somewhat cartoonish infatuation with the pageantry and ideological world of National Socialism still exists in some quarters, more recent developments have highlighted the flexibility of the scene and a certain willingness to distance itself from overt associations with the past. If the early 1990s represented a period of almost propagandistic endorsement of National Socialist ideas and symbols, then more contemporary iterations of Polish black metal often focus more on the intersection of Neopaganism, Slavic history, pan-Slavism, and cultural pride and preservation.[39] None of these are necessarily troublesome in and of themselves; the black metal genre as a whole is often used as an outlet for the expression of cultural, historical, and spiritual particularity.[40] Rather, these ideas become disconcerting when they are utilised to potentially obfuscate ongoing allegiances to more extreme ideologies. Discerning when such obfuscation may be occurring, however, is not always a simple task.

A fitting example of this trend lies within the thematic contrast between the early thought of Rob Darken and his more recent utterances. As has been frequently discussed, Darken's statements in various media outlets throughout the 1990s and 2000s demonstrate his ongoing preoccupation with antisemitism, racial theory, and various aspects of Nazism.[41] This aspect of his thought appears to have receded in the last few years, although it is difficult to determine if this represents a genuine change of outlook or if it is simply more commercially expedient to do so. One way this change is manifest is via Darken's increased willingness to affirm the myths, traditions, and spiritualty of other cultures. Darken's contemporary views on Paganism, for example, emphasise its international character. In a 2021 interview with Dargedik magazine, Darken stated that "for me, the term Paganism refers not only to the Slavs or Vikings, but also to other civilizations, cultures, and races on earth".[42] Speaking with his South American audience in mind, Darken continues by remarking that "metal music connects people around common values and ideals. It is not some kind of propaganda tool of globalist corporations".[43] Such sentiments are anathema to Darken's earlier statements, such as his longing for the "rebirth of the pagan Aryan empire."[44] What is interesting is that despite a certain "mellowing" in Darken's position, he perceives that greater numbers of South Americans are returning to their true beliefs and the roots of their Ancestors. This is a source of admiration for Darken, who derives meaning from his musical activities insofar as this helps inspire international fans to rediscover the myths, traditions, and spirituality appropriate for their context. Such sentiments are suggestive of the concept of a Heimat (Homeland), a term appropriated by National Socialism for the purposes of emphasizing the centrality of ethnicity, pre-Christian spirituality, and cultural homogeneity as a basis for shared identity.[45]

One may suspect that former beliefs are still operational at a personal level, yet attempts have been made to avoid any firm external links that may conclusively affirm this. Naturally, we do not want to become so cynical as to maintain that an individual such as Darken is incapable of personal change and maturation. Yet his example remains important, for it demonstrates that much of the contemporary Polish black metal landscape exists in a nebulous context in which the associations of the past continue to haunt the present.

For those bands and individual musicians who have remained true to the "spirit" of early Polish black metal and its extreme ideologies, an enduring question must surely concern whether there continue to be formal networks of like-minded musicians who are united based on shared racist beliefs. If the Temple of Fullmoon

briefly functioned as an outlet for ideological sympathizers, how do contemporary far-right bands organize their activity, especially as this concerns the production and distribution of their music? Determining the existence of formal right-wing or extremist networks can be difficult and is often layered behind levels of secrecy and vagueness. Yet there are some clear indicators that Poland continues to play a vital role in the dissemination of National Socialist-inspired black metal music on an international basis. One way this is evident is via the distribution labels that operate as promotional outlets.

There are numerous Polish labels responsible for the production and distribution of black metal, NSBM (National Socialist Black Metal), and RAC (Rock Against Communism) music. A search of relevant online webstores highlights releases from countries as diverse as America, Finland, Greece, and Ireland. Many of these labels reveal a strong ideological bias toward racist viewpoints and National Socialism. The mission statement attached to the Wrocław-based distribution website Lower Silesian Stronghold, for example, recounts the infamous "fourteen words" of the white power movement.[46] The Białystok label Old Forest is another example of idealogically motivated online platform for the distribution of far–right leaning bands, with their current and past roster including representation from Costa Rica, Germany, Finland, and America.

Internet webstores enable such labels to function autonomously without the oversight of mediating influences. Of course, not all releases featured are explicitly reflective of National Socialist themes, but this fact alone may say something important about the general perception of extreme ideologies within the broader black metal community and the willingness of some artists to align themselves with openly racist bands. It is also worth considering international labels responsible for the distribution of Polish NSBM. One example concerns a subsidiary of the well-known German label No Colours Records. This particular offshoot hosts a plethora of titles by some of the most notable bands associated with National Socialist-inspired black metal and RAC, including Absurd, Wolfnacht, and Der Stürmer. Included on their roster is significant Polish representation by way of bands including Capricornus, Galgenberg, and Thor's Hammer.

These examples demonstrate the enduring nature of National Socialist themes within black metal and its related subgenres, with recordings spanning the last three decades. No record label, however underground and niche its appeal, can function for any extended period without sufficient organisational skills and a degree of networking and collaboration which must extend to those involved in the physical manufacture of products and their marketing (e.g. record, cassette, and CD production). They also highlight the essential point that there is a clear market for such material, although it can be difficult to determine if consumers of this music are "true believers", are attracted instead by the appeal of its so-called "transgressive" element, or still for some other reason. Indeed, the role of such labels in the promotion of extremist heavy metal might be a prudent area for future research, as the extent to which record labels help facilitate international networks is relatively unexplored.[47] It is also noteworthy that Polish bands have enjoyed significant international representation on music festivals such as Asgardsrei and Hot Shower. Świdnica band Selbstmord appeared at Milan's Hot Shower festival in 2013, as did Infernal War in 2014 and Graveland in 2016. Dark Fury performed at Ukraine's Asgardsrei festival in 2018 alongside Sunwheel – a Warsaw based band featuring members of Kataxu and Gontyna Kry. These are but two representative examples within an underground black metal scene that continues to attract an audience despite the efforts of anti-fascist groups to silence them. Pam Nilan has noted that such festivals often have a dual function, in that the unifying experience of physical participation in the event itself is subsequently transposed into online communities where relationships can be cultivated over time.[48] All of this suggests a degree of international coordination (including in the online sphere), and further demonstrates the leading role played by Poland as a propagator of black metal aligned with Neopagan, racial, and nationalistic themes.

According to Dominika Kasprowicz, some modern forms of Polish black metal are also closely aligned with the Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Tradycji i Kultury "Niklot" organization ("Association for Tradition and Culture 'Niklot'").[49] Based in Warsaw, the group seeks to promote "the character of one's nation" and the "quality of its human material that is the primary factor of its success or failure".[50] Anton Shekhovtsov describes the "Niklot" organisation as a Neopagan "metapolitical fascist" group influenced by the historic nationalist movement Zadruga.[51] It remains committed to the separation of ethnic groups, the superiority of the Slavic peoples,

and is distinctly antisemitic. Importantly, "Niklot" is said to have actively recruited members from skinhead and the National Socialist black metal scenes.[52] Alongside "Niklot" exist numerous other conservative and Neopagan movements that seek to promote pre-Christian Slavic beliefs, including the Nationalist Movement and the National Rebirth of Poland.[53] Such individual groups contribute to a broader political climate that can offer a form of legitimacy to the activities of extremist black metal music.

Ideology and ethical provenance

A 2019 article in the New Yorker posed the vexed question as to whether heavy metal has an ongoing Nazi problem.[54] Largely written in response to National Socialist sympathizing black metal bands, the authors profile a range of anti-fascist voices who are attempting to offer a counter-narrative to this trend. Yet the simple fact that black metal has a recurring issue with National Socialism and other forms of political extremism should prompt deeper questions as to the ideological world black metal inhabits, and whether there are concepts embedded in its underlying philosophy that allow such associations to flourish. Simplistic attempts to portray National Socialist and white supremacist influences as "co-opting" black metal are unsatisfactory, as is the use of collective moral and ethical standards that are not necessarily congruent with a philosophy of hyper-individuality, misanthropy, and self-perceived elitism.[55]

The New Yorker article undoubtedly reflects an increased sensitivity to the presence of Nazi symbolism and themes within the genre. Yet there is evidence that other voices from within the genre view National Socialist themes as a natural extension of the thought world in which black metal exists. Finding such evidence can involve treading into the murky world of internet discussion forums where, under the cover of anonymity, such views are more likely to be shared openly.[56] Claims for the legitimacy of these themes within black metal often meet with the counter response that a nihilistic disdain for humanity has the advantage of not venturing into condemnation of specific cultures or ethnicities based on such categories as race. For some, this is held to be a more desirable position. A representative example of this view is offered in a 1997 interview with

Vegard "Ihsahn" Tveitan and Tomas "Samoth" Haugen from the Norwegian band Emperor. They were asked by the metal magazine Terrorizer about potential affinities between a social-Darwinist worldview and fascist ideology.[57] In response, Ihsahn acknowledged that fascism, Satanism, and black metal are all extreme ideologies that are perceived by many of the genre's fans as inherently bound together. Samoth resonated with this view, stating that although he sympathizes with such links, "that doesn't mean I wear a swastika and worship Adolf Hitler or whatever".[58] Reflecting the misanthropy that is embedded in the black metal ethos, Isahn states that he tends to look down on "humanity as a whole" rather than specific cultures. Appearing to disavow biological racism, he further claims that it is "naïve to think that your intelligence is based on the colour of your skin". Even so, he can still maintain that it is important to "keep different cultures as they are, because so many cultures have been lost because of the Christian religion".[59]

The problem with this view – i.e. that a general loathing of humanity is reconcilable with the black metal ethos so long as it doesn't single out a particular culture – is that it makes the category of hatred an aesthetic choice without due regard for the fundamental dignity of humanity in general. The overriding concern here is how one's hatred is broadly perceived, not whether such misanthropy is justified in the first place. After all, one who feels hatred for "humanity as a whole" will, by definition, still hate Jews and other minorities as people; it's just that such an individual will be careful to not base this hatred on cultural or ethnic particulars, which somehow makes the hatred of a person more acceptable. Thus, attempts to differentiate between generalized hatred and a culturally or ethnically specific hatred can appear to be epistemological sophistry rather than serious attempts to come to terms with a recurring issue. All the while, far-right black metal can find its niche in this tension. For these reasons, black metal and its association with far-right ideologies remains fraught with unresolved complexities that operate on a basic philosophical level. Until such difficulties are dealt with openly (and in a way that doesn't involve recourse to simplistic notions of "co-opting the genre"), it is likely that those clinging to National Socialist and extremist themes will find an outlet in black metal.

Conclusion

As I have noted in a previous article, National Social-ist-inspired black metal and its related genres have proved remarkably resilient in the face of societal and cultural changes and efforts of the broader black metal community to exorcise its influence.[60] A partial expla-nation for this lies in the diversification of its appeal beyond the immediate context of Europe. In a recent article reflecting on the role of classical imagery in white supremacist heavy metal music, Jeremy Swist suggests that "for much of its history the metal scene in general has consisted mostly of white, male artists and audiences, which accounts both for its congeniality to white supremacy and toleration, if not acceptance, of white supremacist artists".[61] This is echoed by Taylor Van Doorne, who notes that "most NSBM musicians are white men".[62] While this may remain largely true, it is also worth noting that emerging bands and solo artists associated with nationalistic black metal originate in a number of non-European contexts, including Indonesia and Mexico.[63] This suggests that although the historio-graphical and sociological focus on extremist black metal has rightly emphasized its European roots, future scholarship should take into account how the national-istic and racial impulse of European black metal is being adapted to new and emerging contexts.

In this chapter, I have also suggested that more structural reasons exist for the ongoing association of black metal music with neo-Nazism, racism, and other forms of political extremism. Contemporary debates in this area often fail to adequately address the issue at its philosophical foundations, thus avoiding deeper scru-tiny of how hateful racist ideologies may indeed be an unintended consequence of a genre that often extols a fundamental antihumanism. With misanthropic and transgressive worldviews remaining key elements in the genres underlying philosophy, it becomes difficult to then impose a set of normative moral and ethical stand-ards that determine what is acceptable and what is not.

What remains central to the ongoing development of National Socialist black metal, however, is the foun-dational role played by Poland as both an innovator and influencer. For the artists themselves, the appeal of extreme ideologies seems to lie less in eugenic and ra-cial theories and more in the insistence on national and cultural separatism. Drawing on powerful narratives of an idealized cultural heritage, black metal artists such as Dark Fury contrast this with a contemporary Poland corrupted through globalisation and mass immigration. As always, in such a mindset, the ultimate cause of this can be attributed to the machinations of the interna-tional Jew, who remains the mythical figurehead for societal ills.

Although it is unlikely that National Socialist-inspired Polish black metal will regain the notoriety of its formative years in the early 1990s, racism and the politics of the right remain an ongoing presence within Polish black metal scene, whether through overt lyrical references or through more subtle imagery and symbol-ism. While the issue is certainly more in focus in the international black metal scene, more work is required in exploring how black metal philosophy enables and justifies the presence of extremist ideologies.

References

1   On the historiography and thematic content of Norwegian black metal, see: Hagen, Ross, "Musical Style, Ideology, and Mythology in Norwegian Black Metal", in Wallach, Jeremy, Berger, Harris M., and Greene, Paul D. (eds.), *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, pp. 180–199; Spracklen, Karl, "True Norwegian Black Metal – The Globalized, Mythological Reconstruction of the Second Wave of Black Metal in 1990s Oslo", in Lashua, Brett, Wagg, Stephen, Spracklen, Karl, and Yavuz, M. Selim (eds.), *Sounds and the City: Leisure Studies in a Global Era*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 183–195; Allin, Jason, Podoshen, Jeffrey, and Venkatesh, Vivek, "Second Wave True Norwegian Black Metal: An Ideologically Evil Music Scene?", *Arts and the Market*, 7 (2017), 159–173.

2   Leo Cooper, *In the Shadow of the Polish Eagle: The Poles, the Holocaust and Beyond*, New York, Palgrave, 2000, p. 224.

3   Such rhetoric often reflects the ideas outlined in the discredited book Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which first appeared in segments in Russian newspapers in 1903. On the history and reception of the Protocols, see: Hagemeister, Michael, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: Between His-tory and Fiction", *New German Critique*, 103 (2008), pp. 83–95.

4   Turowicz, Jerzy, "Obojętność nasza powszednia", *Gazeta wyborcza*, July 1–2, 1995.

5   Gebert, Konstanty, "Anti-Semitism in the 1990 Polish Presidential Elec-tion", *Social Research*, 58 (1991), pp. 723–755.

6   On the history of Grunwald, see: Gasztold-Seń, Przemysław, *Konces-jonowany nacjonalizm. Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne Grunwald 1980–1990*, Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2012.

7   Gebert, "Anti-Semitism in the 1990", pp. 734–735.

8   Cooper, *Shadow of the Polish Eagle*, p. 225.

9   Simpson, Peggy, "The Troubled Reign of Lech Wałesa in Poland", *Pres-idential Studies Quarterly*, 26 (1996), pp. 317–336.

10   Weaver, James, "Interview: Simon Larsen – Iskald", *Distorted Sound Magazine*, October (2018), <https://distortedsoundmag.com/interview-simon-larsen-iskald/> [accessed 3 February 2023].

11   Phillipov, Michelle, "Extreme Music for Extreme People? Norwegian Black Metal and Transcendent Violence", *Popular Music History*, 6 (2012), pp. 150–163 (p. 162).

12 Fullmoon, *United Aryan Evil*. Isengard Productions, 1995. Track no. 1.

13 Veles, *Triumph of Pagan Beliefs*. Dead Christ Commune, 1994.

14 Veles, *Black Hateful Metal*. No Colours Records, 1997. Track no. 8.

15 Benjamin Olson notes that 1990s black metal outside of Norway "had to be as uncompromising as possible to be taken seriously". Somewhat paradoxically, Olson goes on to offer a more substantive rationale for the intense racial fixation of black metal music in Poland, situating this in the disempowerment felt by "angry young Slavs across the former Soviet bloc who were looking for any means of empowerment, meaning and identity that they can find". Olson, Benjamin Hedge, *I am the Black Wizards: Multiplicity, Mysticism and Identity in Black Metal Music and Culture*, master's thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2008, pp. 117–118.

