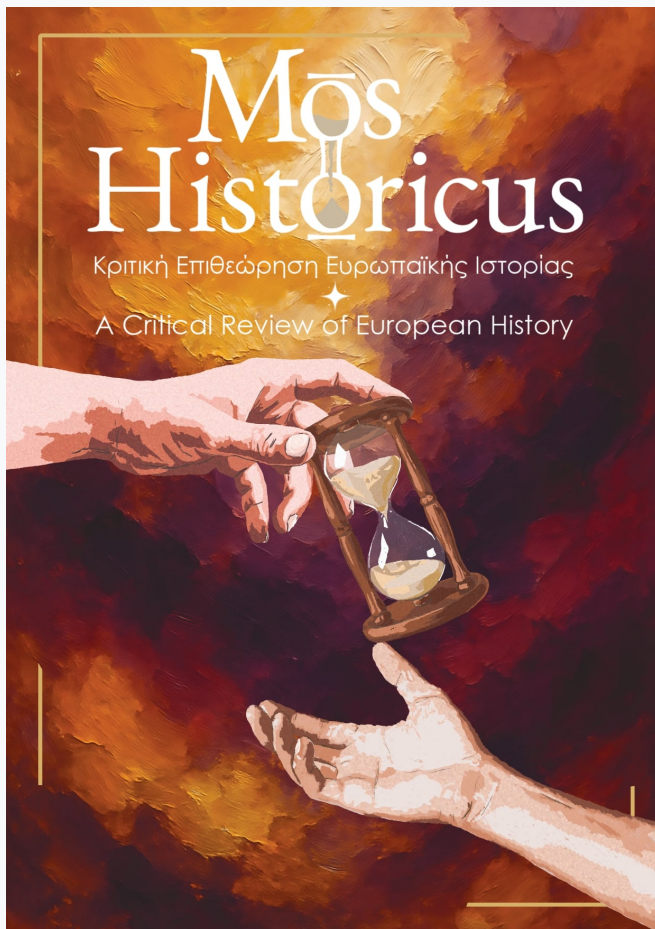


## Mos Historicus: A Critical Review of European History

Vol 3, No 1 (2025)

Mos Historicus: A Critical Review of European History



### The Occult Dimension of Nazism: Magic, Mysticism, and Millenarian Expectations in the Third Reich

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doi: [10.12681/mh.40444](https://doi.org/10.12681/mh.40444)

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#### To cite this article:

Asimiadis, D. (2025). The Occult Dimension of Nazism: Magic, Mysticism, and Millenarian Expectations in the Third Reich. *Mos Historicus: A Critical Review of European History*, 3(1), 91–107. <https://doi.org/10.12681/mh.40444>

# The Occult Dimension of Nazism: Mysticism, Ritual, and Millenarianism in the Third Reich

Η αποκρυφιστική διάσταση του ναζισμού: Μυστικισμός, τελετουργία και χιλιασμός στο Τρίτο Ράιχ

**Dionisis Asimiadis\***

Διονύσης Ασημιάδης

**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the metaphysical dimension of Nazi Germany, analyzing the role of magic, mysticism, and millenarian beliefs in the Third Reich. It focuses on the influence of occult organizations and the connection between Nazism and German esotericism. The article explores the millenarian narrative promoted by Hitler, depicting his regime as the culmination of Aryan historical evolution. Furthermore, it analyzes the cult of the leader, the use of rituals and symbols, and their impact on Nazi propaganda and social cohesion. The study highlights the significance of these elements in understanding Nazi ideology and its influence on German society.

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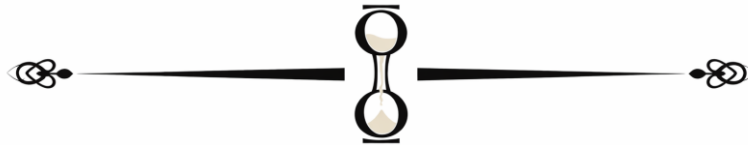
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Ο Διονύσης Ασημιάδης είναι υποψήφιος διδάκτορα Πολιτικής Επιστήμης. Γεννήθηκε το 1996 στη Θεσσαλονίκη. Εργάστηκε για μεγάλο διάστημα ως παραγωγός στο ραδιόφωνο και την τηλεόραση. Αποφοίτησε από το τμήμα Κοινωνικής Διοίκησης και Πολιτικής Επιστήμης του Δημοκρίτειου Πανεπιστημίου Θράκης ενώ έλαβε το μεταπτυχιακό του από τη Νομική Σχολή του ίδιου πανεπιστημίου, σε συνεργασία με το ίδρυμα Jean Monnet. Το 2023, ξεκίνησε να εργάζεται πάνω στη διδακτορική του διατριβή στο Αριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης. Έχει τιμηθεί με το Β' Πανελλήνιο Βραβείο Γλωσσικού Δοκίμιου από το Ίδρυμα Ελευθέριος Βενιζέλος και με το Β' Βραβείο Ποίησης του Συλλόγου Λογοτεχνών Βορείου Ελλάδος. Το 2022, εκδόθηκε το βιβλίο του, *Όψεις του Ελληνικού Ριζοσπαστισμού τον 19ο αιώνα*, από τις εκδόσεις Iwrite, ενώ το 2025 κυκλοφόρησε το έργο του, *Διπλωματικές σχέσεις και συμμαχίες στον Β' παγκόσμιο πόλεμο*, από τις εκδόσεις Παπαζήσης. [dioasimiadis@hotmail.com](mailto:dioasimiadis@hotmail.com)

