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Edited by
Horst Junginger



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PREFACE

Two generations after the end of World War II it is high time to rethink the European study of religion during the 1930s and 1940s. It was in that spirit that the Department for the Study of Religion of the Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen decided to organize an international symposium on "The Study of Religion under the Impact of National Socialist and Fascist Ideologies in Europe" that took place from 16–18 July 2004 at the University of Tübingen. In coordination with the Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionsgeschichte (DVRG, now Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft, DVRW), the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR), and the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), the Tübingen conference offered the opportunity for a thorough debate on that crucial period which affected the study of religion in many ways. There can be no doubt that contemporaneous ideologies had a significant impact on the shaping of its program, on its intrinsic values, and on its academic setting.

Due to the central role National Socialism played within the German study of religion, we felt it meaningful to hold the discussions at the University of Tübingen where, shortly after German troops had begun to spread war over Europe, an 'Aryan Institute' could have been established with the aim to buttress religion and "Weltanschauung" of the Third Reich methodically. The research of the last twenty years has revealed the extent of the ideological correspondence between German scholarship and the Nazi regime. However, political doctrines biased the account not only in Germany. A closer look into the history of our discipline shows that non-scientific orientations could penetrate into the academic field in other countries as well. We must recognize the emergence of similar ideological susceptibilities which ought to be analyzed as part of the complicated relationship between the academic study of religion and those political, religious and other factors determining the course of its development from outside. Which questions were put forth and which kind of answers were given in the era between the First and the Second World War? Was there something approximating a common European approach in the study of religion, and were there comparable distortions?

FROM BUDDHA TO ADOLF HITLER:
WALTHER WÜST AND THE ARYAN TRADITION

Horst Junginger

1. *Introduction*

Walther Wüst is rightly known as one of Germany's leading academics during the Nazi period. He was a scholar of a new voelkish type. Being on very intimate terms with Heinrich Himmler, he quickly advanced in the SS and was appointed SS-“Oberführer” in 1942, the highest rank he would achieve. His academic career prospered similarly. Full professor since 1935, Wüst was nominated rector of the University of Munich in 1941. At that time, he had already headed Himmler's brain trust named “Ahnenerbe” (ancestral heritage) for four years. Indeed, Wüst represented the archetype of a politically engaged Nazi scholar. It is misleading to raise doubts about his extraordinary position only because Alfred Rosenberg tried to thwart some of his projects. Michael Kater goes too far in his still authoritative book about the “Ahnenerbe” relating Wüst to a somewhat old school of scholarly learning in Germany.¹ Writing his dissertation in the early 1970s, Kater did not see through the widely played game of many post-war university professors who made a virtue of necessity in transforming their former rivalries into opposition and even resistance after the war. But it has to be acknowledged that Kater stood under great pressure from his interviewees, mostly university professors and high ranks of the former “Ahnenerbe” and the Reich Ministry of Science and Education, during his research.² They went to great lengths to impose their view on the young doctoral student, even threatening him with legal proceedings if he would go a little bit too far in his interpretation. Their intention was clear: to neglect or, at least, to diminish their involvement in National Socialism

¹ Michael H. Kater, *Das Ahnenerbe der SS 1935–1945. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1974, 3rd ed. 2001), p. 275.

² Kater's correspondence with them is to be found in the Institut für Zeitgeschichte München (Institute of Contemporary History, Munich), ZS/A-25 “Zeugenschrifttum Kater.”

as far as possible. Some even construed a contradiction between the alleged scientific aim of the SS-“Ahnenerbe” and the ideological claims of the Third Reich. Otto Huth (1906–1998), head of the “Ahnenerbe”-section “Indogermanische Geistes- und Glaubensgeschichte” (History of Indo-Germanic Ideas and Belief) called Himmler’s think tank an institution concerned with the development of a Germanic humanism and its journal *Germanien* a place of spiritual resistance against the Nazi regime.³ Only privately did Kater express his opinion that a scholar such as Wüst should be summoned to appear in court. Why should the “Ahnenerbe”-president remain free when its secretary Wolfram Sievers was hanged for his deeds, he asked in a letter to Germany’s chief public prosecutor Fritz Bauer.⁴

Unlike anyone, Wüst epitomized the university system of the Third Reich, its arrogant claims as well as its intellectual and moral decay. A biography of him is an urgent desideratum of Germany’s history of science.⁵ It should not only center on Wüst’s vigor in the field of politics but should also take his influence in indology and the history of religions into account. This article, putting emphasis on Wüst’s views pertaining to religion and the study of religion, can in no way replace such an effort.⁶

³ Letters of O. Huth to M.H. Kater from August 21 and September 9, 1963, *ibid.*, MA ZS/A-25; cf. also Horst Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999), p. 295.