16 The Wrocław-based band Infernum featured an instrumental song by this title on their 1994 full-length album *...Taur–Nu–Fuin...* (Infernum, *...Taur–Nu–Fuin....* Astral Wings Records, 1994. Track no. 6). On the ideology of the Schutzstaffel (SS), see: Ingrao, Christian, *Believe and Destroy: Intellectuals in the SS War Machine*, Malden: Polity, 2013, pp. 52–61.

17 Capricornus, *Kein Blut soll verunreinigt werden*. Capricornus Productions, 1995. Track no. 2.

18 The Temple of Fullmoon was originally named the Temple of Infernal Fire by Adam "Nergal" Darski of Behemoth.

19 Kelly, Kim, "The Shade and the Light: Nergal of Behemoth Interviewed", *The Quietus*, 10 February (2014), <https://thequietus.com/articles/14452-nergal-interview-behemoth> [accessed 10 January 2023]. On Norway's 'Black Circle', see: Dyck, Kirsten, *Reichsrock: The International Web of White-Power and Neo-Nazi Hate Music*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017, pp. 58–59.

20 Of Darken's political leanings, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke writes: "His views are unabashedly fascist: the Pagan spirit underlies all reaction to Christianity, democracy, and technical civilization, where money takes the place of gods. The Holocaust was the culmination of this reaction." Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity*, New York: New York University Press, 2003, p. 205.

21 "[Graveland Interview]", *Heathenpride Magazine*, 1, (2003), unpaginated. An archived copy of this magazine can be found at: <https://archive.org/details/heathenpride_1/page/n1/mode/2up?q=darken> [accessed 5 February 2023].

22 "[Graveland Interview]". A photo of this gathering was featured on the original cover the demo tape Fullmoon, *United Aryan Evil*. Isengard Productions 1995.

23 "[Graveland Interview]".

24 "Dark Fury Interview", *Breidablik Magazine*, 10 August (2007), <http://breidablik-zine.narod.ru/interviews/dark_fury.html> [accessed 6 January 2023].

25 "Interview with Capricornus", *Petrified Magazine* 3, (1994), <https://members.tripod.com/~burnt_jew/Graveland/gl-interviews.html#Petrified%20Zine%20Issue%203> [accessed 5 February 2023].

26 "EJC Expresses Grave Concern over Rise in Antisemitism in Poland", European Jewish Congress, 31 August 2017, <https://eurojewcong.org/ejc-in-action/statements/ejc-expresses-grave-concern-rise-antisemitism-poland/> [accessed 9 May 2023].

27 Most notably, in his self-serving interview with the Bergens Tidende newspaper in January 1993.

28 Mythic Imagination, "Excerpt from the Graveland Interview about the Temple of Fullmoon era", *Black Death Metal History*, 14 February (2018), <https://blackdeathmetalhistory.wordpress.com/2018/02/14/excerpts-from-graveland-interview-for-houseofthewhipcordzine/> [accessed 6 January 2023].

29 A recent example of this is the cancellation of the planned Australian tour by Norwegian black metal band Taake. Mike Hohnen, "Promoters Cancel Australia Tour of Norwegian Metal Band Taake, Accused of Far-Right Sympathies", *The Guardian*, 6 January (2023), <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2023/jan/06/promoters-cancel-australia-tour-of-norwegian-metal-band-taake-accused-of-far-right-sympathies> [accessed 1 February 2023].

30 On black metal and the transgressive, Keith Kahn-Harris writes that "racist discourses are part of a wider set of transgressive discourses that are drawn on within extreme metal, including Satanism, the occult and extreme violence". He further suggests that such discourses remain largely theoretical and exploratory, and that "the scene provides a measure of 'insulation' that allows members to play with a range of highly transgressive themes". Kahn-Harris, Keith, "The Failure of Youth Culture: Reflexivity, Music, and Politics in the Black Metal Scene", *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7 (2004), pp. 95–111 (p. 105). This split between the theoretical and the practical has the convenient benefit of protecting the philosophy of black metal from its association with those who act on their transgressive impulses.

31 "Rob Darken Interview", *Pit Magazine*, 15 (1996), <https://web.archive.org/web/20121111115138/http://www.angelfire.com/nh/carpathianwolves/graveland2.html> [accessed 15 February 2023].

32 Kucia, Marek, Duch-Dyngosz, Marta, and Magierowski, Mateusz, "Anti-Semitism in Poland: Survey Results and a Qualitative Study of Catholic Communities", *Nationalities Papers*, 42 (2014), pp. 8–36.

33 Kucia et al., Anti-Semitism in Poland, p. 21.

34 Pankowski, Rafał, and Kornak, Marcin, "Poland", in Melzer, Ralf, and Serafin, Sebastian (eds.), *Right-Wing Extremism in Europe: Country Analyses, Counter-Strategies and Labor-Market Oriented Exit Strategies*, Frankfurt am Main: Druck- und Verlaghaus Zarbock, 2013, pp. 157–68 (p. 157).

35 Pankowski and Kornak, "Poland", p. 157.

36 Averill, Alan, "Graveland", *The Oath Magazine,* (1994), pp. 16–17.

37 Pankowski, Rafał, *Right-Wing Extremism in Poland*, Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012, p. 6.

38 Dornbusch, Christian, and Kilguss, Hans-Peter, *Unheilige Alianzen: Black Metal zwischen Satanismus, Heidentum und Neonazismus*, Münster: Unrast, 2006, p. 48.

39 On pan-Slavism in the Serbian black metal context, see: Radovanović, Bojana, "Ideologies and Discourses: Extreme Narratives in Extreme Metal Music", *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies* 10 (2016), pp. 51–58 (pp. 56–57). In Poland, the band *Черногаст (Chernogast) from Kraków* explore pan-Slavic themes, while Barbarous Pomerania from Koszalin discuss Slavic Paganism and heritage within the philosophy of Aryanism.

40 One can point to the black metal emerging from China, much of which draws on local history and culture as a source of inspiration. A recent example is the 2022 E. P. release from the band 御矢 (Holyarrow), which discusses the 1661–1662 Siege of Fort Zeelandia and the subsequent liberation of Taiwan from the rule of the Dutch East India Company (御矢 [Holyarrow], 大員合戰 / *1661–1662 The Siege of Fort Zeelandia*. Pest Productions 2022).

41 Buesnel, Ryan, "National Socialist Black Metal: A Case Study in the Longevity of Far-Right Ideologies in Heavy Metal Subcultures", *Patterns of Prejudice*, 54 (2019), pp. 393–408.

42 Zeratulstra, "Interview with Graveland: 'Here in Europe and also in my country, we practically cannot play concerts, which is hindered by all kinds of censorship agendas'", *Dargedik Rock Metal Webzine*, 15 November (2021), <https://www.dargedik.com/2021/11/entrevista-graveland-pagan-black-metal_0438423516.html> [accessed 25 May 2023].

43   Zeratulstra, "Interview with Graveland: 'Here in Europe and also in my country, we practically cannot play concerts, which is hindered by all kinds of censorship agendas'", *Dargedik Rock Metal Webzine*, 15 November (2021), <https://www.dargedik.com/2021/11/entrevista-graveland-pagan-black-metal_0438423516.html> [accessed 25 May 2023].

44   "Interview with Darken 1997 for Ichorzine", *Black Death Metal History*, 12 February (2018), <https://blackdeathmetalhistory.wordpress.com/2018/02/12/interview-with-darken-1997-for-ichorzine/> [accessed 25 May 2023].

45   The complex history and usages of Heimat are examined in: Hermand, Jost, and Steakley, James, *Heimat, Nation, Fatherland: The German Sense of Belonging*, New York: Peter Lang: 1996.

46   "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White Children!" See website of Lower Silesian Stronghold <https://www.trueunderground.cba.pl/news.htm> [accessed 6 September 2024]. On the history of David Lane, the author of the fourteen words, see: Michael, George, "David Lane and the Fourteen Words", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 10 (2009), pp. 43–61.

47   Thankfully, some important research is emerging in this area, including: Pattison, Louis, "Nocturnal Transmissions: The Selling and Distribution of Black Metal", in Howells, Tom (ed.), *Black Metal: Beyond the Darkness*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012, pp. 86–103.

48   Nilan, Pam, "The Youth Appeal of Far-Right Music Festivals", *Youth*, 1 (2021), pp. 14–26.

49   Kasprowicz, Dominika, *National and Right-Wing Radicalism in the New Democracies: Poland*, Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2009, p. 14.

50   From the association's official webpage: <http://www.niklot.org.pl/en/> [accessed 17 May 2023].

51   Shekhovtsov, Anton, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir*, London: Routledge, 2018, p. 113.

52   Minkenberg, Michael, "Between Tradition and Transition: The Central European Radical Right and the New European Order", in Schori Liang, Christina (ed.), *Europe for the Europeans: The Foreign and Security Policy of the Populist Radical Right*, London: Routledge, 2007, pp. 261–282 (p. 265).

53   Piotr Grochowski documents the example of the Rodzimowierstwo movement in: Grochowski, Piotr, "Nationalism and Conservatism in Neopagan Movements: The Case of Polish Rodzimowierstwo", *Politics and Religion*, 15 (2022), pp. 783–806.

54   Moynihan, Colin, "Heavy Metal Confronts its Nazi Problem", *The New Yorker*, 19 February (2019), <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/heavy-metal-confronts-its-nazi-problem> [accessed 27 December 2022].

55   Spracklen, Karl, "Nazi Punks Folk Off: Leisure, Nationalism, Cultural Identity, and the Consumption of Metal and Folk Music", *Leisure Studies*, 32 (2013), pp. 415–428 (p. 426).

56   Spracklen, Karl, "True Aryan black metal: the meaning of leisure, belonging and the construction of whiteness in black metal music", in Scott, Niall W. R., and von Helden, Imke (eds.), *The Metal Void: First Gatherings*, Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press 2010, pp. 81–94 (p. 87).

57   Whalen, Gregory, "Emperor: Their Satanic Majesties Request", *Terrorizer*, February, 1997.

58   Whalen, Emperor.

59   Whalen, Emperor. On the thematic content of Emperor's music see: Phillipov, Michelle, "Extreme Music for Extreme People?", *Popular Music History*, 6 (2011), pp. 156–161.

60   Buesnel, "*National Socialist Black Metal*".

61   Swist, Jeremy, "Classical Imagery in the Album Artwork of White Supremacist Metal Bands", Pharos, 14 May 2021, <https://pharos.vassarspaces.net/2021/05/14/white-supremacist-heavy-metal-album-artwork-sturmer-arghoslent-destroyer-666/> [accessed 10 May 2023].

62   Van Doorne, Taylor, "Black Metal, White Supremacy, and Fraught Masculinity", *React/Review: A Journal for Art and Architecture*, 2 (2022), pp. 137–143 (p. 138).

63   Olson, "I am the Black Wizards", p. 135. For a representative example of emerging trends in non-European contexts, see: Gendler, Alex, "The Bizarre World of Aztec Nazi Black Metal", *No Recess Magazine*, February 13, (2020).

3

Perspectives from Hungary

"Eurasian Magyars"

The Role of Historical Reenactment and Experimental Archaeology in Hungary's Illiberal Heritage Regime

Katrin Kremmler

In illiberal Hungary, the concept of historical statehood has undergone a process of political re-engineering, with a cultural heritage festival as a main site of experimentation.[1] In 2007, actors on the fringes of Hungarian academia and far right groups started revitalising Hungarian Turanism[2] – understood here as the belief in a shared cultural and biological link with people of Turkic descent – at a cultural heritage festival called Kurultáj,[3] which translates as "great tribal assembly". In 2010, the promotion of Turanism was taken up by the Orbán government and, from 2019 onwards, was supported by genetics and bioarchaeological research carried out in new government institutions running parallel to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.[4] These new institutions play a significant role in furthering Hungary's geo-economical alignment with Turkey, Central Asia and China. Putting on combat and archery reenactments and horse races involving 500–600 reenactors on horseback and on foot, national and international ethno-sports competitions, Neopagan rituals, nationalist rock music, and Hungarian and Eurasian folklore concerts and performances, Kurultáj is similar to popular mediaeval festivals all over Europe but on a surprisingly larger scale, attracting between 150,000 and 200,000 visitors over a long weekend.

Kurultáj is also a platform for popular science education, presenting the culture of Eurasian nomad warriors in a framing of what Marlène Laruelle calls "archaeological patriotism"[5] – patriotically interpreted results and considerations from the field of archaeology, in displays provided by the Hungarian Natural History Museum (HNHM), regional archaeology museums and, from 2022 onwards, the Hungarian National Museum (HNM). The new Eurasian "ancestors" of contemporary Hungarians are represented as "Europid-Mongolid" racial types, with archaeological crania and facial reconstructions prepared by the HNHM. Drawing on experimental archaeology, a range of reenactment groups and heritage communities participate in order to demonstrate the combat and cultural techniques of nomadic warrior military elites dating back to the Huns and Avars, all of which are considered relevant for Hungarian military history and statehood. This allows the Hungarian government to integrate what observers consider conflicting civilisationist agendas: "White" Christian Europe as the "real Europe"[6], and Eurasian civilisationism for the purpose of geo-economic, cultural and scientific co-operation with Turkic Muslim states.

Since 2014, the content and aesthetics of these heritage events in Hungary have been characterised by close partnerships with recently established major cultural heritage sites and events in Central Asia and Turkey: the National Museum in Astana, the world music festival Spirit of Tengri in Kazakhstan, and the World Nomad Games[7] in Kyrgyzstan. The Hungarian project is therefore part of a geopolitical network connecting various transregional culture war agendas: Kurultáj, held in the southern Hungarian countryside, is referred to as one of the biggest Turanist events in the context of Turkish Eurasianism. The event has attracted large numbers of Turkish visitors since 2014, and the cultural stage has been sponsored by the Turkish Co-operation and Coordination Agency (TIKA). There are also links to the new (Pan-) Turkic History Museum and Statue Park in Ankara.[8]

As Aurélie Stern has shown in her ethnographic study of the Turkish delegations at Kurultáj in 2021 and 2022, the festival serves as an intermediate space for the circulation of conservative ideas at a transnational level; it is a space for the construction of a transnational conservative identity, where religious differences are resolved through Tengrism[9] as a shared ancient religion,[10] evoked in shamanic ceremonies.[11]

The Orbán government has increasingly embraced the festival since 2010, the opening ceremony is regularly held in the Parliament Building, and the speaker of the National Assembly László Kövér delivered the welcome address at the event site in 2018 and 2022. In recent

Fig. 1   Launch of *Kommentár* issue 3 at the Hungarian National Mueum, Budapest, published on Facebook in 2022.

years, the government has sponsored the festival with the equivalent of around 1 million euros per year.

Since the event's inception, the volunteers providing event security have been a regional branch of the Magyar Gárda Mozgalom ("New Hungarian Guard Movement"), a legal successor organisation to the far-right paramilitary Hungarian Guard that was disbanded in 2009 by the (then) socialist-liberal coalition government. In odd-numbered years, the organising body (Magyar-Turán Alapítvány, or "Magyar-Turán Foundation") hosts a smaller, "domestic", event called Ősök napja ("Day of Ancestors"), which caters to ethnic Hungarians from the neighbouring countries in the Carpathian Basin, the region covering the historical kingdom of Hungary in its pre-1920 borders imagined as ethno-national space. At the venue, a special exhibition pavillon is dedicated to vendors from Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine and Serbia.

As I saw for myself between 2014 and 2022, the strong far-right presence at Kurultáj and Ősök napja declined, whilst the government delegations from Turkey and Central Asia came to play a more central role, with their national television teams broadcasting the event to audiences back home.