Keywords: Occultism, Mysticism, Propaganda, Ritual, Ideology, Hitler

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ: Το παρόν άρθρο μελετά τη μεταφυσική διάσταση της ναζιστικής Γερμανίας, αναλύοντας τον ρόλο της μαγείας, του μυστικισμού και των χιλιαστικών πεποιθήσεων στο Τρίτο Ράιχ. Επικεντρώνεται στην επίδραση των αποκρυφιστικών οργανώσεων καθώς και στη σύνδεση του ναζισμού με τον γερμανικό εσωτερισμό. Το άρθρο διερευνά το χιλιαστικό αφήγημα που προωθούσε ο Χίτλερ, και το οποίο παρουσίαζε το καθεστώς ως την κορύφωση της ιστορικής εξέλιξης της «Άριας» φυλής. Επιπλέον, πραγματεύεται τη λατρεία του ηγέτη, τη χρήση των τελετουργικών και των συμβόλων, καθώς και τον αντίκτυπο τους στη ναζιστική προπαγάνδα και την κοινωνική συνοχή. Η μελέτη υπογραμμίζει τη σημασία αυτών των στοιχείων για την κατανόηση της ναζιστικής ιδεολογίας και της επίδρασής της στη γερμανική κοινωνία.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Αποκρυφισμός, Μυστικισμός, Προπαγάνδα, Τελετουργία, Ιδεολογία, Χίτλερ



## Introduction

Historical research into Nazi ideology has traditionally been preoccupied with its more famous features, namely political, military, and racial to the neglect of one dimension of the greatest significance: its metaphysical and cultural origins. Yet the connection between the Third Reich and occultist doctrines, esoteric creeds, and ritual practices forms a critical but under-analyzed dimension of Nazi ideology. It is true to say that this dimension has hitherto been marginalized compared to political, racial, or military explanations, this is no reason for concluding that it has been completely eschewed by historiography. A number of seminal works from Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's groundbreaking *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (1992) to Michael Kater's studies on the Ahnenerbe, right up to more recent ones by Julian Strube, Stephen Flowers, and Peter Levenda have taken into account the occult or esoteric aspects of National Socialism. But this scholarship has been rather constrained in scope and patchy, especially concerning the wider

historiography of National Socialism. Consequently, when this article speaks of an "overlooked" dimension, it is not in the sense of an absolute silence, but of the lack of persistently and intensively concentrated attention within the broader field.<sup>1</sup>

This article investigates this dimension itself, pointing out how mysticism, archaic worship, and pagan mythology were used to build a new "political religion" designed to secure the unqualified allegiance of the individual to the regime and to Hitler. The aim of the article is to demonstrate the function of occultism in Nazism not only as an "obsession" for some officials and intellectuals, but also as a component of a world vision that sought to restructure the world in accordance with specific myths, rituals, and ideological conversions. By examining SS groups and ritual traditions, the investigation recognizes the formation of a differing spiritual system devoted to encouraging the integration of an ideology and the submission of the population. Although the related bibliography is expansive, historiography continues to offer contradictions with regard to understanding and intention for these occulting elements. This study is part of a larger debate launched by Amsterdam School researchers and the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), in attempts to relocate Nazi occultism as a non-historographical "accident," but rather as a political religion apparatus that constructed National Socialism through mystical destiny as a legitimation. The added value of this paper is its synoptic discussion of political, cultural, and metaphysical boundaries, too often addressed in silos in the literature. Rather than presenting discrete data or retelling well-known examples, the paper proposes a rethinking of how we approach the ideological composition of Nazism through the prism of political mythology and the functionality of occultism for social engineering of the Reich. Before embarking on the discussion of the particular examples, it is necessary to establish definitions of terms in this context. Definitions of magic, mysticism, occultism, and esotericism differ and bring huge conceptual ambiguity into the secondary literature. Antoine Faivre's theoretical construct, as explained in his book *Access to Western Esotericism* (1994), is used for this article. According to Faivre, Western esotericism can be defined on the basis of six key principles: correspondence, living nature, imagination and mediations, transmutation, praxis of concordance (gnosis), and sympathetic magic. Additionally, Wouter Hanegraaff's methodology is adopted, where emphasis is placed upon esotericism not as an independent field of knowledge, but as a scientific discourse