⁴ Letter of M.H. Kater to F. Bauer from February 26, 1968, MA ZS/A-25, s.v. Bruno Beger, fol. 16f.

⁵ Gerd Simon is preparing a book on Wüst with the title *Mit Akribie und Bluff ins Zentrum der Macht. Walther Wüst und das ‘Eymologische und vergleichende Wörterbuch des Altindoirischen’*. Helmut Heiber’s *Universität unterm Hakenkreuz*, vol. 2.2 (München: Saur, 1994), pp. 216–233 describes the life of Wüst a little bit different compared with Kater’s study (*op. cit.*, pp. 43–46). A dissertation of Max Schreiber, Munich, concentrating on Wüst’s academic career, ought to appear in 2007.

⁶ My main archival sources are Wüst’s personal files at the Munich University Archive and at the Federal Archives Berlin (the former Berlin Document Center, BDC), the “Ahnenerbe”-files NS 21 there (consisting of nearly 1000 large volumes), the literal remains of Jakob Wilhelm Hauer laying in the Koblenz branch of Germany’s Federal Archives, and the holdings of the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich. I have to thank Gerd Simon especially for information about the “Ahnenerbe”-career of Wüst and his relationship with Julius Evola. The “Gesellschaft für interdisziplinäre Forschung Tübingen” (GIFT), of which we both are members, is providing access to some important files concerning the humanities under National Socialism, see <http://homepages.uni-tuebingen.de/gerd.simon/gift.htm>.

2. Religious Background and the World View of Herman Wirth

Born in May 1901 in Kaiserslautern, Wüst was raised in a traditional Protestant environment. His father was a teacher and a staunch Bavarian civil servant. Brought up by a very pious mother in common Protestant values and virtues, Wüst participated already as a schoolboy in activities against the Versailles treatise which had cut off the left side of the Rhine from the German Reich. At that time, Palatine in the west of Germany belonged to Bavaria. In 1920 Wüst began to study German, English, and Indian philology as well as comparative religion at the University of Munich. Similar to many others, Wüst became aware of new ideas in the course of his academic education. The university widened his horizons and led to a certain estrangement from his parental home and familiar attachments. Becoming acquainted with the religious world apart from Christianity, the belief of his childhood lost much of its cohesive force. Particularly the religions of the East impressed the young student who immersed himself in the cultures of India and Persia during his training in Aryan philology.

Though the notion “Aryan philology” had no negative or racial connotation at the beginning of comparative Indo-European linguistics and was merely synonymous with philological expertise in Sanskrit and Avesta, non-scientific influences were superimposed on it in the second half of the 19th century. To deal with the culture of the Aryans now meant much more than scrutinizing language structures and etymological relations.⁷ Something like an Aryan Myth emerged. Léon Poliakov closely related the appearance of the Aryan Myth in Germany with the scientific work of Friedrich Max Müller.⁸ Although Poliakov exaggerated his influence in that regard, one should be attentive to the fact that Müller developed a firm interest in the racial theories of Count Arthur de Gobineau at the end of his life. In a letter to Ludwig Schemann, the propagator of Gobineau’s racism in Germany, Müller expressed his

⁷ See Ruth Römer, *Sprachwissenschaft und Rassenideologie* (München: Fink, 1985) and Maurice Olender, *Les langues du Paradis. Aryens et Sémites, un couple providentiel* (Paris: Galilimard, 1989, German ed. *Die Sprachen des Paradieses. Religion, Philologie und Rassenlehre im 19. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 1995).

⁸ Léon Poliakov, *Der arische Mythos. Zu den Quellen von Rassismus und Nationalismus* (Wien: Europa-Verlag, 1977, English ed. *The Aryan Myth*, London: Heinemann, 1974), esp. pp. 241ff. See also Laurens van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller. A Life Devoted to the Humanities* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 370ff.