Kurultáj's target audience in Hungary encompasses a broad spectrum, ranging from "ordinary" families and visitors attending with their respective cultural or sport associations performing at the event through to far-right politicians and visitors displaying explicit far-right affinities. Hungarian society is said to be polarised to a "pernicious" degree between liberal and national camps;

the division is not only about political affiliations but also includes opposing notions of national culture and cultural belonging. It is important to note that the so-called national camp, which identifies with conservative to far-right concepts of national culture, is not united in terms of its political party affiliations and cannot be assumed to be pro-government. One aim of the new Eurasian project is to integrate and unite this "national camp" in metapolitical – cultural – terms against the liberal camp and "Western liberal hegemony".

This new Eurasian political project is not just a recent invention engineered and administered from the top down. It draws on a wide spectrum of alternative national prehistory narratives in the popular culture of the national camp, stretching back to the interwar period and the 19th century – Hungarian Orientalism – a tradition that only needed to be modernised and streamlined for the 21st century. The advent and rapid development of archaeogenetics is at hand: a group of nationalist scientists started looking for Eastern haplogroups in archaeological skulls from Hungarian territory in a pattern fairly similar to what historian Richard McMahon has described as "genetic ethnology".[12] In fact, shared genealogies with Central Asian physical anthropology were established as long ago as the 1960s.[13]

As already mentioned, displays of archaeological crania and facial reconstructions of "Europid-Mongolid" racial types are a key component of Kurultáj. Since 2010, they have been provided by scientists affiliated with the HNHM. According to the museum's annual reports, these displays started out as initiatives by individual staff scientists volunteering at the event, using skulls and other materials from the museum's collection.

Since 2016, this research strand has received new backing from geneticists from the University of Szeged. While researching 9th-century archaeological burial sites in Hungary, they identified a genetic link to Central Asia and started presenting their findings at Kurultáj in 2016. Since 2018, they have published their results in a number of international science journals.[14] Based on these findings, they constructed a narrative of historical Hungarian statehood and Central Asian kinship. By 2023, the Magyar-Turán-Foundation had developed an extensive international network for scientific cooperation and exchange involving a wide range of state institutions and individual scholars and scientists in Turkey, Kazakhstan and Mongolia as well as Western Europe and the US.

The illiberal heritage regime

A new government Research Institute of Hungarian Studies (Magyarságkutató Intézet, or MKI) was founded in 2019.[15] The term *magyarság,* innocuously translated as "Hungarian", conveys ethnic semantics of the interwar period. Interwar "*magyarság* research" was an interdisciplinary national sciences paradigm of studying the nation's body politic ("*nemzettest*") and ancient cultural and biological origins in an integrated approach that took in physical anthropology, archaeology, folklore studies, ethnology, medieval history, linguistics and orientalist studies. For all the interwar disciplines involved, influences from German science and scholarship can be documented, but have not been synthesised to date. As Róbert Keményfi and Tamás Csíki have shown, Hungarian *Volkstumsforschung,* inspired by its German counterpart, has used the cultural nation rather than the "state-nation" (the nation in the political sense) as a guiding concept, meaning that people were considered not only citizens but also part of an older religious, cultural, "racial" and national community predating the modern nation state. This notion was extended to include the Hungarian minorities in its neighbouring countries under post-First World War borders.[16]

In interwar physical anthropology, packaged as national science, this involved measuring and comparing 9th-century archaeological skulls and skeletons with living populations of the post-imperial ethnic Hungarian majority. While most of the other ethnic minorities were considered compatible, Hungarians with a Jewish and Romani background were excluded as "alien races", not only in terms of their "racial biology" but also for their lack of autochthony, as "recent", modern-era "newcomers" to the Carpathian Basin, which had been thought of as the Magyars' kingdom for a millennium.

MKI staff nowadays combine references to interwar authors concerning medieval Hungarian chronicles with cutting-edge archaeogenetics, their stated aim being to strengthen Hungarian national identity. The institute enjoys a sizeable budget, employs over 100 researchers and has signed cooperation agreements with most of the major Hungarian universities as well as a number of Turkish scientific institutions and the Mongolian Academy of Sciences' Archaeology Institute. MKI scientists publish extensively in international sciences journals and under international partnerships, and flood the Hungarian Science Bibliography database

Fig. 2   Launch of *Kommentár* issue 1 at the Hungarian National Mueum, Budapest, published on Facebook in 2023.

(Magyar Tudományos Művek Tára, MTMT) with content (1,778 publications, 692 citations since 2019; number of entries: 2018: 0; 2019: 174; 2020: 442; 2021: 378; 2022: 150; 2023: 103).[17]

The MKI addresses the public through government and social media and through a partnership with Mediaworks Hungary, one of the biggest media companies in the country, for exclusive content in the (pro-)government daily newspaper *Magyar Nemzet* ("Hungarian Nation"). The MKI board sees their work as expressly continuing the interwar Turanist tradition of science and scholarship and provides regular accounts of the MKI's scientific progress on M5, the cultural channel on government TV.

Over time, the most prominent scientists that have presented at Kurultáj since 2016 – geneticists from the University of Szeged – have become affiliated with the MKI or its partners. In 2019, the physical anthropologist Zsolt Bernert, one of the scientists who had prepared the skull displays at Kurultáj since 2010, was appointed as the new director of the HNHM. His first project was to display the narrative of Hun-Avar-Magyar ancestry in the exhibition *Attila Örökösei – A hunoktól az Árpád-házig* ("Attila's heirs – from the Huns to the House of Árpád") in October 2019. In 2021, László L. Simon, a Fidesz member of parliament and former state secretary for culture and a writer and poet by profession, was appointed as the new director-general of the HNM. Simon is a member of the editorial board of the conservative/alt-right journal *Kommentár*, which, under his management, has been presenting new issues in the HNM on a regular basis, and

Fig. 3   Street parade commemorating the foundation of Hungary in Budapest, Hungary, 2021.

continues to do so.[18] The cover design clearly shows fascist aesthetics updated for the 2020s (fig. 1 and 2).

In 2022 the HNM had its own exhibition yurt at Kurultáj for the first time,[19] and several HNM archaeologists presented in the science tent. The new Eurasian narrative has been established and institutionalised to a point that it can integrate the scholarship of what even critical Hungarian scholars consider to be legitimate academic actors not known for their illiberal affiliations or nationalist leanings: in 2022, a scholar affiliated with the (then) Eötvös Loránd Research Network (Eötvös Loránd Kutatási Hálózat, ELKH) – which the government broke away from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) in 2019 and re-named Hungarian Research network (HUN-REN) in 2023[20] – presented their current work at Kurultáj.

The HNM cooperation with Kurultáj continues today: with the museum's yurt in 2024, exhibits, publications and products from the museum's gift shop available to festivalgoers. Dr. Gábor Virágos, Archaeological Deputy Director of the HNM and director of the HNM *National Institute* of *Archaeology*, discussed future closer cooperation and research possibilities at Kurultáj 2024.[21]

By now, seasoned festivalgoers are ready to embrace any new information about Eurasian nomadic peoples of the past and present as part of Hungary's civilisational heritage and national identity. By early 2023, the MKI was becoming very vocal about its mission having succeeded:

> [It claims to have] reinstated the genuine past of the nation, restoring the truths of our chronicles […] and popular consciousness, which had been expunged from history with defiant insolence by malicious adventurers of foreign origin,[22] and with sheer blunt violence in the absence of scientific facts. It is now an indisputable fact that the Hungarians are the organic heirs of the Scythians, the Huns and the Avars, in short, of the Eurasian archery culture of the Steppe, the first representatives of which were demonstrably present in the Carpathian Basin six thousand years ago at the latest. There is no longer any question that a significant proportion of the Avars spoke Hungarian, and it is also clear that some of the Huns were already Christians – and it is in this light that the Scourge of God, Attila the Hun, who was punishing the West then drowning in aberrations and cynicism, should be interpreted.[23]

Besides establishing new research institutions, the Orbán government has also gradually been taking over existing state institutions of education and culture, such as universities, museums, scientific collections and theatres. The new Eurasian narrative is now being disseminated in museum exhibitions, state media and social media, music and theatre productions and the education system. What is at stake is the construction of a new hegemonic illiberal epistemic architecture.[24] Designs and motives inspired by "ancient Magyar mythology", which convey the aesthetics of the Eurasian nomads, are being generated and fed into the cultural mainstream, becoming part of the repertoire of national cultural institutions. Recent examples include the National Equestrian Theatre, the Open Air Theatre of Margaret Island, the National Opera House, the HNM, the Hungarian National Theatre, and the Capital Circus of Budapest (fig. 13).[25] The new narrative is being disseminated in the educational systems via school textbooks and national-education projects outside the state school system.

Aesthetics of Eurasian nomadic and ancient Magyar heritage are becoming increasingly present in public events and public spaces. The street parade commemorating the founding of Hungary in the year 1000 by St Stephen, the first king of Hungary, in Budapest in 2021 (planned for the Trianon centennial in 2020, postponed for the COVID-pandemic) clearly set out to dazzle its audiences by re-inventing the nation's ancient symbols in the visual language of contemporary pop culture, starting with 9th century reenactors of the conquest era and shamans (fig. 3).

They were followed by floats featuring gigantic portrayals of so-called ancient Magyar mythical totem symbols and symbols of Christian iconography: the Miracle Deer (whose design was inspired by the 6th-century Scythian Golden Deer from Tápiószentmárton in the HNM), the Turul bird, St Stephen, the Holy Crown of St Stephen, and the Virgin Mary. In 2022, the Hungarian National Bank erected a statue of a golden Miracle Deer as a new, monumental emblem of the nation's dynamic economic recovery and expansion.

Lifestyle influencers and a whole illiberal ethnocultural identity industry complex that encompasses fashion designers, media companies and other cultural producers are promoting Eurasian nomad culture as being liberating and fulfilling, desirable and emancipatory and a path to personal growth and spiritual fulfilment for young women and, at the same time, are grounding motherhood in a cultural national identity

Fig. 4   Lifestyle blogger Rebeka Bársony in an online article of the newspaper Magyar Nemzet, 16 May 2021

and the concept of the warrior nation and constitutional sovereignty (fig. 4).[26]

In August 2023, the MKI, the National Theatre and the University of Theatre and Film Arts began negotiating future co-operation possibilities.[27]

Inventing the triumphant nation: the Battle of Pressburg (907 CE) as a victory over the West

While my interest was originally focused on government involvement and the output from state research institutes and state media, my attention was grabbed by the growing reenactment scene. My research was not an ethnographic study of individual reenactors or reenactment groups; rather, I sought a broader understanding of reenactment that invested in shifting the meaning of historical battles from defeat to a narrative of victory. Battle reenactments and representations are one aspect of a larger project of cultural production, in an effort to stretch Hungarian statehood temporally backwards to the era of conquest (fig. 6).

Fig. 5   Poster of the movie *The Battle of Pressburg*, MKI 2020.

The Battle of Pressburg (907 CE), which took place near to present-day Bratislava between Bavarian troops and the Pagan Hungarian Principality has taken on special significance for the extreme right. This battle, a response to the Hungarian invasion between 895 and 900, resulted in a crushing defeat for the East Francian kingdom and ended its control over the area. It marked the end of the Hungarian conquest era and laid the foundations for the establishment of the Kingdom of Hungary in 1000 CE. The battle is hardly mentioned at all in contemporary sources, and many of its details remain unknown. Self-proclaimed historians have fashioned a story of this battle as a story of Magyars surviving under the hostile watch of "the Germans" and the "West", and winning against the threat of total annihilation. The MKI saw opportunity in this already grounded interpretation of the battle of Pressburg, and in 2020 turned it into an animated film, for broadcast on state television (fig. 5).

The animated film, which was originally developed from a game engine, attracted disappointment, and dev-

astating criticism from a number of academics and reenactors for its blatant lack of professionalism, academic and artistic quality. An external academic listed as a consultant, Attila Mátéffy from the University of Bonn, distanced himself from the project in the press.[28] After a change of leadership in 2023, even the new MKI management distanced itself from the film.[29]

Yet, it did not put an end to the thirst for filmmaking for MKI, on the contrary. It has scaled its operations up to supporting major feature films that are international co-productions:[30] *1242: Gateway to the West*,[31] a Hungarian-Mongolian co-production, will be released in late 2024. The MKI's director at the time of its comission declared:

> In today's world, it is more important than ever to strengthen Hungarian national consciousness and pride, and films are one of the best tools for this. Our ancestors never gave up the fight even in the most unpromising situations, our warriors defended the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Hungarian nation – in this film – against attacks from the East to the last drop of their blood, but this story will also show that the West did not always show its best face to us in the 13th century.[32]

Reenactments and experimental archaeology

Seeing the MKI's results, a number of Hungarian archaeologists (affiliated with the ELKH – now HUN-REN), joining forces with reenactors (who had been cooperating with the HAS since 2013), have voiced criticism and called for authenticity based on sound scientific research and professionalism. Some of the reenactors are part of a new cooperating structure called the Foedus Orientalis Cultural Association (fig. 7). One early major product of this co-operation was the video *Regnum Fest* (2021).[33] János Mestellér (Foedus Orientalis Cultural Association; Kazár Bazár) gave a talk on historical reconstruction at the 28th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists in Budapest (2022).

As a professional challenge to the lavishly funded MKI archaeologists, in a scientific cooperation between the (then) Eötvös Loránd Research Network, the Archaeology Institute of the Pázmány Péter Catholic Uni-

Fig. 6   Commemoration of the Battle of Pressburg in Heroes' Square in Budapest, Hungary, July 2020.

Fig. 7   Reenactors from Foedus Orientalis proudly take pictures in front of the arguably most prestigious Hungarian forum for sciences, at the former HAS, now HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities Budapest, where the former ELKH, now HUN-REN institute for history is located (date unknown)

Fig. 8 Ethnographic display at Kurultáj in Bugac, Hungary, August 2022

Fig. 9 Reconstruction of a Hun warrior at Kurultáj in Bugac, Hungary, August 2022.

versity and the Digitális Legendárium working group, this group produced a shoestring-budget film on their own: *In The Saddle, On Horseback – The art of war of the conquest-era Magyars* (2023, 27:45 min).[34] It presents the production and use of weapons in the 10th-century conquest era. As the focus is not on narrative but on an in-depth exploration of crafts and techniques, it can potentially serve as an educational resource in museums and schools.

My point here is the overlap between the various festival sites and reenactment groups. Many of the reenactors campaigning for authenticity and professionalism are members of heritage groups that receive government funding and regularly perform at all the events on the national heritage circuit, including Kurultáj.

The Foedus Orientalis is considered a welcome and relevant performer to patriotic Hungarian military history not only at Kurultáj, but at the newly launched Szent László Festivals in Hungary and its neighbouring countries, especially in the Romanian city of Oradea.[35]

Exhibitions

In the case of archaeological and ethnographic exhibitions and displays as well, mainstreaming has reached a point where visitors from outside may have a hard time distinguishing between the work of illiberal actors and institutions on the one hand and scholars without nationalist affinities on the other based solely on the artifacts on display.