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology*, NYU Press, New York 1992, p. 101.

on knowledge that was held in reserve with respect to the mainstream scientific paradigm. This is the perspective that is most central to the present analysis, as Nazism employed instances of esotericism and occultism not only as ideological components, but as tools for the construction of a rival “knowledge” with the intent to restructure society morally and spiritually. Finally, chiliasm is applied in its eschatological sense in this study, signifying a belief in an imminent renewal of society with a predetermined purpose that would continue for a period of one thousand years. This is one of the cornerstones of Nazi ideological officialdom.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Historical Origins of Nazi Occultism**

The philosophical acceptance of National Socialism by occult, mystical, and pagan currents was not an endogenous phenomenon to the inner life of the Third Reich. Rather, it goes far back in 19th-century German esoteric and cultural dynamics, wherein there emerged an eccentric synthesis of racial nationalism, theosophy, German Romanticism, and mystic antisemitism. In the midst of this mixture was the notion of an ideal, primeval, and unadulterated Germanic nation, bearers of secret knowledge and destiny, once historically downtrodden but capable of being reborn.<sup>3</sup>

The Germanenorden of 1912 was one of the first institutionalized expressions of this ideology. It was a mystical, secret nationalist order with a clear racist bent, incorporating ancient strains of Germanic mythology, pagan motifs, and an antisemitic theory on the “internal enemy.” Its aim was not merely political propaganda, but the cultic reestablishment of a “lost Aryan purity” through ritual, symbolism, and occult reinterpretation of history. The Thule Gesellschaft was established in 1918 from the Germanenorden by Rudolf von Sebottendorff. The Thule Society was not a political movement alone, however, and combined ethnocentric theosophy with an overtly occult orientation. Its ideology drew on Ariosophy, a bizarre synthesis of racist pseudoscientific theory and mysticism, under heavy influence of the philosophers Guido von List and Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels. The former had evolved the theory of an Aryan race that had lived in the remote past and possessed transcendent qualities, whose strength was preserved in the blood. The latter had mixed Catholic mysticism with eugenic ideas and a racial “moral superiority” doctrine.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Otto Dietrich, *Die philosophischen Grundlagen des Nationalsozialismus: Ein Ruf zu den Waffen des deutschen Geistes*, Zentralverlag der NSDAP, München 1936, pp.13–16.

<sup>3</sup> Heather Pringle, *The Master Plan: Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust*, Hyperion, New York 2006, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, Penguin Books, London 2004, p. 656.

The Thule Society cultivated the belief that the Aryans were descended from the continent of Hyperborea a lost land, a womb of civilization and energy and that Germany's rebirth was contingent upon a return to the inner virtues of this lineage. A central figure in the group was Dietrich Eckart, who personally met Hitler and initiated him into the ideological and esoteric underpinnings of the circle. The connection between Thule and the early National Socialist movement was not merely ideological; several of the early Nazi leaders were recruited from the organization, and some historians have seen Thule as the pre-political womb of the NSDAP.<sup>5</sup>

In the field of technological mysticism, Vril Gesellschaft was a distinct exception. Its foundation was based on Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1871 novel, *The Coming Race*, which is a tale of a subterranean superhuman people who employ a cosmic force called Vril a secret power that can transform human existence and grant unlimited power. The movement embraced the ideology of "energy" into nationalist aspiration, proclaiming that the Aryan people had a natural ability to tap into this energy. This would later shape rumors about secret weapons and the technological superiority of the Reich. Vril was more than theory: it was connected to experiments in technology and published flying disc projects, which, although subsequently the target of speculation and conspiracy theories, found a tangible application in the ideological myth of Nazi destiny.