"sincere admiration" of the French count on January 1, 1894.⁹ Müller did not even hesitate to support the Gobineau-society Schemann had founded to spread the racial ideas of Gobineau.¹⁰

The attractiveness of the Aryans in the 19th century had scientific and religious origins. Translating and analyzing a vast corpus of hitherto unknown holy scriptures was an imperative and indispensable, but also a Herculean task. The series *The Sacred Books of the East* Müller inaugurated and edited between 1878 and 1894 provides proof of the enormous progress in this new field of research called history of religions. But in addition to inner scientific motives and developments, historians of religions also turned their interest to the religious world outside Europe because they were dissatisfied with their own religion at home. Liberal-minded scholars were deeply disappointed by orthodox Christianity, its affinity with monarchy and its outdated dogmas opposing scientific progress in many areas of academic learning. If they, nevertheless, wanted to remain religious or, at least, if they esteemed religious values important to one's personal and social life, where should they head? Leaving the church and becoming overt agnostics or atheists was an option for very few. It would have been against their convictions and, perhaps more important, it would have hampered their academic career considerably. To embark on the path of religious reformation was no alternative for them either since they were already on the fringe of their church. My point is A) that many religious studies scholars were attracted by non-Christian traditions as a result of and parallel to their alienation from Christianity. And B), the more they occupied themselves with religions they equally found true, authentic, and respectable, the more their intrinsic critique of Christianity raised. Under such circumstances the wonderland of India functioned as a magnet drawing scientific interests, spiritual needs, and political hopes out of their traditional Christian setting. It is no surprise that a lot of traits then attributed in a positive form to the Aryan people originally stemmed from the catalogue of Christian

⁹ "Ich habe seit Jahren eine aufrichtige Verehrung für Gobineau gefühlt und mich oft gewundert, daß sein Name so wenig genannt wird." quoted together with two other affirmative letters of Müller by Ludwig Schemann, *Gobineaus Rassenwerk* (Stuttgart: Fr. Fromms Verlag, 1910), p. 188f.

¹⁰ See Günther Deschner, *Gobineau und Deutschland. Der Einfluß von J.A. de Gobineaus 'Essai sur l'Inégalité des races humaines' auf die deutsche Geistesgeschichte 1853-1917* (Diss. Erlangen 1967), p. 64 and the appendix as well as Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft*, pp. 145ff.

deficiencies. Because linguistic evidence was not sufficient to verify a close kinship between the old Aryans in India and contemporary Germans in Europe, the importance of non-scientific features increased. Race became such a determining factor amalgamating the people of India and Germany to "Indo-Germans" who were supposed to share a specific Aryan worldview.

Scholars such as Walther Wüst and Jakob Wilhelm Hauck were deeply rooted in the 19th century's study of religion. They projected their own longings onto the Aryan heritage to a much greater extent than their forerunners. As a legacy of the old Protestant text-orientation, Wüst and Hauck aspired to reveal the essence of Indo-Aryanism via interpretative hermeneutics. When the Nazis attained power, both perceived a clear inner calling to come forth with their particular expertise in Aryan philology and religion in order to authenticate and even substantiate the ideology of National Socialism. But in the decade before, in a situation of ideological confusion and political disorder after the lost war, Wüst, Hauck and many others began to think about the Aryan tradition in rather unspecific and ill-defined terms of a cultural and spiritual alternative.

In the course of Wüst's habilitation procedure, the dean of the philosophy department of the University of Munich Lucian Scherman wrote an expert opinion in May 1926 in which he specifically praised the candidate's philological diligence. Scherman, in summarizing the votes of his colleagues Hanns Oertel and Hermann Güntert, however added the warning that Wüst should not leave the path of methodological thoroughness when turning his attention to cultural history in the time to come.¹¹ Scherman's assessment must be understood in the context of a severe crisis in Indology faced due to the old age of most of its professors and the great number of solely language-oriented Sanskrit chairs. Wüst was one of the few promising young scholars of Indian and Iranian philology who nurtured hope in a positive development in the future. In those days of little money and great problems, politicians and ministry officials wanted the universities to place more stress on practical relevance. Studying Sanskrit philology or religious

¹¹ L. Scherman's "Gesamtgutachten" from May 10, 1926 as well as the votes of H. Oertel (January 14, 1926) and H. Güntert (n.d.) are to be found in Wüst's personal files, University Archive Munich, ON 7 and ON 14. Perhaps Scherman's admonition was also a reaction to the overtly positive statement of Güntert which Bruce Lincoln quotes in his article on p. 199, n. 70.

traditions far away in time and distance for purely scientific reasons was esteemed superfluous and potentially dispensable. University disciplines like indology and comparative religion reacted to this challenge with a closer orientation towards cultural themes and arguments. In so doing they hoped to gain further legitimacy and to cope with the new demands of a new time. It was probably not astonishing that a young and talented scholar like Wüst saw this as a chance to connect his personal advancement with the overdue modernizing of indology. Consequently, Wüst went one step further and included the interpretation of the Aryan race to the interpretation of the Aryan culture when it soon became necessary. The vagueness and uncertainty of the race-concept did not speak against its utilization. Instead, it was a notion of great hope and expectations.