Tatyjana Szafonova analyses how the ethnographic displays at Kurultáj in 2022 (fig. 8, 9 and 11) feature artifacts from contemporary (!) Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to illustrate the culture of the everyday life of 9th-century conquest-era Magyars and points out how indigenous peoples, portrayed as timeless and unchanging, are engaged in shared cultural celebrations to fight Western liberal hegemony as the common enemy.[36]

In 2022/2023, the State Museum of Prehistory in the German city of Halle/Saale, one of the best known archaeological state museums in Germany, presented its own version of the touring exhibition *Equestrian Nomads in Europe – Huns, Avars, Hungarians*, taken over from Schallaburg in Austria. The exhibition featured 420 archaeological finds from various national museums and collections. Due to different local teams with substantially different academic and visual agendas, the exhibition changed significantly in terms of both content and design. It is the Halle museum's declared principle

Fig. 10 Reconstruction of an Avar warrior (by Déri Múzeum Debrecen) in front of an enlarged medallion of the Nagyszentmiklós treasure. Temporary exhibition *Reiternomaden in Europa – Hunnen, Awaren, Ungarn* ("Equestrian nomads in Europe – Huns, Avars, Hungarians") at State Museum of Prehistory in Halle/Saale, Germany (December 2022 to June 2023).

not to portray the people of the past as primitive "barbarians", but to show that they were not essentially different from people today.[37] Accordingly, it aimed to immerse visitors in the world of the equestrian peoples of the early Middle Ages, consciously without relying on clichés of barbaric mounted warriors such as Attila or Genghis Khan. Instead, the exhibition presented the archaeological legacy of the steppe peoples and told their story through gold- and silversmithing and bronze casting illustrated with jewellery, brooches, and belt mounts medallions. According to the museum's communications and press reports, the exhibition aimed to show that

[…] these horsemen were much more than bloodthirsty rulers who threatened Europe. Instead, they were part of Europe and contributed to its development. The exhibition aimed to show the coexistence of these peoples with their European counterparts and their importance in history.[38]

The Halle exhibition sought to challenge historically loaden terms like "barbarians", meaning the enemies of civilization, and Hungarian museums have recent, carefully crafted reconstructions to offer. A case in point is the Avar reconstruction (from Debrecen, fig. 10).

An innovation of the Halle exhibition was the use of modern (late 19th/early 20th century) ethnographic photographs from Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan and other countries as accompanying and illustrative elements (fig. 12). A likeness between the setup of the Halle version of the Schallaburg exhibition and the Kurultáj is the reliance on ethnography of recent times. I would not be surprised if parts of the Halle version of the Schallaburg exhibition were to become a reference point for HNM or Kurultáj exhibits.

To sum up, the mainstreaming and institutionalisation of this illiberal transformation of science and scholarship has progressed to a point where archaeological and ethnographic exhibitions on the one hand and reenactments on the other display similar or identical artifacts, and the same groups and actors perform both for science that is considered internationally legitimate and for events that form part of the illiberal heritage regime.

Irredentism and expansion

Both Kurultáj and the MKI always make an explicit link between the Eurasian civilisationist narrative of historical Hungarian statehood and irredentism. The Ősök napja festivals celebrate the unity of Hungarians within their pre-1920 borders. Since the celebration of the centenary of the Treaty of Trianon in 2020, the Magyar-Turán Foundation has increasingly expanded its focus and activities to encompass the neighbouring countries. The 1920 Treaty of Trianon[39] established Hungary's current borders, reducing its territory by 72 per cent and its population by two thirds, including 5 million ethnic Hungarians. Hungarian irredentists wish to reclaim historically Hungarian territories and areas with Hungarian populations in the neighbouring countries. Since 2010, the Orbán-government took huge interest in surveying its potential economic and political benefits among the Hungarian minorities in the neighboring countries as voter base, and to control the Hungarian language media.

The Magyar-Turán Foundation is an active supporter of the regional Hungarian Székler autonomy movement in Transylvania and has attended Székler

Fig. 11 Copies of the Nagyszentmiklós Treasure at the Hungarian National Museum's Yurt at Kurultáj in Bugac, Hungary, August 2022.

Freedom Day celebrations since 2012. For the Trianon Centenary in 2020, Ősök napja festivals planned in the neighbouring countries were cancelled due to COVID-19. Since 2021, Ősök napja festivals have been held in Serbia, Romania and Slovakia. 2021 and 2022's events in the village of Bajša in the Serbian region of Vojvodina used the historical term *Délvidék* (literally "southern province"), which refers to the southern part of the Kingdom of Hungary before 1920 and is a politically loaded term. In April 2023, the Magyar-Turán Foundation helped to organise "Bringing up our ancestors", Serbia's first archaeological exhibition on the Hungarian conquest era at the Municipal Museum in Bečej (Gradski muzej Bečej) in co-operation with the HNHM. The exhibition was presented at Kurultáj 2024, as a guest exhibition of the Bačka Topola/Topolya City Museum (Muzej opštine Bačka Topola), which presented it later in August 2024.[40]

The first Ősök napja in Romania was held in Belin in Covasna County (Széklerland region) in 2022. The first one in Slovakia, entitled *Az Ősök útján* ("On the Trail of the Ancestors") took place in July 2023 in Dunajská Streda in co-operation with the local municipality. It was funded by the National Cultural Fund of Hungary (NKA) and the Hungarian government's Human Capacities Grant Management Office and organised by heritage groups from amongst the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, who practice archery as a specifically Hungarian form of national martial art and lifestyle.[41] Lead organiser Gábor Kopecsni is a member of the team that organises Kurultáj. The politically charged term *Felvidék*

("Upper Hungary", literally "upper province") is used in discourse, referring to the northern part of the pre-1920 Kingdom of Hungary. And, as I was able to observe, this regional project of "following the ancestors" explicitly forges a long timeline of Hungarian statehood in contrast to that of the "young" state whose citizens these actors are, which gained its independence during their own lifetime (1993): "We are here in this place, which is *currently* in Slovakia".[42] The semantics of *jelenleg Szlovákiában* ("currently-", or "at present in Slovakia") implies that this status quo is not set in stone and could change in the future. Besides promoting Kurultáj in Slovakia, the organisers' future projects also include a reenactment of the Battle of Pressburg in its historical location near Bratislava.[43] On Hungary's national holiday, August 20, 2023 (St Stephen's Day, which celebrates the founding of the Hungarian state in 1000 CE), Kopecsni received a state award from the Hungarian government for his long-term commitment to Hungarians living outside the country's borders.[44]

These developments tally perfectly with the openly revisionist content regularly posted on the Kurultáj website for National Unity Day (4 June), introduced by the Orbán-government in 2010, which commemorates the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Trianon.

Fig. 12   Copy of St Stephen's Crown from the Hungarian National Museum in front of an 1870s ethnographic photo of a Kyrgyz yurt. Temporary exhibition *Reiternomaden in Europa – Hunnen, Awaren, Ungarn* ("Equestrian nomads in Europe – Huns, Avars, Hungarians") at State Museum of Prehistory in Halle/Saale, Germany (December 2022 to June 2023).
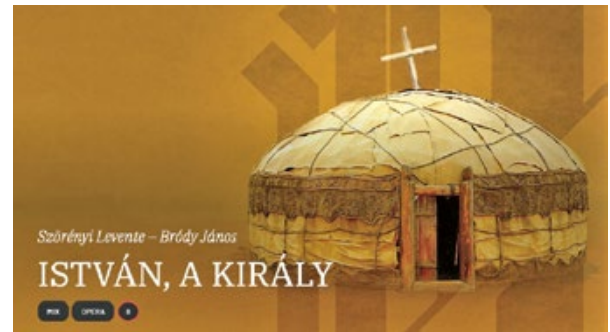

Fig. 13   Image of a yurt topped by a tilted cross in reference to St Stephen's Crown. Advertisement by the Hungarian State Opera for a new production of the rock opera *Stephen, the King* (1983) by Levente Szörényi and János Brody, which premiered in 2020).

As the Slovakian example suggests, the implementation of the Eurasian narrative in the neighbouring countries and in partnerships with local municipalities, municipal museums and other regional and local actors needs to be investigated on a regional and local scale, in the Széklerland and Partium regions in Romania as well as in Slovakia and Serbia. Activities in Ukraine seem to have come to a halt but followed a similar trajectory until 2019.[45]

And there is another aspect to consider: these activities are focused on sites in Serbia, Romania, and Slovakia, all of which have an ethnic Hungarian community and were returned to Hungary by the Vienna Awards (1938/1940), only to be revoked by the Paris Peace Treaties of 1947. While the pre-1920 period disappeared from living memory in the early 2000s, the 1938–1944 period is still being kept alive by intergenerational accounts, and the Hungarian government is actively investing in preserving the memory of this era: in 2020, the HNM hosted the exhibition entitled *The Hungarian World 1938–1940*, presented as an era of "peaceful revision", which was co-organised by the MKI and the private Kodolányi János University.[46]

Given these developments, the idea is no longer farfetched that these activities to develop and popularise a consciousness of national unity in historical and cultural terms (see the definition of *Volkstumskunde* above) amongst both Hungarian citizens and the Hungarian minority populations in its neighbouring countries will be extracted for future political gains.
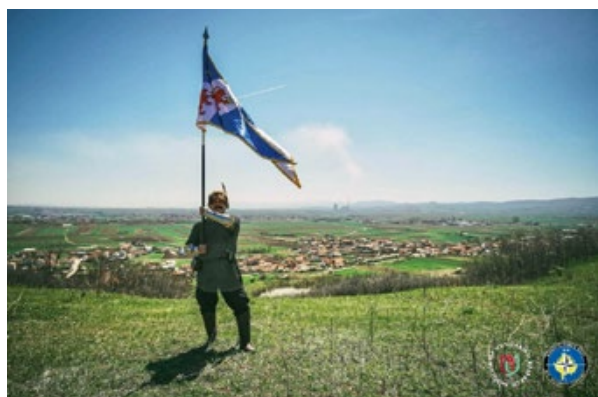
Fig. 14 – 16   MKI-archaeologist/historian Csaba László Hidán in reenactor outfit presenting to NATO KFOR-soldiers at Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje, April 26, 2022, published on Facebook.

Scythian spirit: the overhaul of the Hungarian army

The notion of "Military heritage" for the 21st century is also under reconceptualisation. The defence ministry and the Hungarian army have special programmes about modern-era military history and military heritage, which are considered important for recruitment,[47] helped by dedicated MKI military historians working on extending the concept of "military heritage" from the modern to the early modern and mediaeval eras. In April 2022, MKI historian and archaeologist Csaba László Hidán gave a presentation on the 1448 Battle of Kosovo on site at Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje, to soldiers from 18 countries from the NATO-KFOR mission, by invitation of their Hungarian commander (fig. 14–16). The government-owned daily *Magyar Nemzet*, a media partner of MKI, went overboard and ran the headline "We Hoisted the Hunyadi Banner in Kosovo Again!"[48]

In January 2023, the Hungarian Ministry of Defence began a large-scale overhaul of the army top brass, resulting in the removal of several generals. The move was part of a broader effort to reshape the country's military and security apparatus.[49]

At the same time, the MKI and the Ministry of Defence hosted an academic conference entitled *A gyepűtől a biztonsági határzárig* ("From the medieval defence system to the border barrier"). The term *gyepű* (*indago* in Latin) refers to "a special defensive system of the frontiers of a tribal confederation or a (nomadic) state".[50] The term *határzár* refers to Hungary's new border barrier between Serbia and Croatia that was constructed in 2016.

In his concluding remarks, Tamás Vizi Nagy, (then) Deputy Director-General for Science at the MKI, emphasised that the Hungarian crown represented the territory of Hungary and that this heritage must be preserved not only for the present but also for future generations. He went on to discuss the concept of border defence in Hungarian society over the past few centuries, suggesting that "without Hungarian society, there could be no effective border defence"[51] – thus declaring border defence being a Hungarian mission, a unique and important mission potentially for Europe, a service and a matter of national concern.

The concept of the *gyepű* as the defence system of historical Hungarian statehood stretches it back to the "nomadic state" that existed in the century following

the Battle of Pressburg and the foundation of the Hungarian kingdom. This serves to give the defence of Hungary's contemporary borders a historical dimension dating back more than a millennium and frames protecting these borders in the present day as a collective virtue and duty of the Hungarian people ("society"). The purpose of this conference was obviously to establish the scientific basis for a new historicising narrative and corporate identity for the Hungarian army, an idea that has found support in recent developments: in May 2023, for example, the new chief of staff of the Hungarian Defence Forces Lt. Gen. Gábor Böröndi declared that a culture change was needed in the Hungarian Defence Forces and that he would bring nuclear deterrence, patriotic education and the "Scythian mindset" back into military training.[52]

It would seem that setting up new research institutions and implementing a new heritage regime are components of a long-term political strategy aimed at providing historical and cultural legitimacy for a significant long-term shift in Hungarian defence policy.

Conclusion

In this paper, I set out to map the dimension of reenactments as part of the Orbán government's new heritage regime, including the dimension of popular mass events, experimental archaeology, national commemorations in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia or the streets of Budapest, festivals, influencers, new productions of popular stage performances and the emergence of a corporate identity for the Hungarian defence forces.

Initially driven by individual far-right actors, the illiberal project today not only undermines and replaces existing cultural and scientific structures and institutions but also uses all available resources to establish an epistemic architecture that can co-opt and integrate legitimate and credible academic scholarship in order to gain cultural and scientific legitimacy.

The Orbán government won another term in 2022 and has shown clear signs of having long-term goals. Critical observers must be alert and prepared for the unexpected.

References

1   Because the developments described here are unfolding in real time, academic accounts tend to be outdated by the time they are published. This paper documents the situation in January 2024 and includes only a brief update on the 2024 Kurultáj event. An earlier version of this subchapter was published in Kremmler, Katrin, "The Role of Culture for Illiberal Nation Branding: The Making of Eurasian Civilizationism in Hungary", in Kováts, Eszter (ed.): *Culture Wars in Europe*. Illiberalism Studies Program at the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies (IERES), The Washington University, 2023, pp. 329–343 <https://www.illiberalism.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Culture-Wars-in-Europe-Eszter-Kovats-ed.pdf> [accessed 31 January 2024]. See also: Varga, Zsuzsanna, and Kremmler, Katrin, forthcoming. "Looking for Heterosexuality in the Imaginary East: The Role of Sexualities for the Illiberal Hungarian project." In: Koscianska, A., Kurimay, A., Liskova, K., Renkin, H. (eds.): Handbook on Sexuality in Central Eastern Europe. Routledge.

2   Ablonczy, B., *Go East! A History of Hungarian Turanism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022.

3   kurultaj.hu.

4   See Horváth, Szilvia, "Illiberal Cultural War and Hegemony-Building in Hungarian Academia: Scholars between Cooperation and Resistance", *Illiberalism Studies Program*, 17 November 2022. <https://www.illiberalism.org/illiberal-cultural-war-and-hegemony-building-in-hungarian-academia-scholars-between-cooperation-and-resistance/> [accessed 31 January 2024].

5   See Laruelle, Marlene, *Central Peripheries. Nationhood in Central Asia*. London: UCL Press, 2021.

6   Bassin, Mark, "'Real Europe'. Civilizationism and the Far Right in Eastern Europe", in Mörner, Ninna (ed.), *The Many Faces of the Far Right in the Post-Communist Space: A Comparative Study of Far-Right Movements and Identity in the Region*, Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2022, pp. 15–22. On Kurultáj see also: Imre, Anikó, "Midsommar and the production of white fantasy". *Off white*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526172211.00019>. Web. 11 Sep. 2024 [accessed 31 January 2024].

7   Cf. Pelkmans, Mathijs, "Spectacular Politics at the World Nomad Games", in Montgomery, David D. (ed.), *Central Asia in Context: A Thematic Introduction to the Region*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2022, pp. 425–430.

8   Cf. Kremmler, Katrin, "The Role of Culture for Illiberal Nation Branding".

9   Cf. Laruelle, Marlene, "Religious revival, nationalism and the 'invention of tradition': political Tengrism in Central Asia and Tatarstan", *Central Asian Survey*, 26 (2007), pp. 203–216.

10   Stern, Aurélie, "Tous des descendants d'Attila? La présence turque au festival identitaire Macar Turan Kurultayı en Hongrie". Paper given at *Mobilisations conservatrices en Europe Centrale et Orientale dans une perspective transnationale. Colloque International 8–9 décembre 2022*, French Research Center in Humanities and Social Sciences (CEFRES), Prague, 8 December 2023.

11   Cf. Teisenhoffer, Viola, "Pagan revival, re-enchantment, and new forms of rituality in Hungary: the case of the Kurultaj festival", in *Religion*, (2024) 54:1, pp. 62–87, https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2023.2277023 [accessed 8 August 2024].

12   McMahon, Richard, "Resurrecting raciology? Genetic ethnology and pre-1945 anthropological race classification", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 83 (2020) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsc.2019.101242> [accessed 8 July 2024].