But while the narrative successfully illustrates the symbolic function of Vril in Reich ideological fantasy, it is not very successful in distinguishing substantiated wartime fact from post-war myth. The use of flying disc experiments and forbidden technology, while rooted in Nazi esoteric ideology, it is largely taken from post-1945 conspiracy literature rather than documented wartime evidence. The line between ideological mystic adoption of the mystical energy and actual scientific use remains fuzzy, and most of what has been circulated about the so-called 'Vril technology' has stemmed from retroactive constructions, driven often by sensationalism. Thus, the role of Vril must be understood as largely mythopoeic, a myth-making mechanism for racial superiority and cosmic destiny rather than as actual technological activity within the Third Reich's historical mechanism.<sup>6</sup> Heinrich Himmler founded the Ahnenerbe in 1935 as a twofold paramilitary SS organization: on one level, it was presented as a scientific institute dedicated to the study of "prehistoric German heritage"; on the other level, it was a valuable instrument for projecting and mythologically justifying Nazi racial policy. Its activities encompassed a wide range

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<sup>5</sup> Wolfgang W. Fuchs, *Ahnenerbe: Die SS-Forschung und ihre Ergebnisse*, Grabert, Tübingen 1989, p. 112.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race*, George Routledge & Sons, London 1871.

of research fields, ranging from anthropological and archaeological documentation, folklore, linguistics, runic studies, “sacred geometry,” and ritual symbolism. Beyond Europe, the Ahnenerbe mounted expeditions to Tibet, the Near East, and South America in search of evidence of the Aryan “master race” in ancient civilizations.<sup>7</sup>

Among the principal objectives of most expeditions was the restitution of sacred items thought to be carriers of transcendent power and representatives of the historical mission of the Germanic people. Above all was the Spear of Destiny – the lance which, Christian myth says, pierced the side of the Crucified Christ. For the SS elites, it embodied hegemonic legitimacy in the belief that whoever possessed it was capable of controlling the world. Second in significance to this was the Holy Grail, sought as evidence of immediate connection to the chivalric mystical tradition and the line of the Cathars and Templars, regarded by the Nazis as the spiritual predecessors of the SS.<sup>8</sup>

The other objectives of the Ahnenerbe were to locate the Golden Staff of Thoth, a purported Egyptian artifact believed to possess knowledge and healing powers, and the Nebra Disc, an ancient astronomical disc of cosmological significance, which the Nazis believed could be possible evidence of Aryan astronomy. They also sought the Triple Throne of Wotan, the alleged pagan ritual throne of Norse theology and Germanic mythology, and the Archives of Hyperborea, a legendary storehouse of ancient Aryan wisdom said to be hidden in underground locations in Tibet or the Himalayas. These objects were not regarded merely as historical or cultural relics, but as instruments for the ideological legitimization of the Reich – material proof of the SS's connection to a higher metaphysical order. In the mind of Himmler and his associates, their collection and possession were not merely an act of scientific interest or collector's obsession, but a ritualistic restoration of the Aryan race's historical dominion over the planet.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to emphasize that most of Nazi ritual and esoteric practice was not accessible and available to the general German public, still mainly Protestant at the time. Julian Strube points out that they were not expressions of popular religiosity but rather at an elitist and concealed level, serving as rites of initiation and tools for preserving hierarchical orders alive in the SS.<sup>10</sup> This chasm between the elite esoteric cult of the SS and the mainstream Protestant piety of the

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<sup>7</sup> Trevor Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny*, Samuel Weiser, York Beach 1982, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Michel Angebert, *The Occult and the Third Reich*, Macmillan, New York 1974, p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> Harald Meller, *Der Himmelscheibe von Nebra*, Theiss, Stuttgart 2004, p. 87.

<sup>10</sup> Julian Strube, *Global Tantra*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2022, p. 114

German majority created a latent tension within the ideological texture of the regime. While the wider society continued to be organized in Christian moral values and temporal rhythms, the SS cultivated an opposing spiritual universe, one that was characterized by blood mysticism, ancestor worship, and pagan-symbolism and ritual coordinates. This duality did not merely express itself as a divergence in worldview, but betrayed a deeper stratification within Nazism itself, where the masses were provided with nationalist rhetoric and mythic imagery to consume, and the inner cadre participated in an arcane re-sacralization of politics founded upon secrecy and ritual. The failure to integrate these rites into public religious life was ideological and tactical: it preserved the mystical authority of the SS, without confronting the deeply ingrained Christian traditions of the populace. But it also underscored the internal contradiction of a regime that sought total ideological unity, but operated at spiritually disparate levels separating the elite from the populace.<sup>11</sup>

A striking aspect of this dynamic is Adolf Hitler's own incredulity and, at times, outright disdain for Heinrich Himmler's mystical excursions. Himmler's esoteric objectives were to construct a symbolic system that would position the SS in consonance with medieval chivalric orders and restore a mythic connection between Germany and an idealized ancient past. The development of Nazi occultism, therefore, was not a random process but was deeply connected with the pre-existing occultist trends, ideological frameworks, and ritual experiments which had already become popular in Germany during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Nazi ideology did not produce occultism but borrowed and rechanneled it, taking an outer fringe manifestation of alternative religiosity and turning it into a means for political discipline, identity creation, and political myth-building. This strategy reveals the strategic utilitarianism of esoteric traditions as not ends in themselves, but rather effective means within the greater mission of social and ideological engineering.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Ahnenerbe and the Institutionalization of Mysticism in the SS**

The institutionalization of mysticism into the National Socialist regime was not a fleeting cultural phenomenon, but rather an intentional program for the spiritual reeducation of the individual and

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<sup>11</sup> Wilfried Daim, *Der Mann, der Hitler die Ideen gab*, Ueberreuter, Wien 1957, p. 50

<sup>12</sup> Otto Dietrich, *The Hitler I Knew: Memoirs of the Third Reich's Press Chief*, Constable, London 1957, p. 280

the formation of a new “priestly” caste in the Reich. The architect of this endeavor was Heinrich Himmler, who viewed the SS as a paramilitary group, to be sure, but also as an order of initiates – a metaphysical aristocracy sworn to racial purity, ritual practice, and communion with a spurious Aryan spiritual tradition.<sup>13</sup>

For Himmler, the Ahnenerbe was less an academic institution than an institutionalizer of occult discourse, imparting to ethnoracial propaganda a veneer of scientific respectability and ritual symbolism. Even the idea of the “heritage of the ancestors” was transformed into a cultic model, in which the SS were not merely agents of political discipline, but bearers of Aryan esoteric continuity. Ahnenerbe's Tibet, Scandinavia, Middle Eastern, and Breton expeditions were meant to return with data that would prove the superiority of the German “racial spirit,” and the emphasis on sacred geometry, runes, and Viking mythology was meant to connect the Third Reich's present with a “traditional order” that was highly ritualistic and hierarchical.<sup>14</sup>

The culmination of this ideological institutionalization was the rechristening of Wewelsburg Castle in the Paderborn region of Westphalia as the “sacred center” of the SS. It was even referred to as a site of ritual gatherings and initiation of higher-ranking officers by Himmler himself. The innermost heart of the SS, the Circle of Twelve, held its rituals there that imitated themes of medieval chivalric orders, with particular emphasis on racial and mythological purity. The Great Hall of Wewelsburg was circular in design, characterized by dramatic geometric and energetic symbolism, centered around a stone core in the shape of a swastika, serving as a place of concentrated power. SS vows of loyalty were sworn in rituals utterly separated from Christian rites, canonically inscribed, mystical, and solely directed toward the worship of blood and ancestral legacy.<sup>15</sup>

Blood to Himmler was more than a racial or biological fact; it was also a spiritual, metaphysical conveyor of being. Initiatic rituals used such things as antique swords, runes, flame, and pre-Christian symbolism, where symbolic meaning governed every detail of action from the oath-swearing to selection of ritual garments. Members were supposed to renounce Christian identity and adopt the “one truth” contained in the Aryan race mission. Special events involved the

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<sup>13</sup> Michael H. Kater, *Das “Ahnenerbe” der SS 1935–1945: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturpolitik des Dritten Reiches*, Oldenbourg, München 2006, p. 113.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen E. Flowers, *The Secret King: The Myth and Reality of Nazi Occultism*, Feral House, Los Angeles 2007, p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> Heather Pringle, *The Master Plan: Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust*, Hyperion, New York 2006, p. 172.

performance of literal or symbolic blood libations on stone slabs, on which the initiates' signatures were written, infusing the practice with the form of a symbolic contract between the living and the “ancestral spirits”.<sup>16</sup>

Ancestor worship, which was one of the central features of SS ideology, was a full-fledged alternative religious system. The naming ceremonies for SS children, racial marriages, and annual rituals to deceased ancestors were all included in a doctrine of the "continuous reproduction" of the Aryan material, with the Ahnenkerze (Ancestral Candle) symbolizing the eternal flame of the racial soul. These rituals were not merely intended to bind members to the order, but to consolidate collective identity, to form a spiritual caste, and to cultivate an internal image of a “sacred people” in direct connection with the mythical creation of the world.<sup>17</sup>

But this esoteric culture was neither public nor general among the broader population. As Julian Strube has documented, the SS's rituals and ideological system remained within an inner elite and never became part of the Nazi regime's public religion or official policy. On the contrary, Hitler himself was often ambivalent about such activities, often regarding them as eccentric or redundant. But to Himmler, occultism was not folklore or embellishment. It was a tool of spiritual manipulation, in which the SS were structured as an alternate church – a “guard of blood and spirit” that did not merely protect the Reich, but tried to fulfill the racial destiny of the world.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Julian Strube, “Occultism and Nazism Revisited,” in Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, *Hermes Explains: Thirty Questions about Western Esotericism*, Equinox, Sheffield 2019, p. 94.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Heinz Roth, *Die Ahnenerbe der SS: Rassenideologie und Wissenschaft im Dritten Reich*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt 1990, p. 88.