13   See Kremmler, Katrin, "'Eurasian Magyars': The Making of a New Hegemonic National Prehistory in Illiberal Hungary", in Koranyi, James and Hanscam, Emily (eds.), *Digging Politics: The Ancient Past and Contested Present in East-Central Europe*. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023, pp. 179–213 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110697445-008 [accessed 8 July 2024].

14   E.g., in *Plos One* <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0205920> [accessed 8 July 2024].

15   See <https://mki.gov.hu/en/> [accessed 31 January 2024].

16   Keményfi, Róbert and Csíki, Tamás, "Ungarische Volkstumsforschung", in Fahlbusch, Michael et al. (eds.), *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften. Akteure, Netzwerke, Forschungsprogramme.* Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2017, pp. 1165–1181.

17   See <https://m2.mtmt.hu/gui2/?type=institutes&mode=browse&sel=institutes21426> [accessed 31 January 2024].

18   In November 2023, Simon was sacked from his position after a controversy around LGBTQ+ content at the World Press Photo exhibition hosted by the NHM. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/hungarys-fires-national-museum-director-over-lgbtq-imagery-world-press-photo-exhibition-1234685816/> [accessed 31 January 2024].

19   <https://magyarnemzet.hu/kultura/2022/08/bemutatkozott-a-nemzeti-muzeum-regeszeti-tarlata-a-kurultajon> [accessed 31 January 2024].

20   <https://hun-ren.hu/en/about-hun-ren/about-us> [accessed 12 September 2024].

21   <https://www.facebook.com/nemzetiregeszetiintezet/posts/pfbid02xUeN4KtnPZMbyuMoZZVh5jBKd5ZobjHDY6A0SUxCbUfS8iM8b-K52EzCG0GN7taNil> [accessed 12 September 2024].

22   The term "malicious adventurers of foreign origin" can be decoded as meaning "Habsburgs, Communists, Jews".

23   MKI, "The Institute of Hungarian Research has reinstated the genuine past of the nation, restoring the truths of our chronicles", Institute of Hungarian Research <https://mki.gov.hu/en/hirek-en/sajto-en/a-magyarsag-kutato-intezet-en> [accessed 31 January 2024].

24   I thank Annastiina Kallius for suggesting this term.

25   Cf. Kremmler, "The Role of Culture for Illiberal Nation Branding".

26   Varga, Zsuzsanna and Kremmler, Katrin, "Looking for Heterosexuality in the Imaginary East: The Role of Sexualities for the Illiberal Hungarian project", in Koscianska, Agnieszka, Kurimay et al. (eds.), *Handbook on Sexuality in Central Eastern Europe*. New York: Routledge, Forthcoming.

27   See Facebook post: <https://www.facebook.com/kasler.miklos.hivatalos/posts/pfbid032tXfBMCREFfDB4Z47pR5suzZ2A4BBGcopFaJiray9gg-McmdcPtf3TWXkkUA77iiul> [accessed 31 January 2024].

28   See <https://www.valaszonline.hu/2021/01/18/mateffy-attila-pozsonyi-csata-film-kozleme> [accessed 31 January 2024].

29   <https://mki.gov.hu/hu/hirek-hu/reflexio/a-pozsonyi-csatarol-csak-az-esemenyhez-melto-modon-szabad-megemlekezni> [accessed 31 January 2024], [website no longer active, archived material].

30   See <https://mki.gov.hu/en/hirek-en/minden-hir-en/1242-at-the-gates-of-the-west-gap-filling-historical-adventure-film-about-the-era-of-bela-iv-and-batu-khan> [accessed 31 January 2024].

31   See <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13542474/> [accessed 31 January 2024].

32   MKI, June 23, 2022. <https://mki.gov.hu/en/hirek-en/minden-hir-en/1242-at-the-gates-of-the-west-gap-filling-historical-adventure-film-about-the-era-of-bela-iv-and-batu-khan> [accessed 31 January 2024].

33   See <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15388062> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvWNW6g5l78> [accessed 31 January 2024].

34   See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZj5LGJr_Iw> [accessed 31 January 2024].

35   <http://kurultaj.hu/2019/06/nagyvaradi-szent-laszlo-napok-a-magyar-turan-alapitvany-programjai/> [accessed 31 January 2024].

36   Szafonova, Tatiyana, "The Central Asian Turn in Hungarian Identity Politics: How is Self-Orientalization Different from Orientalism, if it is Different?". Paper given at *The Institute for Advanced Study*, Central European University (CEU), Budapest, 10 May 2024.

37   See Malter, Tabea: Vorgeschichten in Archäologischen Landesmuseen. Zur Konstruktion von Gedächtnis, Erbe und Identität in Ausstellungen, Bielefeld: Transcript 2023, p. 355.

38   See <https://www.mdr.de/kultur/ausstellungen/halle-landesmuseum-vorgeschichte-reiternomaden-100.html> [archived material, last accessed 1 September 2023].

39   Cf. Feischmidt, Margit, "Memory-Politics and Neonationalism: Trianon as Mythomoteur". *Nationalities Papers*, 48 (2020), pp. 130–143 <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2018.72> [accessed 8 August 2024].

40   <https://www.facebook.com/muzejbacketopole/posts/pfbid037zN-fzCpCWeC1KDvFfEp6R1Cj162p1Srhke9QEu1wwcNZCUsjEC6w7eZX6H1h-WzDfl?locale=hu_HU> [accessed 13 September 2024].

41   See <https://www.felfolddalia.com/en> with English, Hungarian, Russian and Turkish language menu [accessed 31 January 2024].

42   Author's field notes, July 22, 2023.

43   Author's field notes, July 22, 2023.

44   See <https://kurultaj.hu/2023/08/a-kulhoni-magyarsagert-dijat-kapta-kopecsni-gabor-hagyomanyorzo-szovetsegunk-egyik-felvideki-vezetoje-gratulalunk/> [accessed 31 January 2024].

45   See <http://kurultaj.hu/2019/09/a-magyar-turan-alapitvany-csapata-karpataljan-a-hungary-fest-en/> [accessed 31 January 2024].

46   See <https://magyarvilagkiallitas.hu/> [accessed 31 January 2024].

47   <https://honvedelem.hu/cimke/hagyomanyorzes.html> [accessed 5 May 2023].

48   <https://magyarnemzet.hu/kultura/2022/04/ujra-kituztuk-a-hunyadi-zaszlot-rigomezon> [accessed 31 January 2024].

49   <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/hungarian-generals-ousted-as-orban-overhauls-top-army-leadership-1.1874592> [accessed 31 January 2024].

50   *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare and Military Technology* <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195334036.001.0001/acref-9780195334036-e-0466> [accessed 31 January 2024].

51   MKI Facebook page, February 1, 2023 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1153718705335410> [accessed 31 January 2024].

52   <https://telex.hu/belfold/2023/05/02/honvedelmi-es-rendeszeti-bizottsag-borondi-gabor> [accessed 31 January 2024].

Mythological Ancestry in Hungarian Rock

Áron Szele

How do most societies discover their "own" past and history? The conventional answer would be that they read history textbooks, are taught history in school or visualise it in some way in educational facilities such as museums. But how many of these examples leave a lasting mark or shape identity at a societal level? This text argues that the role played by media is at least as important in forming political identities, if not more so. Of all the various types of audio-visual media accessible to the public, music is one of the most readily available. Music streaming services on the Internet have huge, often uncurated, libraries in which all styles of music containing all kinds of lyrics can be found. This has led to the growth and popularity of politically charged music covering the entire political spectrum. In Central and Eastern Europe, nationalist rock has become one of the most popular types of music. This paper sets out to examine its messages, the manner in which they are delivered and the context in which Hungarian rock speaks about the nation's perceived origin and to ascertain whether this creates divisions or unity.

Being a historian rather than an ethnomusicologist, I am tackling this topic mainly from the perspective of my own expertise and from the point of view of its lyrical content as the main receptacle for its intended message. Whilst the style, composition and arrangement of the songs is also very important, and I do make reference to these, my argument is that it is the message that sets it apart from other types of similar music. Thus, many pieces of ethno-nationalist rock cannot be distinguished from their peers from a stylistic perspective. Although the message in the lyrics takes precedence, the style, the instruments used and the visual presentation are also important[1] and will be taken into consideration, albeit only as a part of the whole, as a "chaperone" for the lyrical content.

Establishing context

Ideas about there being Hungarian ethnic origins other than those found in serious academic research are as old as the idea of the Hungarian nation itself and are indeed a product of it, as Hungarian elites have sought to define themselves and establish their nation as an independent European country. This has been done in two ways: through genuine scientific, historical and linguistic investigation on the one hand and by mythologising through art on the other. Exploring the history of this search and the Hungarian idea of the origin of the Hungarian nation falls outside the scope of this paper due to lack of space;[2] in a nutshell, the end product after a century or so was official confirmation, both in academic circles and at the level of the official debate, that Hungarians shared the same ethno-linguistic origin as the rest of the Finno-Ugric family and were thus related to Finns and, to a lesser degree, Estonians. However, many Hungarians viewed this origin in the Ural-Altai mountains as a lowly one, suggesting as it did that their ancestors were not conquerors of empires or doers of great historical deeds but a people of humble pastoral origins. A much more seductive idea was to associate the nation with an alternative past that cast them as the scions of the Huns or even the Scythians[3] before them. As genuine investigations into the history of past societies such as that of the Huns and Avars (who shared some similarities with early Hungarians and lived in what is now Hungary) and Iranians-Scythians continued as part of Hungarian scholarly life, these theories became an accepted, albeit unofficial, part of the political discourse about history. During the interwar period, they crystallised into concrete political debates. Many anti-communist free corps and secret societies emerged in the wake of the first World War[4] and appropriated alternative theories of their nation's ethnic origin for themselves in an effort to present themselves as revolutionaries to the general public. They began to use these alternative theories to criticise the country's former elites for having lost the war in a disastrous manner. The criticism even went so far as to question the legitimacy of the nation's Christian origins under its first king, Stephen,[5] who was presented as a traitor of the pre-modern Hungarian military democracy. The claim was made that, when Stephen Christianised the nation, he established the Hungarian state and the elite, setting the country on a course towards national disaster.[6] By contrast, his rival Kop-

pány was presented as a hero, continuing the Pagan, warmongering tradition of the Hungarians that stretched back to the Scythians and the Huns of Attila.[7] These theories, which ran counter to mainstream research and the available evidence, were appropriated and developed further by the fascist party ideologues and historians Ödön Málnás and Tibor Baráth into a racial history of Hungary.[8] In their view, racially distinct elites (Turanian Hungarians) exploited a huge, immobile mass of Finno-Ugric Hungarians who were related, but only distantly so.[9] These ideas fell into obscurity after the Second World War, only being kept alive by far-right Hungarian émigrés. After 1990, however, there was an explosion of books, articles and other types of media dedicated to alternative theories about the ethnic origins of the Hungarian people, some of them including the old tropes listed above and featuring mythic figures such as Attila and Koppány. Political music was among the new types of art that repackaged and transported these myths.

Combining music with nationalism, however, was not an invention of the post-communist period. It actually enjoys a long history in Hungary, dating back to the 19th century, when the first national operas and musical plays on the topic appeared. Composers such as Ferenc Erkel put music and national heroism together in works such as *Bánk Bán* and *Hunyadi László.* The 20th century would come to be dominated by the (re-)discovery of folk music by musicians such as Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók.[10] Due to its popular/populist nature, folk music remained an important political tool even during the communist period, influencing the style and content of popular music during this and future periods. Folk music thus retained its popularity.[11]

1983 witnessed what was probably the most important musical event that brought together popular music, nationalism and populism: the premiere of the rock opera *István, a király* ("Stephen, the King"). It was written by János Bródy, with music by Levente Szörényi, both of whom were former members of the rock band Illés. It was a hugely successful staging of the mythical birth of the Hungarian state and polity. The opposition between Christianity (Stephen) and Paganism (Koppány) appears prominently in Act III of the opera. Musical works like this helped to open the door for other works combining rock music with the theme of the nation's origin. In 1993, the same Szörényi premiered a new rock opera entitled *Attila, the Sword of God.* At around the same time (1970s–1980s), folk rock emerged in Hungary with bands such

as Kormorán, who are widely regarded as the precursors of *nemzeti rock,* "national(-ist) rock" music.[12]

Another important development in the 1980s was the arrival of the skinhead and punk movements in Hungary, with bands such as Oi-kor, Egészséges Fejbőr ("Healthy Skin") and Magozott Cseresznye ("Seeded Cherry" – a reference to shaved heads) forming during that decade.[13] They espoused thinly veiled racism and nationalism in their lyrics, while their style of music was varied, including elements of ska, oi-punk and hard rock.[14] Many of these bands survived the fall of communism, enjoying great popularity and influence throughout the 1990s and even into the early 2000s (on their particular scene), helping to form the *nemzeti rock* movement in Hungary. They were the first to openly explore and present to the public the racial angle on the origin of the Hungarians and to embrace heroes such as Attila.

A palette of styles: the typology of nationalist rock

Before beginning to analyse content, I must first make it clear that not all rock containing elements of national-ethnic origin is created in a similar way: there is a large variety of styles and depths that the bands employ in tackling the topic. Rather than existing in a vacuum, however, they represent a part of a larger palette, with genres overlapping and flowing into one another. This, as I argue below, is actually the point, as they act like slices or even layers of an onion, each driving the listener further towards the core of the ideology. For now, though, it is useful to distinguish between three main categories of band and style, each of which exhibits a different intensity in its political messaging: 1. Ethno-rock and folk metal bands. Prominent examples of this category are bands such as Dalriada, KerecsenSólyom and Sacra Arcana.[15] 2. Nemzeti rock bands. The most well-known of these are Kárpátia, Hungarica and Romantikus Erőszak (fig. 1).[16] 3. White power music bands such as Magozott Cseresznye and Egészséges Fejbőr.[17]

As stated above, these three genres can be distinguished to an extent by a certain set of characteristics, first and foremost the musical style. Bands in the first category usually play a form of metal, be this folk metal or an adapted form of black metal – this is not usually as harsh-sounding as Scandinavian black metal, nor is

Fig. 1   Romantikus Erőszak live concert in Budapest, March 2015.

the imagery associated with the music as dark. But it is similar in terms of how song lyrics are written, in the imagery used in the music videos and in the style in which the bands and their fans dress. Like its Scandinavian relative, Hungarian Folk Metal borrows heavily from imagined traditions of dress and, more significantly, real or imagined mythical elements from the country's history feature prominently in its lyrics. These usually include the heroic wanderings and plunderings undertaken by the Hungarian tribes in the pre-state period. Though impossible to tell, it is safe to assume that the Viking mythology found in Scandinavian metal and the Celtic folklore that infused Anglo-Saxon folk rock[18] and metal are probably the sources of inspiration for the subject matter covered by these bands. The Viking-Magyar parallel is obvious, and both romanticise the alleged ethnic traits of mythical freedom, martial might and authenticity of the Pagan period of history. This is encapsulated by symbols used in the bands' presentation of themselves, with album covers and promotional art that features some Runic writing, the clothes the bands wear, and so on. Instruments considered "traditional" are also used in their songs, especially mediaeval musical instruments such as the *duda* (Hungarian bagpipes), *köcsögduda* (friction drum), *cobza* (a type of lute), zither,

tamburica and various types of violins. These are all firm fixtures of Hungarian late-mediaeval and Renaissance music as well as folk music. The bands' songs are usually medium-to-long affairs with complicated, technically difficult guitar riffs. They also feature guitar solos and are often structured as follows: intro (sometimes with traditional musical instruments and excerpts) – chorus – main content – guitar solo – chorus. The vocals are also of a high technical quality, as is the production.