<sup>18</sup> Ernst Schäfer, *Reise nach Lhasa: Mit der SS-Expedition in Tibet 1938/39*, Ullstein, Berlin 1943, p. 23.

## The Political Religion of the Reich

Nazism's ideological edifice was more than the foundation of a worldly political program. Quite the reverse, from a very early time, it borrowed the attributes of a totalising cultural doctrine that was marked by powerful ritualistic, eschatological, and mythological aspects that coalesced into a political religion designated by historiography. The term, which derives from the classical analyses of Emilio Gentile and Eric Voegelin, refers to totalitarian regimes that replace traditional religions with deified, ritually organized, and metaphysically rationalized ideologies.<sup>19</sup>

Here, Adolf Hitler was increasingly presented not just as a political leader, but also as a redemptive leader embodying the destiny of the German people. Nazi propaganda and discourse produced a form of "messianic nationalism," in which Hitler became the Führer who would restore the "harmony between blood and soil," lead the people to rebirth, and purge "unnatural" forces from culture. Hitler's self-image as a visionary for a new world rested on the notion of the Volkskörper, the national body which was tainted and needs to be cleansed so that historic grandeur can be regained.<sup>20</sup>

The staging and ritual display of power visually were the primary instruments in the solidification of this political religion. The Nuremberg Party Rallies were staged annually particularly from 1933 to 1938 and became integrated into a rigidly hierarchical ritual structure. The Cathedral of Light (Lichtdom) by Albert Speer, in which 130 beams of light radiated to the heavens, was not merely an artistic performance but a temple of the cosmos; the sphere of heaven was artificially delineated, producing the sense of sacralness, stillness, and pure order.<sup>21</sup>

Mass aesthetics were prescribed by ceremonies of the rhythmic processions, uniform salutations, orderly utilization of music, and rigorous spatial geometry to create a collective subjectivity, an illusion of moving beyond the self and fusing with the body of the nation. Architectural symbolism – straight lines, massive colonnades, monumental scale – operated not only as a show of power, but as a symbol of a sacred-political universe where the Führer acted as a hierophant. The symbolism was no less deliberate. The swastika was not used as a mere symbol, but as a focal point for racial, solar, runic, and cosmic energies stolen from pagan and Indo-

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<sup>19</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis*, Allen Lane, London 2000, p. 113.

<sup>20</sup> Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, Macmillan, New York 1970, p. 171.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Goebbels, *Kampf um Berlin: Der Anfang – Der Angriff – Das Ende*, Zentralverlag der NSDAP, München 1934, pp. 85–90.

European templates. The SS runes, the ancient Germanic symbols, even the colors of the uniforms all followed specific codes suggesting ritual purity and multiple degrees of initiation. Speer's architectural interventions from the Pantheon of the Fallen to the new capital Germania, established a uniform universe of aesthetic sacralization of power.<sup>22</sup>

The Nazi political religion was not based on the spiritual authority of divine scriptures, but on the aesthetic authority of the absolute order: order of space, of the body, of symbols, of sound. The crowd its silence, the ritual repetition, and the constant projection of Hitler's figure at the center of each image emphasized a sense of collective belief. As Klaus Vondung observes, Nazi mythology relied on an apocalyptic cycle by which society was transformed into a “vehicle of destiny”. As a religion, sacralization of politics was a belief system in which the enemy was demonized, the Führer was deified, and the future was teleologically framed as redemption. It didn't only seek to dominate history, but to orchestrate its ritual rebirth through a cultural and racial Apocalypse.<sup>23</sup>

### **Nazi Messianism and the Vision of the Thousand-Year Reich**

The ideological identity of Nazism was not limited to allusions to the past or mythic re-creation of an Aryan antiquity; it extended with the same fanatical fervor into the future, through the mythology of a historical mission that portrayed the German people as a chosen people, bearers of a higher mission of world rebirth. This forms the foundation of Nazi messianism, which was built on eschatological motifs drawn not only from paganism but also from Christian sources stripped of divine mercy and converted into instruments of racial redemption.<sup>24</sup>

The Thousand-Year Reich vow was not rhetorical exaggeration. It was a cosmology in meticulous detail, structured and functioning in the guise of apocalyptic stereotypes: following a period of trial and crisis, a climactic confrontation, the so-called *Endkampf* would occur, to create a new world order. From his earliest public appearances, Hitler stood before the masses as a

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<sup>22</sup> Rainer Zitelmann, *Hitler: Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1987, p. 206.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, Elke Fröhlich, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, München 1992, vol. 3, p. 45.

<sup>24</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Franz Eher Nachfolger, München 1925–1927.

prophet-herald, a "man of destiny" (Mann des Schicksals), to bring not just national rebirth but cosmic vindication to Germany's cause.<sup>25</sup>

Nazi ideology read history as a teleological process with an internal end, in which every stage necessarily led to the final triumph of the "law of blood." Past, present, and future were not understood as distinct temporal phases, but as continuous with a mythical narrative – a predestined historical epic. Each generation was represented as a cog in an uninterrupted chain of mission and duty, and historical progression was legitimated through articulation of the "natural order." Propaganda, particularly through Leni Riefenstahl's films, the Nuremberg rituals, and National Socialist education acted to reinforce the notion that the citizen was an integral part of a world-historical plan of redemption, predestined to culminate in Aryan predominance being renewed.<sup>26</sup>

At the heart of this narrative approach was the demonization of the internal and external enemy (Jews, Bolsheviks, liberals, bourgeoisie) and the determination of the final conflict as a struggle between light and darkness in the cosmos. Iconography, slogans, literary production, and education all served to construct a mass consciousness ever in search of the great convulsion: war as purification, victory as the advent of eternal justice. The coming theology of Nazism did not function as a promise of hope. It did not promise peace, but endless struggle (ewiger Kampf), endless mobilization, and endless conflict between the "pure" and the "degenerate." The "Thousand-Year Reich" did not simply indicate a historical era, but a mode of living – an aesthetic of destiny.<sup>27</sup>

The institutions of the Third Reich had integrated this messianic narrative into everyday life: from youth organizations (Hitlerjugend) to the ritual calendar, from ceremonies honoring the dead to school textbooks. The present was portrayed as a stage of preparation; the future belonged to the chosen. The deification of the future did not function as a promise of happiness, but as a weapon of subjugation. The acceptance of the "end," whether as triumph or self-destruction, was presented as the ultimate act of faith. Nazi eschatology was not an abstract prophecy, but a form of guidance in the present, structured, repetitive, and psychologically internalized. The future was duty.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Reden und Proklamationen 1932–1945*, Max Domarus (ed.), Süddeutscher Verlag, München 1965, vol. 1, p. 326.

<sup>26</sup> Baldur von Schirach, *Ich glaubte an Hitler*, Biederstein Verlag, München 1947, p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> Erich Erdstein, *Hitler spricht: Reden 1933–1938*, Propyläen Verlag, Berlin 1939, p. 77.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Goebbels, "Nun, Volk steh auf, und Sturm brich los!" Speech delivered February 18, 1943, Berlin Sportpalast, in German Propaganda Archive, Calvin University, 1944.

## Ritual Practices in Daily Life

The theology of the future under Nazism was not a hopeful promise. Not peace, but eternal struggle (ewiger Kampf), perpetual mobilization, and endless conflict between the “pure” and the “degenerate” were the future theology in Nazism. The “Thousand-Year Reich” defined not so much a time span as a mode of being – a destiny aesthetics. The SS baptism of infants was not a neutral social act, but a symbolic initiation into the race body. The ritual required the presence of a senior SS officer, the laying of a hand upon the child, and an invocation of loyalty to the pure and unbroken bloodline. Instead of cross or holy water, the child was consecrated with the Ahnenkerze (Ancestral Candle) or runic symbols, which sealed their acceptance into a racially defined group with a “secret mission.”<sup>29</sup>

SS weddings were only conducted after strict racial screening. The partner was determined by the Ahnenpässe, which were documents that established proof of blood purity via at least four generations. The wedding was conducted in specially chosen locations, which were most often wooded or historically relevant to Germanic myth, and involved the exchange of vows of loyalty not only between the bride and groom but also to the “German Race” and the Führer. One of the significant acts of the ritual was the lighting of the Ahnenkerze by the couple, symbolizing racial continuity and historical task.<sup>30</sup>

The replacement of the liturgical calendar was a systematic cultural undertaking, aimed at dismantling Christian temporality and establishing a calendar legitimized through racial and cosmological principles. Christian holidays were not merely marginalized; they were denounced by the SS administration as “degenerate, individualistic, and hostile to blood,” and were replaced by ceremonies inspired by Germanic paganism, astronomical cycles, and mythologized historical moments of the Order.<sup>31</sup>

The Winter Solstice (Wintersonnenwende), which was celebrated around December 21st, was turned into the most significant annual celebration of the SS. The night was thought to be sacred, signifying the reappearance of light and blood. The ceremony began with a torchlight procession; initiates wore ritual clothing with runic symbols and gathered in a circle around a fire,

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<sup>29</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Die okkulten Wurzeln des Nationalsozialismus*, Ullstein, Frankfurt am Main 1997, p. 88–112.