Nemzeti rock bands are usually just that. They play a style of music that can easily be categorised as hard rock or heavy metal, with broad appeal, and do not offer the larger scene of domestic or international rock anything by way of novelty. Their style is somewhat conservative and mainstream. Some bands may borrow from or lean towards punk (Romantikus Erőszak), heavy metal (Kárpátia) or hard jazzy rock (Ismerős Arcok). Many of them also incorporate folk and mediaeval instruments. For example, Romantikus Erőszak has a bagpipe player as one of its semi-permanent members, and this instrument features in many of the band's songs. Kárpátia has used the zither in many of its song intros, amongst them *Erdély Szabad!*,[19] as well as various mediaeval stringed instruments. The technical prowess demonstrated by these bands is usually good, as many

Fig. 2   Hungarica during the Polish-Hungarian Friendship Days in Kielce, Poland, March 2019.

of their members have been musicians for decades, but they shy away from complex arrangements and flashy technical elements; any guitar solos that are put in take up only a short or, at most, medium length of time in the songs. These bands sound the most commercial and might even be considered "easy listening".

Lastly, white power bands are the most limited in terms of musical style. They usually line up as the classic rock quartet with a lead guitar, sometimes a second guitar, bass guitar and drums. Other instruments are hardly ever used, although they might be included as opening instrumentals in album versions of songs, but this is extremely rare. The music that they play is a form of punk called "oi", a style of punk adopted by skinhead bands from the 1980s and pioneered by British bands such as Cock Sparrer and The Cockney Rejects. The bastardised version of this music was created by the notorious white power group Skrewdriver. The songs are short and fast, and their structure is uncomplicated. Like punk, their guitar riffs are composed of just a few notes. Some of the bands also play a form of hardcore known in the West as "hatecore", which features slower, dragged-out guitar riffs and screamed, distorted vocals, all elements borrowed from hardcore.

The second element that can help to distinguish between the three loose stylistic categories is their political message. It is also the most difficult element to gauge, as many of the bands make use of metaphor, allegory and symbolism in their lyrics to varying degrees. Some may suggest certain things and actions and expect the listener to reach their own conclusions, whilst others state their intentions in a very explicit manner. Whereas all three types of band reference the national, mythical, pre-Christian past in their lyrics, they use it to promote different political messages. Folk metal bands present various aspects of the past and the nation's ethnos are presented as a longing for an idealised community and social concord and as a metaphor for the beginning of social strife. They exhibit a romanticised notion of the historical past and of the nation's origins in general. This sort of rose-tinted view of national ancestry is actually shared by all three categories. Yet it does not translate directly into a political agenda – at most, this is implicit when the listener contrasts what they are hearing with current events. It is an exercise in myth-making and the promotion of a positive mythology related to an ideal, long-lost past. It is also a longing for this past, as the bands highlight the relationship be-

tween Hungarians past and present. There is an underlying implication that the past might be recovered in some way, but not much more than that.

With *nemzeti rock*, the past, whether this be the ethnic origin of the nation or its continued history, is a political tool to further an agenda for today. However ancient it may be, the past is ever-relevant, looming large over the present. The kind of message that folk metal bands convey by showcasing glorious episodes of history is voiced directly by *nemzeti rock* groups: the current state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue as it runs counter to the ideal state the nation used to be in, when its community was at its most pristine and unified in those initial glorious moments of history. This is the message of the far right translated into music. Here, I find it useful to use Cas Mudde's concept of the far right[20] as an umbrella term. He divides far-right politics into two categories, the "extreme right" and the "radical right". The extreme right disagrees with the main characteristics of democracy, including political equality and the majority voting system, while the radical right supports democracy but rejects the key values of minority rights and the rule of law.[21] Moreover, the extreme right is actively engaged in a real or discursive struggle that lies outside the realms of law (and that does not eschew violence) in order to achieve its political goals. Mudde's definition of the far right as a movement with more than one actor or ideology helps us to understand the field of far-right music better, as it reflects the multiple shades of grey inherent in and choices made by its political arm. Thus, there are radical, extreme, conservative and even fascist actors acting semi-independently of one another; this is as true for politics as it is for culture. Folk metal musicians may only present a part of the message – almost indistinguishable from similar songs by their *nemzeti rock* counterparts – as an argument for political mobilisation and a conservative political revolution. This political revolution deepens even further when one arrives at openly racist bands of the white power music scene, who call for nothing less than the racial purification of society.

Similarly, the political commitment shown by the three groups is also different. Folk metal music usually claims to be apolitical; as mentioned above, the sociopolitical conclusions of their songs are obtuse at best and sometimes even non-existent. They show no commitment to any of the actors on the political scene, and their political leanings are not obvious to the outside observer. This is not true of *nemzeti rock* bands. While most attempt to maintain at least a modicum of autonomy and cultivate an image of independence (since it adds to their image as incorruptible critics of society and politics), they are more or less loosely associated with radical or extreme right-wing politics. Bands such as Romantikus Erőszak and Kárpátia fronted many political gatherings organised by the radical right-wing political party Jobbik[22] before it shifted to the political centre.[23] Ismerős Arcok became the darlings of the ruling radical right-wing party Fidesz, participating in its political assemblies, such as those dedicated to combating the influence of George Soros and the European Union, its "Peace Marches" and even its campaign rallies.[24] White power bands usually support the extreme right or, traditionally, political organisations such as Blood & Honour Hungary.

The lyrics

A look at the content of the songs produced by rock bands that tackle the topic of ethnic origins and national characterology reveals a surprising degree of similarity. There is a large pool of common topics, themes, actors and song titles. One of the first categories that stand out is that of national mythology. For example, the title *Csodaszarvas* is shared by songs written and performed by a wide variety of groups, ranging from folk metalists to exponents of *nemzeti rock* and white power bands. Here are some sample lyrics for such a song:

> Hey, I never forget, I never forget
> The brightness of the sun
> The flame of the moon
> The world of stars!
> Hey, I never forget, I never forget
> The wind roaring the word
> Shiny gold from the stream
> Echoing spring song!
> I went out on a mountain
> I look down on the valley
> There I see you drinking
> Wonder boy-deer
> Bright sun on his forehead
> Stars on its branches[25]

Fig. 3   Dalriada performing at Ragnarök-Festival 2011 in Lichtenfels, Germany.

The lyrics come from one of the best-known Hungarian folk metal bands, Dalriada (fig. 3). The song recounts the opening moments from the national myth of the wonder stag, a beast that was supposedly followed by the Hungarian tribes and that led them out of Asia to eventually discover their new home in the Carpathian Basin. The song of the same name by Egészséges fejbőr ("Healthy Scalp") tells a similar story:

> Look at the forest and you see a game animal
> He runs there boldly at noon
> Brave young men in his wake
> Hunor's Magyar get there
> They understand the great miracle
> Because the wild ones just cheated on them
> To find a new home
> Oh beautiful miracle deer
> Show us again
> Help me find a new path
> Because otherwise we'll get lost[26]

This song is from a band that straddles the boundary between *nemzeti rock* and white power music. Formerly a skinhead/white power band, it shifted its style further towards more "mainstream" *nemzeti rock* in the mid-2000s. There are similar songs dedicated to the mythology of ethno-genesis in the repertoire of bands such as Verszerzodes ("Blood Oath", with its song of the same name) – a self-declared white power group – or the Pagan black metal band Arvisura (with its own song of the same name). They both narrate the mythological act of the so-called blood oath, in which the leaders of the seven Hungarian tribes – Álmos, Előd, Ond, Kond, Tas, Huba and Töhötöm – mixed their blood together in a chalice swore fealty to one another and to Álmos as their leader and vowed to establish a new homeland and nation.

There are also many songs about the Hungarians' Christianity, despite the same bands dedicating songs to Pagan leaders and events, e.g.:

Kárpátia's – *Egy az Isten, egy a Nemzet*
("God is One, One is the Nation")

One is God, one is the nation
No matter how weak, no matter how wounded.
Where the trees grow to the sky,
There are still milestones.
[chorus]
Our holy crown
Protect, take care of our country
Morning star, our beautiful cross
Shine on us.
God is one, one is the nation[27]

Romantikus Erőszak – *Szent László éneke*
("Saint László's Song")

Our house is burning, the stubble is burning,
many of our good knights are dead
The beautiful Hungarians attacked the bloody
Kuns
The bloody fight lasted for three days and
three nights
[…]
[Chorus]
Great king, be with us
We're suffering a robbery
Help us now,
[…]
King László is angry, his two eyes sparkle
Ungodly heathens have no place in our country[28]

Interestingly, folk metal bands choose to dedicate much of their song content to Pagan imagery. Vágtázó Csodaszarvas (the successor to folk punk band Vágtázó Halottkémek, now playing more of a mix of folk and rock, fig. 4), Dalriada and KerecsenSólyom speak about and allude to various natural deities at length in their lyrics, including sun gods, the spirit of the winds (Vágtázó Csodaszarvas – *Napkapu*, Dalriada – *Napisten hava*, Dalriada – *A Nap és a Szél háza*), or martial gods such as the god of war (KerecsenSólyom – *Kerecsen*).[29]

Many of the bands also include, on the same albums, songs about the barbarian raids and heroic exploits of both Huns and Hungarians. Examples include Vágtázó Csodaszarvas – *Napkapu*, KerecsenSólyom –

the entire *Aquileia Ostroma* album (2010), Dalriada – the entire *Szelek* album,[30] especially the song *Hajnalpír (Világnak királya, Attila)*, and also Arvisura – *Attila*, Sacra Arcana – *Isten kardja*.[31] This wealth of songs is likely to reflect the fantastical nature of the events explored but also the latent, unexpressed nationalism of the bands.

Hunnic mythology is a main point of connection between folk metal and *nemzeti rock*. Mainstays of the *nemzeti rock* scene, Romantikus Erőszak and Kárpátia have released almost identical songs in terms of their subject matter and lyrical content, such as *Isten ostora* by the former and *Hajdanán* by the latter.[32] *Hajdanán* is a typical example as it mixes the origins of many ethnicities together haphazardly in an orgy of irrational Hungarian radical nationalism:

Once upon a time, a Szekler went out into
the woods,
A fairy coaxed him deeper and deeper,
He walked to where no bird went,
He found his home deep in the forest,
And he said:
Hear Hungarians,
Scythians, Huns, Avars,
From a flesh, from a blood
I'm one with you![33]

Fig. 4   Album Cover of Vágtázó Csodaszarvas, *Végtelen Ázsia!*
Fonó Records 2008.

This type of diatribe is a sort of primer in the nationalism of the Hungarian far right concerning ethnic origin. The main features of the nation's past are its martial trait, its military democracy and its masculine nature. Songs revel in detailing every aspect of early Hunnic, Hungarian and, as we can see above, even Scythian battle techniques (KerecsenSólyom – *Csatába!*, "To Battle!"),[34] their conquests and so forth. We can see this in songs such as Sacra Arcana's *Isten kardja* ("Sword of God"):

> "Scythian kings had
> A sword from the gods
> That ruled over all peoples
> […]
> Their wonderful sword is so lost
> In the darkness of the past
> only the elders know
> Their sword is still in the world."[35]

Other songs (Vágtázó Csodaszarvas' *Hunok csatája*, Romantikus Erőszak's *Isten ostora*)[36] detail the similarities between the two (three?) ethnicities, glossing over the fact that they are separated by five to six centuries of history. The bands are lifting material straight out of the alternative theories of national ancestry, which in the interwar period were harnessed by fringe and radical political movements, chiefly the Hungarian radical right and fascist movements.

While there is an inherent tension between the various ethnic origins of the nation and its Pagan versus Christian roots, this is collapsed in the discourse pursued by the radical right; the contradictions do not matter, only the heroism and the glory of the past. The past is perceived as a sort of "greatest hits" album, a compilation of glorious deeds, albeit unrelated to one another. It is a disjointed synthesis, not a logical story. The songs of various groups present a palette of seemingly competing heroes and narratives; however, they are not competing if one sees them as they are presented, in a grossly superficial understanding of history, as part of a national pantheon, as places of memory,[37] or stopping-off points in a national narrative.

Since this study is about the perceived national origins of the Hungarian nation in nationalist rock music, I shall not go into any great detail regarding the rest of the subject matter in the lyrics of the aforementioned bands. It is, however, very important to mention that folk metal, *nemzeti rock* and white power bands all have a large proportion of songs dedicated to various folk and national heroes. All of them also write and sing about landmark moments in national history, both victories and defeats. Besides the general historicist approach to songwriting already mentioned, the main common thread shared by all these bands is the mediaeval period.

In folk metal, this is due partly to the influence of similar Western bands but also to the nationalist views held by the groups. This is a trait that they share with *nemzeti rock* and white power bands, although the latter pays very little attention to the Middle Ages. The reason for this is probably conceptual, since outspokenly fascist bands have their own mythology linked to the interwar and wartime periods, with which they have a morbid fascination. The other reason for this is ideological: bands that are the heralds of fascist movements are probably the least historicist in terms of their ultimate goal; their project is a modernising and revolutionary attempt (not in any positive sense, but radical nonetheless) that aims to upend history, not return to it.[38] There is a tension between racist music and the rest, racial, pan-European "whiteness" versus the Hungarians' national origin (the dominant view and the more popular choice due to the institutionalised exposure of this theory) being the main bone of contention.[39] Because of this, white power music cannot break out of its niche; but elements of it have seeped into the mainstream, forming a new style and type of music: nationalist rock.[40] This phenomenon is a microcosm of the "traditional" post-war fascist movements versus the contemporary alt-right, which obscures its intent in order to gain political support.

It is vital to point out that, whilst not candid, folk metal bands are not innocent in the messages that they communicate. As stated above, they choose metaphor and vagueness instead of a clearly stated and comprehensive message, but, if one cares to read between the lines, one can even find traces of a political agenda in their songs. Perhaps the best example of this type of concealed political messaging is *Dalriada*'s song *The Kingdom of John the Baptist*. It is an adaptation of a poem by the Hungarian national poet, Janos Arany, that reads:

> The Hungarian nation was a proud warrior,
> adventurous people
> A double-edged sword that wounded left and
> right when it moved

And left and right, where did the edge of
the weapon turn
The desolate country became desolate and
the music of wolves roared through it
[…]
A German man stepped into the royal chair
He who took it secretly gave the country to
another
And by giving it to someone else and ruined
the Hungarians
In a terrible civil war, a Hungarian shed the blood
of a Hungarian for years […].[41]

These lyrics suggest that there is a connection between the ethnicity and origin of the ruler and the success of the nation itself; I would argue that, in these lyrics, we can find the seeds of an overarching narrative that pits foreign ethnicities against the Hungarians. If we read and listen to the rest of the songs through this lens, the importance and large number of songs dedicated to the topic of ethnic origins, history and pure martial traits becomes understandable. They are part of a political-cultural conflict with the surrounding world but also against internal enemies that are seeking to tone down the characteristics that made Hungarians great in the past and that, indeed, gave them their national identity in the bands' opinion. This is the missing link between folk metal and *nemzeti rock* (the link between the latter and white power bands is more obvious). This argument is further backed up by actual events, such as the several occasions (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2020) on which *Dalriada* participated in *nemzeti rock*'s premier festival, the Hungarian Sziget. Here, it shared the stage with notorious *nemzeti rock* bands such as Romantikus Erőszak, Kárpátia, folk rock bands such as Kormorán and fellow folk metal band Vágtázó Csodaszarvas as well as bands that are on the borderline between *nemzeti rock* and white power music such as Oi-kor, Magozott Cseresznye and Titkolt Ellenállás.[42]

Conclusions

My argument is that we must treat these bands as enablers of far right ideology in that they act as a gateway to far-right ideologies for the listener. This occurs in several ways:

Since the same theories of ethnic origin and national mythology are present in all types of music men-

tioned above, one can theorise that they might function as a gateway to more radical *nemzeti rock* and far-right music and to radicalised subcultures. This is because they present snippets of an already established ideology and written narrative, all ready to be explored by the listener. These bite-sized pieces of ideology are easily absorbed by the listener, especially when they are accompanied by music that is written and performed well. The bands gain fans on account of their sound, not only their lyrics.