<sup>30</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen*, Verlag Dr. Karl Alber, Freiburg and München 1993, p. 21–35.

<sup>31</sup> Klaus Vondung, *Die Apokalypse in Deutschland*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München 1988, p. 198–210.

singing hymns to the “restoration of racial strength.” One of the ritual climaxes was the ceremonial presentation of the Ahnenkerbe by new members of the SS joining the Order, symbolizing the blood continuity with the ancestors.<sup>32</sup>

Day of Loyalty to the Blood (Bluttreue) was linked to the repetition of the SS officers' oaths of loyalty to the Order and the Führer. It was established to replace the celebration of Pentecost. In the course of the ritual, individuals stood around in a circle before a stone table covered with runic markings. Each member was required to pass his right hand across a ceremonial sword, a symbol of the continuation of the racial line and take the same oath first uttered by the Order's founders in 1931. The gesture was not ritualistic but a mystical seal of the marriage of blood and spirit.<sup>33</sup>

The Festival of the Ancestors (Ahnenfeier) held a pride of place in the SS ritual calendar. It was held twice a year, normally in spring and autumn, and involved ceremonies in memory of deceased officers, including the placing of runes on marble slabs, the reciting of elegiac hymns, and the reading out of the names of the dead. On the familial level, these rites were observed in private circles, where children learned their genealogy and took an oath to “continue the blood and the mission.”<sup>34</sup>

All of them were not alternative celebrations. Time, severed from Christian structures, was refashioned into a cycle of racial ascendance. The ritual calendar of the SS was structured toward the continuous reaffirmation of the relation between self and Order, body and race, nature and ideology. The calendar was an instrument of discipline, and celebration an act of existential obedience.<sup>35</sup>

But even as the regime endeavored to redefine temporality in racial-cosmological terms, this reconstruction was not comprehensive nor without issues. Its attempt to erase Christian calendrical customs with mythic-pagan festivals did not resonate with the broader German society, still deeply rooted in Protestant and Catholic rhythms of life. To the majority of the population, Christian holidays were the symbols of civic identification and moral orientation despite the encouragement

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<sup>32</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, p. 162–177.

<sup>33</sup> Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, SUNY Press, Albany 1994, p. 10–18.

<sup>34</sup> Wilfried Daim, *Der Mann, der Hitler die Ideen gab: Lanz von Liebenfels*, Wiener Volksbuchverlag, Wien 1957, p. 134.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Levenda, *Unholy Alliance: A History of Nazi Involvement with the Occult*, Continuum, New York 2002, pp. 53–76.

by SS and state organizations of their symbolic replacements. Such dislocation of the prescribed ritual frameworks and the lived religious time signals the partial failure of the Nazi state to establish spiritual hegemony among the populace. The regime's sacralization of politics might have entered the ceremonial and visual domain of public life, but on the deeper level of individual belief and cultural continuity, old-fashioned religiosity often still lingered in clandestine tension with the new ideological orthodoxy.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

This study has attempted to draw attention to a level of Nazi ideology that is classically ignored: its metaphysical, ritualistic, and mythological character as a political religion. In addition to the classic political and military analyses, Nazism must be understood as a comprehensive philosophy that occupied not only the biological and social domination of life, but also its metaphysical legitimation. The mythic reinterpretation of history, the ritual reorganization of the calendar, the festivals, the symbolic role of blood, and the secret initiations of the SS were not ideological pretenses, but instruments for the establishment of an alternative spiritual reality –one wholly consonant with the imperial ambitions of the Third Reich. Himmler, the architect of this domestic order, did not merely seek to discipline the population but to spiritually reconfigure it by creating a new anthropological figure: the initiate-warrior of the Aryan mission.

Third Reich wasn't so much a regime of terror but also one of faith. The Thousand-Year Reich vision, the occult philosophy of the Ahnenerbe, the mythologizing of the Thule Gesellschaft, and the Wewelsburg rituals, were not just instances of grotesque obsession. They show how Nazism set out to establish a new sacred order one that would be in a position to legitimate its domination not just over the body, but over the soul. Exposing this ritualistic and mystical dimension is not a routine exercise in historical fascination. It is epistemologically obligatory to know the fact that totalitarianisms of the twentieth century not only existed based on guns and laws, but also on oaths, hymns, symbols, and myths. It is, in the final analysis, necessary in order to see how politics when separated from ethics can become a priestly function, and how religion when separated from pity can be used as an agency of destruction.

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<sup>36</sup> United States Government, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression: Volume VII*, Suzeteo Enterprises, Edinburgh, 2019.

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