Since an overwhelming majority of the bands have a subject matter that is either identical or similar, it is easy for fans to "cross over" from one type of band to another. They also share a similar sound, inasmuch as all of them can be categorised as belonging to the broader category of hard rock. All of the bands play nationally themed rock, so it is easy for the casual listener to discover similar bands within the same category. As we have seen above, they all include songs in their repertoire that are historicist, narrate the ethnic origin of the nation (giving priority to alternative theories about national ancestry), and present the national pantheon of historical heroes in a positive manner. However, heroes and events are set up in an antagonistic relationship, a teleology against an outgroup. This is not always apparent but is always present if the listener explores the subject matter further or goes further down the rabbit hole towards more radical and explicit bands and styles. What is merely suggested by a folk metal band or even absent completely from their songs (such as a negative presentation of outsiders) will be found in songs penned by nationalist rockers or white power "oi" bands, which, incredibly, often share the same title (e.g. the songs about Attila and the Huns).

The alternative, partially Pagan theories of national origin do not exist in a vacuum. They are not neutral stories but are part of and inextricable from a larger narrative – that of the far right. This narrative begins with alternative theories about the ancestry of Hungarians, preferring the fantastical and glorious Scythians and Huns of Attila to the mundane, but academically established Finno-Ugric origins. This kind of narration, introducing falsehoods and exaggerations across the whole timeline of Hungarian history, continues to the present day.

Many listeners are introduced to this kind of history through music and channelled towards discovering the rest of the nationalist narrative: racism, nationalism,

chauvinism, homophobia, xenophobia and so forth. Listeners can easily migrate from music to other types of receptacle for the nationalists' narratives: printed media, political social media pages, etc.

Thus music is instrumentalised as a tool for a *Kulturkampf*[43] between the mythical origins of the nation on the one hand and universalism on the other, as there are many other types of new media in the age of the Internet.[44] The seemingly large variety of the bands and messages is part of the strategy of the far right, which is weaponising new media and culture for its own ends. By hiding behind metaphor, avoiding overt declarations and breaking down the message into many component parts, the far right is attempting to mainstream it.

It is therefore useful to think of far-right music as we do the contemporary far-right political movement, as defined by Mudde: instead of a central party or movement, there is a palette full of as many ideologies as there are styles of music, all sharing pieces of the narrative. In fact, the muddled nature of music and of the ideology is precisely the point, as this is the manner in which the modern-day alt-right presents itself and exists: diverse and muddled in its nature, in order to conceal fascism, sometimes even from its own followers. It acts as a gateway to real fascism, just like the layers of an onion. Music and the historicising content of its lyrics are exploited in a decentralised manner, with the ultimate goals sometimes being obscured not only from the listeners but also from those who produce some of the music. Some of the folk metal or folk rock bands that produce songs about Attila's Huns might not even realise they are fuelling the growth of the far right, nor would they define themselves as such. The musical styles, just like the ideology of the far right or alt-right, exist as a loose network in which autonomous cells communicate with each other yet remain somewhat disconnected.

There is, however, a central myth that binds them together: a conspiratorial understanding of reality. The truth lies in alternates and is always different from the official narrative. *Nemzeti rock* is also part of the official culture of nationalism but uses alternative theories in order to position itself as both a subculture[45] and a counter-cultural movement[46]. The difference between accepted notions of the ethnos and mythical ones helps with this. By advocating alternative stories, they position themselves as the holders of the truth, hidden from the public by "the authorities", who are therefore in a

position to critique the establishment. Young people may see this as a "cool" factor, a rebellious counter-narrative to that of the universalist or moderate establishment. In this strange way, *nemzeti rock* both subverts and reinforces the narrative of the nation-state. Together with its insidious use of nationalism, this is its most dangerous feature, subverting the discontent and need for change felt by the public and channelling it toward hate and prejudice by using a type of media that all of us consume every day: music.

References

1 Teitelbaum, Benjamin, "Music of the Far-Right", *Music Research Annual*, 2 (2021), pp. 1–20, <https://musicresearchannual.org/teitelbaum-the-study-of-far-right-music/> [accessed 8 August 2024].

2 Ablonczy, Balázs, *Go East! A History of Hungarian Turanism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv21r3q9j> [accessed 8 August 2024].

3 Fodor, István, *In Search of a New Homeland: The Prehistory of the Hungarian People and the Conquest*, translated by Tarnoy, Helen. Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1982 [originally published as *Verecke Híres Útján...*, Budapest: Gondolat, 1975]; Kovács, László, and Veszprémy, László, *Honfoglalás És Nyelvészet*, Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1997.

4 Bodó, Béla, *Pál Prónay: Paramilitary Violence and Anti-Semitism in Hungary, 1919–1921*, Pittsburgh, PA: Center for East European and Russian Studies, 2011.

5 Rogger, Hans, and Weber, Eugen J., *The European Right: A Historical Profile*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965; Weber, Eugen, *Varieties of Fascism: Doctrines of Revolution in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1964.

6 Rogger and Weber, *A Historical Profile*, p. 378, C.A. Macartney, *October Fifteenth (Hungary, 1929–1945)*, Edinburgh University Press, vol. 1, p. 31.

7 Rogger and Weber, *A Historical Profile*, p. 378, Andrew C. Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary, 1825–1945*, Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 257.

8 Szele, Áron, *The Arrow Cross: The Ideology of Hungarian Fascism: A Conceptual Approach*, Central European University, 2015, <https://www.ceu.edu/sites/default/files/attachment/event/14210/thesisbookletszele.pdf> [accessed 8 August 2024].

9 Szele, Áron, "Racist Politicking and Antisemitism in Fascist Discourse. The Hungarian Case", in Kovács, Éva, , and Cârstocea, Raul, (eds.), *Modern Antisemitisms in the Peripheries: Europe and Its Colonies 1880–1945*, Vienna: New Academic Press, 2019, pp. 179–204.

10 Frigyesi, Judit, "Béla Bartók and the Concept of Nation and 'Volk' in Modern Hungary", *The Musical Quarterly*, 2, 78 (1994), pp. 255–287, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/742543> [accessed 7 August 2024].

11 Ádám, Ignácz, Milliók Zenéje: *Populáris Zene És Zenetudomány Az Államszocialista Magyarországon*, Budapest: Rózsavölgyi, 2020.

12 Feischmidt, Margit and Pulay, Gergő, "'Rocking the Nation': The Popular Culture of Neo-Nationalism", *Nations and Nationalism*, 23 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12264> [accessed 10 August 2024].

13 Feischmidt and Pulay, "'Rocking the Nation'", p. 5

14 Szele, Áron, "Nemzeti Rock: The Radical Right and Music in Contemporary Hungary", *JOMEC Journal*, 2016, pp. 9–26, <https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10040> [accessed 10 August].

15   Cf. e.g. <https://youtu.be/XEk_QvBFtmk>; ›https://youtu.be/Glts-2DLfcDw›; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AoEEzTf5Pk8&ab_channel=Zumwaloro> [all accessed 8 January 2024].

16   Cf. <https://youtu.be/xAhhd6xuosU, https://youtu.be/FnOJeTLriFs> [accessed 8 January 2024].

17   Cf. <https://youtu.be/HmG6jzWhWS4, https://youtu.be/wu4Jvw6E-OsY> [accessed 8 January 2024].

18   McParland, Robert, *Myth and Magic in Heavy Metal Music*, Jefferson: McFarland, 2018.

19   Kárpátia, *Istenért, Hazáért!* Exkluziv Music Kiadó, 2007, Track no. 11.

20   Mudde, Cas, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

21   Mudde, Cas, *The Far Right Today*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019.

22   Cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2dHoifDSxk&ab_channel=Anik%C3%B3cser%C3%A9p> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rBTpsaJvcU&ab_channel=B%C3%A9laPap> [both accessed 8 January 2024].

23   Krekó, Péter, and Mayer, Gregor, "Transforming Hungary—Together? An Analysis of the FIDESZ-Jobbik Relationship", in Minkenberg, Michael, *Transforming the Transformation? The East European Radical Right in the Political Process*, London: Routledge, 2015, pp. 198–201.

24   See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZdsX5q8G50&ab_channel=ECHOTV> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOOS-XFKkbE&ab_channel=H%C3%ADrTV> [both accessed 8 January 2024].

25   "Hej regö-rejtem, sosem felejtem / a napnak ragyogását, / a holdnak lángolását, / a csillagok világát! / Hej regö-rejtem, sosem felejtem / a szél zúgó szavát, / a patak fényes aranyát, / felzengő tavasz dalát! / Én kimennék hegyre, lenézek a völgybe, / ott van látom, iszik, / csodafiú-szarvas. / Homlokán fényes nap, / ág-bogán csillagok […].", Dalriada, *Szelek*. Hammer music/Nail Record, 2008. Track no. 11 (*Tavaszköszöntő*). All lyrics are translated by the author of this article. Cf. <https://youtu.be/thng-3I3s8w> [accessed 8 January 2024].

26   "Nézd az erdőt s látsz egy vadat / Ott fut bátran, délcegen / Bátor ifjak a nyomában […]. Hunor s Magyar odaérnek / Megértik a nagy csodát / Mert a vad csak csalta őket / Hogy leljenek új hazát / Oh gyönyörű csodaszarvas / Jelenj újra meg nekünk / Segíts új ösvényt keresni / Mert különben elveszünk […]." Egészséges Fejbőr, *Csodaszarvas*. Keressük!, 1997. Track no. 1 (*Csodaszarvas*). See also <https://youtu.be/q86OrchLNrk> [accessed 8 January 2024].

27   "Egy az Isten, egy a nemzet / Bármily gyenge, bármily sebzett. / Ahol a fák égig nőnek, / Állnak még a határkövek. / [Chorus] Szent koronánk / Óvd, vigyázd Hazánk / Hajnalcsillag, szép keresztünk / Ragyogj fel reánk. Isten egy, egy a nemzet." Kárpátia: *Tűzzel, vassal*. Exkluzív Music, 2004. Track no. 4.

28   "Ég a házunk, ég a tarló, sok jó vitézünk halott / Gyönyörűszép magyar honra támadtak a bősz kunok / Három nap és három éjjel tartott a véres harc […] / [Chorus] Nagy király légy velünk / Rabláncon szenvedünk / Segíts most […] / Haragra gyúl László király, szikrát szór a két szeme / Istentelen pogányoknak országunkban nincs helye." Balázs Sziva, *Sziva 40 Hunnia Fia, Vol. 2*. Hammer Music, 2017. Track. no. 3.

29   Vágtázó Csodaszarvas, *Végtelen Ázsia!* Fonó Records 2008. Track no. 1; Dalriada, *Napisten hava*. Nail Records/Hammer Music Hungaria 2012. Track no. 5; Dalriada, *Szelek*. Nail Records, 2008. Track no. 03; Kerecsen-Sólyom, Aquileia Ostroma. Nail Records, 2010. Track no. 4.

30   See above.

31   Dalriada, *Szelek*. Nail Records, 2008. Track no. 4; Arvisura, *Vérszerződés*. Independent, 2003. Track no. 2; Sacra Arcana, *Titkos Szertartas*. Nail Records, 2005. Track no. 1.

32   Romantikus Erőszak, *Hun és magyar mondák*. Self-released, 2005. Track no. 4; Kárpátia, *Utolsó percig*. Exkluzív Music, 2010. Track no. 10.

33   "Hajdanán egy székely kiment az erdőbe, / Csalta egyre beljebb tündérek meséje, / Arra sétált, hol madár se járt, / Erdő mélyén hazára talált, / S így szólt: / Halljátok magyarok, / Szkíták, hunok, avarok, / Egy húsból, egy vérből / Véletek egy vagyok!" Kárpátia, *Utolsó percig*. Exkluzív Music, 2010. Track no. 10.

34   KerecsenSólyom, Aquileia Ostroma. Nail Records, 2010. Track no. 6.

35   "Volt a szittya királyoknak / Egy kardja az istenektől / Hogy az összes népek felett […] / Csodás kardjuk úgy elveszett / A múlt homályában / Hogy csupán a vének tudták / Kardjuk még a világon van." Sacra Arcana, *Titkos Szertartas*. Nail Records, 2005. Track no. 1.

36   Vágtázó Csodaszarvas, *Végtelen Ázsia!* Fonó Records 2008. Track no. 2; Romantikus Erőszak, *Hun és magyar mondák*. Self-released, 2005. Track no. 4.

37   Nora, Pierre, and Kritzman, Lawrence D., *Realms of Memory. 1. Conflicts and Divisions*, European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Ctiticism, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

38   Griffin, Roger, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; Griffin, Roger, and Feldman, Matthew (ed.), *A Fascist Century*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

39   Szele, Áron, "Nationalism, Racism, Internationalism: The White Power Music Scene in Hungary and Romania", in Shekhovtsov, Anton and Jackson, Paul (eds.), *White Power Music: Scenes of Extreme Right Cultural Resistance*, London: Searchlight and RNM Publications, 2012.

40   Szele, Áron, "Nationalism, Racism, Internationalism: The White Power Music Scene in Hungary and Romania", in Shekhovtsov, Anton and Jackson, Paul (eds.), White Power Music: Scenes of Extreme Right Cultural Resistance, London: Searchlight and RNM Publications, 2012.

41   "Büszke, harcos, kalandor nép / Volt a magyar nemzet, / Kétélű kard, mely ha moccant, / Jobbra-balra sebzett / S jobbra-balra, merre fordult, / A fegyvernek éle, / Puszta lett a népes ország […] / Német ember hágott, / Aki fogta, másnak adta /Titkon az országot. / S amiatt, hogy másnak adta / S a magyart megrontá, / Iszonyú belháborúban / Maryar a magyarnak vérét / Esztendőkig ontá." Dalriada, *Arany-album*. Nail Records, 2009. Track no. 02.

42   Anon., "Jövőre is Magyar Sziget!", *Magyar Sziget*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20030831012344/http://www.magyarsziget.hu/> [accessed 29 January 2022].

43   Dafaure, Maxime, "The 'Great Meme War': The Alt-Right and Its Multifarious Enemies", *Angles*, 10, 2020, p. 5 <https://doi.org/10.4000/ANGLES.369> [accessed 8 August 2024].

44   Defaure, "The 'Great Meme War'", p. 3

45   Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London: Routledge, 1991, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203139943> [accessed 10 August 2024]; Gelder, Ken, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice*, New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007.

46   Whiteley, Sheila, and Guibert, Gérôme, »Contre-Cultures: Musiques, Théories et Scènes«, *Volume 1*, 91, 1 (2012), pp. 5–16, <https://doi.org/10.4000/VOLUME.3056> [accessed 10 August 2024].

Appendix

Contributors

Hannes Buchmann, M.A., is a scientific staff member at the Institute for Prehistoric Archaeology at Saarland University in Saarbrücken. From 2012 to 2019 he studied prehistoric, classical, early Christian, medieval and early modern archaeology, and ancient history in Münster and Halle (Saale). He is currently working on his PhD thesis about "Roman objects in Germanic settlements".

Ryan Buesnel, Ph.D., studied theology at Charles Sturt University in Sydney, Australia. His research focuses on the activities of the German Christian movement during the Third Reich period. He is currently working on his first book, scheduled for publication in late 2025 through Bloomsbury. He has published articles in Studies in Christian Ethics, The Journal of Church and State, Patterns of Prejudice, and Religion Compass. He has an ongoing academic interest in contemporary expressions of antisemitism within popular culture.

Dr **Mariusz Filip** is a social anthropologist and assistant professor at the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. His main interest is in identity processes among these minority groups, for whom the question of the Slavic past is fundamental. He has conducted ethnographic fieldwork among contemporary Slavic Pagans in Poland (and abroad) as well as among ex-Slovincians who eventually decided to live in Germany. He is author of the book *Od Kaszubów do Niemców. Tożsamość Słowińców z perspektywy antropologii historii* ("From Kashubians to Germans. The Identity of Slovincians from the Perspective of the Anthropology of History"), Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2012.

Anna-Lena Heckel, M.A., is a research assistant in the Department of Ancient Language and Literature at the University of Göttingen. Her research interests include the reception of the Middle Ages since the 18th century. She studied political science and German philology in Göttingen. She is currently working on her doctoral project on gynaecological literature of the late Middle Ages.

Ralf Hoppadietz, M.A., is an archaeologist and religious studies scholar and has been working as a researcher at the Bibracte EPCC, Centre archéologique européen, Glux-en-Glenne since 2013. He taught at the Chair of Prehistory and Early History at Leipzig University from 2008 to 2013 and worked at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) in Leipzig in 2022/23. In addition to late Iron Age settlement archaeology and religion in Europe, his research focuses in particular on communicating history to the public. Since 2006, he has devoted himself intensively to researching the overlapping fields of historical representation and reenactment, neo-Germanic Paganism and musical subcultures.

Katrin Kremmler, M.A., is a Ph.D. candidate at the Institute of European Ethnology, Humboldt University Berlin. She is working on the politics of knowledge dimension of Hungary's Eastern Opening Policy, the geopolitical orientation towards Turkey and Central Asia, in the 2014–2024 period. Her recent publications include: "'Eurasian Magyars': The Making of a New Hegemonic National Prehistory in Illiberal Hungary." In *Digging Politics: The Ancient Past and Contested Present in East-Central Europe*, edited by James Koranyi and Emily Hanscam, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg 2023 (doi: 10.1515/9783110697445-008) and "The Role of Culture for Illiberal Nation Branding: The Making of Eurasian Civilizationism in Hungary", in Kováts, Eszter (ed.), *Culture Wars in Europe*. The Washington University: 2023, (https://www.illiberalism.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Culture-Wars-in-Europe-Eszter-Kovats-ed.pdf), with Varga, Zsuzsanna, "Looking for Heterosexuality in the Imaginary East: The Role of Sexualities for the Illiberal Hungarian project." In: Koscianska, Agnieszka et al. (eds.), *Handbook on Sexuality in Central Eastern Europe*, Routledge: forthcoming.

Dr hab. **Michał Pawleta** Prof. UAM is an associate professor at the Faculty of Archaeology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. His research interests include the social functions of archaeology, the uses and misuses of the past in the present, archaeological methods and theory, the protection and management of archaeological heritage, and heritage studies.

PD Dr **Niels Penke** works at the University of Siegen in his own third-party funded project on *EcoFolk* (with Joana van de Löcht). He studied German Philology, Scandinavian Studies and Philosophy in Göttingen, and received his doctorate in 2011 with a thesis on Ernst Jünger (published with Winter, Heidelberg 2012). He completed his habilitation in 2022 with a study of the *Formations of the Popular around 1800* (published with

Winter, Heidelberg 2024). He has held visiting professorships at the Universities of Erlangen-Nuremberg and Dresden and has been a fellow in England, Estonia and the USA. Publications on right-wing literature, pop and popular culture, antisemitism and heavy metal.

Dr **Karin Reichenbach** is an archaeologist and historian. She received her Ph.d. from the University of Leipzig in 2020 with a thesis on archaeology and politics in 20th century Silesia. Since 2021 she holds a postdoctoral position at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe and is conducting research on "Performances of the Pagan Past. Popular History Practices as Identity Politics in Poland and Beyond". Her main areas of expertise are the history of archaeology and the humanities, public history, right-wing extremism in popular history and political medievalism.

Hermann Ritter is a social worker and historian/political scientist. He has been working with disadvantaged adolescents and adults for decades. As a sideline, he publishes fantasy (from *Perry Rhodan* to the fantasy annual *Magira*) and explores the formation of myths etc. in right-wing extremist groups. Among his latest publications are: "Sherlock Holmes & 'The Man from U.N.C.L.E.'" (*Sherlock Holmes Magazin* 55, 2023), "Bei Yggdrasil! Oder: Asatru im deutschen SF-Heftroman" (*Herdfeuer* 63, 2023), "Der Nachweis auf extreme Schwarzalbigkeit bei Lukas, dem Lokomotivführer und Kalle Wirsch, König der Wirsche" (Podcast 2022, https://de.cba.media/579071; gedruckt in *Herdfeuer* 61, 2023), "Robert Brenner zum 90." (https://www.hermannritter.de/index.php?title=Robert_Brenner_zum_90.; gedruckt in *phantastisch!* 84, 2021), and "Linksextremer Lichtalbe sucht glutenfreien Gnom" (https://www.hermannritter.de/index.php?title=Linksextremer_Lichtalbe_sucht_glutenfreien_Gnom; gedruckt in *Herdfeuer* 60, 2022). His works have also been published in Japanese, English and French language.

Dr **Julius Roch** is a research assistant at the Institute of Archaeology at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. From 2011 to 2017, he studied classical and Prehistoric archaeology at Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. He also completed his doctorate in classical archaeology there in 2021. From 2022 to 2023, he worked as a museum assistant in advanced training at the

Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin. He was awarded a travel grant from the German Archaeological Institute in 2023.

Prof. Dr **Heike Sahm** is Professor of Early German Language and Literature at the University of Göttingen. She specialised in research on the literature of the early Middle Ages and its reception since the Romantic period. Together with colleagues from German, Scandinavian and English studies, she is working on a textbook on the beginnings of Germanic-language literatures and, together with Philip Flacke, on a translation of the 'Heliand'.

Dr **Philipp Schaab** studied religious studies, history and geography at Universities in Heidelberg and Krakow. He obtained his Ph.d. in 2019 with the dissertation "Gods, ancestors, blood and soil? The construction of ethnic identity in contemporary Slavic Neopaganism in Poland". He completed a traineeship at TätowierMagazin and worked as a lecturer at the University of Heidelberg. He currently works as an editor and freelance journalist. He also publishes poems, fantastic and scary stories and essays in magazines and anthologies. In 2015, he published the poetry collection *Gewitterdämmerung. Gedichte über Welt- und Sonnenuntergänge* by Periplaneta, followed a year later by the short story collection *Der süße Duft der Kobralilie*. A second volume of stories *Die Stadt der leuchtenden Schmetterlinge* was published in 2022 by Edition Roter Drache.

Dr **Áron Szele** is a historian, with a Ph.D gained at the Department of History of the Central European University in Budapest on the topic of fascist ideology and discourse in interwar Hungary. He has a B.A. from the Faculty of History of the University of Bucharest, and an M.A. in comparative history from the Department of History of the CEU. His main themes of interest and expertise include entangled histories and relationships of Hungary and its neighbours, Romanian political history, the history and ideology of populist and right-wing radical movements, and minority issues in East-Central Europe. He is a project coordinator at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Bucharest.

Figure Credits

1 Perspectives from Germany

P. 13 Of Gods and Ancestors: Historical Reenactment and the Long Shadow of Neo-Germanic Paganism Ralf Hoppadietz

Fig. 1 Photo by Argumente & Kultur gegen rechts e.V., Bielefeld with kind permission.

Fig. 2 Screenshot from Facebook page of Historisches Dorf Ganna-hall,16 January 2016: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=9179489 85002944&set=ms.c.eJw9ztsNBDEIA8COTrzB~%3BTd2Soj3c2THAdqIwa-SIIeKHY4hoFUqwHsy4l3Uzz7XQvX171jxOcE~%3B79nOeTdfMzdb~_7HrfN~%3Bu~_9wn73pvzv5DNP~_fxgPcm7r7Wc~_1~_cL~%3Bi9nv~_ ub035w~-~-.bps.a.917948678336308> [accessed 8 September 2024].

Fig. 3 Screenshot from Facebook page of Historisches Dorf Gannahall, 17 January 2017: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=95620641117 7201&set=a.956205544510621> [accessed 8 September 2024].

Fig. 4 Drawing Die Gartenlaube, 1862, p. 380. Photo by Yvonne Bentele, Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 5 Unknown Author, Naturdenksäulen Deutscher Vergangenheit, *Die Gartenlaube* (1862), pp. 379–380 (p. 380). Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 6 BArch NS 21/1205 <https://weimar.bundesarchiv.de/DE/Content/ Virtuelle-Ausstellungen/Das-Ahnenerbe-Der-Ss-Himmlers-Geisteselite/ das-ahnenerbe-der-ss-himmlers-geisteselite.html> [accessed 10 September 2024].

Fig. 7 Screenshot from Facebook page of Rico Krüger, 14 January 2016: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=947407768668126&set =pb.100001967344205.-2207520000&type=3> [accessed 8 September 2024].

P. 38 Popular Pagans. Germanic Culture and Mythology in (Heavy) Metal Niels Penke

Fig. 1 Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 2 Photo by Grywnn, Wikimedia Commons.

P. 47 Speculative Stories. Entanglements in the Web of Conspiracy Theories, Speculative Fiction, Fantasy Role-playing, Paganism and Right-Wing Extremism Hermann Ritter

Fig. 1 Barkun, Michael: *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2nd edition 2003.

Fig. 2 Screenshot from https://parzifal-versand.de: <https://parzifal-versand.de/product_info.php?products_id=52> [accessed 27 August 2024].

Fig. 3 Screenshot from https://timmi-spielwaren.de: <https://timmi-spielwaren.de/shop/haunebu-ii-flying-saucer-bausatz-reichsflugscheibe-172-revell-03903/> [accessed 14 September 2024].

Fig. 4 Kuntz, Robert, and Ward, James: *Gods, Demi-Gods & Heroes. Dungeons & Dragons. Supplement IV, Rules for Fantastic Medieval Wargames. Campaigns Playable with Paper and Pencil and Miniature Figures*, Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Rules, 2006.

P. 59 Newly Told Stories. On the Topicality of the Myth of the Germanic Peoples in Children's and Young Adult Books Anna-Lena Heckel and Heike Sahm

Fig. 1 Heusler, Andreas, *Urväterhort. Die Heldensagen der Germanen*, Berlin: Martin Oldenbourg, 1904. Public Domain.

Fig. 2 Rowohlt Berlin Verlag GmbH with kind permission.

2 Perspectives from Poland

P. 85 Christianisation as Trauma – Aspects of Ethnonationalist Identity Construction Amongst Slavic Neopagan Groups in Poland Philipp Schaab

Fig. 1 Photo by Pola lilla, Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 2 Photo by Adrian Tync, Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 3 Photo by Karin Reichenbach with kind permission.

P. 93 Transformation as Repetition: Historicity Among the Pagan Right in Poland Mariusz Filip

Fig. 1 Photo by Radosław Brzostek; (sz), [Untitled], *Głos Koszaliński*, 14 November (1997), p. 5.

Fig. 2 Photo by Radosław Koleśnik; (pol), "Chwała Trygławowi!", *Głos Pomorza*, 12 November (1999), p. 1.

Fig. 3 Photo by Tomasz Szlufik; (grs), [Untitled], *Głos Koszaliński*, 20–21 November, (1999), *PoGłoski* supplement, p. 2.

Fig. 4 Photographer unknown; (ED), "Obrona interesów", *Głos Pomorza*, 19 June (2001), p. 6.

Fig. 5 Photographer unknown; Dubois, Ewa, "Prezesów zabrali na komendę", *Głos Pomorza*, 19 June, (2001), p. 1.

Fig. 6 Photographer unknown; *Wprost* 16 July (2000).

Fig. 7 Photo by Maciej Piąsta; Karnowski, Michał and Amelia Łukasiak, "Jesienny zaciąg Leppera", *Newsweek*, 13 October (2002) pp. 20–23 (p. 22).

Fig. 8 and 9 Photographers unknown; Пискорский, Матеуш, "Новый славянский национализм в Польше", Атеней no. 1 (2001), pp. 58–72 (pp. 66 and 69).

Fig. 10 Anonym; <https://artinfo.pl/dzielo/unia-europejska-to-utra-ta-ziem-odzyskanych> [accessed 10 August 2024].

P. 108 Performing Paganism. Popular History Practices as Doing Metapolitics in Poland Karin Reichenbach

Fig. 1 and 2 Photos by Jakub T. Jankiewicz, Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 3 Biblioteka Śląska, Katowice, <https://sbc.org.pl/publica-tion/643453>, public domain.

Fig. 4 Photo by Karin Reichenbach.

Fig. 5 Photo by Jasper Granderath with kind permission.

Fig. 6 and 7 Photos by Karin Reichenbach.

Fig. 8 Photo by Jakub T. Jankiewicz, Wikimedia Commons.

**P. 121   The Restaged Past Is a "Dirty Business":
The Politicisation of Historical Reenactment in
Present-day Poland** Michał Pawleta

Fig. 1 and 2   Photos by Karin Reichenbach with kind permission.

Fig. 3   Photo by Jakub T. Jankiewicz, Wikimedia Commons.

**P. 133   Eastern Hate: The Development of Political
and Racial Extremism in Polish Black Metal**
Ryan Buesnel

Fig. 1   Photo by JurgenPhotography, Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 2   Gray, Louis H., *The Mythology of All Races*, Vol. III, Boston: Marshall Jones, 1918, Plate XXXV. Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

**P. 159   Mythological Ancestry in Hungarian
Rock** Áron Szele

Fig. 1   Photo by Derzsi Elekes Andor, Wikimedia Commons

Fig. 2   Photo by Jrkruk, Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 3   Photo by Trollhead, Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 4   Grandpierre Atilla, Wikimedia Commons.

3   Perspectives from Hungary

**P. 145   "Eurasian Magyars":
The Role of Historical Reenactment and Experimental Archaeology in Hungary's Illiberal Heritage
Regime** Katrin Kremmler

Fig. 1   Screenshot from Facebook page of the Hungarian National Museum: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4910930802272441&set=pcb.4910931435605711> [accessed 31 January 2024].

Fig. 2   Screenshot from Facebook page of the Hungarian National Museum: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=588653576632952&set=pcb.588661796632130>. [accessed 31 January 2024].

Fig. 3   Photo by Huszti István, telex.hu: <https://telex.hu/belfold/2021/08/20/augusztus-20-szent-istvan-nap-felvonulas-turul-szobor> [accessed 31 January 2024)].

Fig. 4   Photo by Zsófia Wesniczky. *Magyar Nemzet*: <https://magyarnemzet.hu/kultura/2021/05/leanyokon-nokon-es-asszonyokon-mulik-a-haza-jovoje> [accessed 31 January 2024].

Fig. 5   Magyar Filmadatbázis: <https://www.mafab.hu/movies/a-pozsonyi-csata-454831.html#&gid=1&pid=1> [accessed 31 January 2024].

Fig. 6   MTVA – Médiaszolgáltatás-támogató és Vagyonkezelõ Alap, Szent Korona Rádió: <https://szentkoronaradio.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PozsonyiCSata7.jpg> [accessed 31 January 2024].

Fig. 7   Screenshot from Keleti Szövetség ("Eastern Alliance") Webpage: <keletiszovetseg.hu> [accessed 31 January 2024].

Fig. 8–12   Photos by Katrin Kremmler.

Fig. 13   Hungarian State Opera opera.hu. <https://www.opera.hu/hu/musor/2023-2024/istvan-a-kiraly-2023/> [accessed 11 November 2024].

Fig. 14–16   Screenshot from Facebook page of Magyarságkutató Intézet (Institut for Hungarian Studies): <https://www.facebook.com/magyarsagkutato/posts/pfbid0Y7zjYJrMaTeP7z1mvnh5275by5UVat4Ar-1c7YWtkQh6TEpTjr3M4p8drk01DQxTel> [accessed 31 January 2024].

The allure of the Pagan past—the prehistoric and early medieval eras before Christianisation—pervades modern media, from fantasy novels and video games to Viking TV series and comics about ancient heroes. This volume explores the deeper, more political currents running through the popular fascination with these distant times. Focusing on three key areas—historical reenactment, ethnic Neopaganism, and the metal music scene—the book examines how these fields not only entertain but also serve as powerful vehicles for political ideologies.

The collected essays explore how these "popular Pagans" create romanticised images of pre-Christian societies, idealising their perceived naturalness, ethnic purity, and martial heroism. Drawing on ethnicist thinking, ancestral identification and nostalgia for an unadulterated past, these portrayals often disregard current scholarly discourse. Instead, they perpetuate outdated narratives, that are more in line with far-right ideals, fostering exclusionary beliefs and anti-democratic rhetoric. Based on research discussions initiated at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe, this volume is the first to shed light on the political role of the Pagan past in contemporary Germany, Poland and Hungary.