A growing interest in Indo-European mythology notwithstanding, Wüst entirely remained in the realm of Protestant Christianity in the 1920s. He maintained close contacts with missionary circles long after he had finished his dissertation in 1923 and his habilitation in 1926. Yet in 1931 he participated in the annual meeting of the East Asia Mission in Basle where he gave a lecture on Buddhism and Christianity.¹² Founded in Weimar in 1884, the "Allgemeine Evangelisch-Protestantische Missionsverein," better known as "Ostasien-Mission," had Japan and China as its main missionary fields. Because the East Asia Mission gave less prominence to traditional missionary work and admitted a more scholarly approach based on critical historical methods, it was refused membership in the umbrella organization of the "Deutscher Evangelischer Missionsbund" in 1928 for being not Christian enough. The inclination towards the history of religions found expression in the journal of the East Asia Mission *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* edited by Johannes Witte and Hans Haas. Whereas Witte focused on the missionary aspects, Haas accentuated the history of religions as far as he could, resulting in severe difficulties with his co-editor. Together with some 20 liberal theologians and historians of religions – among them Karl Beth, Karl Bornhausen, Wilhelm Brachmann, Carl Clemen, Otto Eißfeldt, and Joachim Wach – Wüst joined the scientific board of the *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswis-*

¹² Walther Wüst, "Buddhismus und Christentum auf vorderasiatisch-antikem Boden. Vortrag, gehalten während der 47. Jahresversammlung der Ostasien-Mission in Basel, 6. 10. 1931," *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* (1932); pp. 33–63.

senschaft in 1929. In some issues he appears right after Joachim Wach in the list of board members. Wüst wrote several articles and reviews in which he emphatically appraised books of Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, Rudolf Otto, Gustav Mensching, and Hilko Wiardo Schomerus. Wüst even assessed publications of the Jewish indologists Isidor Scheffelowitz and Otto Strauß in quite a positive manner, scholars who were later denounced as racially alien and as a threat to the German university system.

The relationship between Protestant mission and the study of religion is of exceptional importance and has undeservedly been excluded from historical investigation until today. A great bulk of material in church and missionary archives is still waiting to be examined. Its analysis would enable a much better insight in the history of our discipline in particular with regard to the era of National Socialism.¹³ Quarrels among the various German missionary societies preceded and pre-structured some of the later conflicts within the study of religion after 1933. Wüst's reservations against Hauer were most likely based in the rivalry between the East Asia Mission and the pietistic Basle Mission Society, the "Basler Missionsgesellschaft," for which Hauer had worked as missionary in India. Hauer instead fought a fierce battle with Johannes Witte who got the first chair of history of religions (in combination with missiology) newly established in the Third Reich at the University of Berlin in 1935. In a letter to Alfred Rosenberg Hauer attacked Witte as an unqualified Christian apologetic who should be seen as a danger to the German youth.¹⁴ The "Missionsinspektor" of the East Asia Mission Wilhelm Brachmann had been strongly promoted by Witte before he changed sides and became the leading religious studies scholar of the "Amt Rosenberg." Witte himself was nominated head of the German delegation to attend the 6th IAHR conference

¹³ Cf. Werner Ustorf, *Sailing on the Next Tide. Missions, Missiology, and the Third Reich* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2000) who puts little emphasis on the study of religion itself. The excellent investigation of Bertelsmann publishers carried out under the directorship of Saul Friedländer contains a valuable description of the missionary scene in Germany written by Helen Müller and Trutz Rendtorff, see S. Friedländer et al., eds., *Bertelsmann im Dritten Reich* (München: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2002), pp. 91–101. Cf. also Karla Poewe's article "Liberalism, German Missionaries, and National Socialism," in Ulrich van der Heyden and Holger Stoecker, eds., *Mission und Macht im Wandel politischer Orientierungen. Europäische Missionsgesellschaften in politischen Spannungsfeldern in Afrika und Asien zwischen 1800 und 1945* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005), pp. 633–662.

¹⁴ Letter of J.W. Hauer to Alfred Rosenberg on May 23, 1935, quoted in Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft*, p. 180.

that took place in Brussels in September 1935. Shortly before the event his former membership in a Freemason society became known and he therefore was replaced by Karl Bornhausen. Less than one year before Bornhausen had taken over the chair of Paul Tillich in November 1934, teaching philosophy of religion in a newly created institute of science of religion at the University of Frankfurt. Similar examples abound, showing a remarkable expansion of research in religion on Protestant premises that took place in the first years of the Third Reich. It was evident that the Reich Minister of Science and Education Bernhard Rust supported the German Christians and had no interest in fostering a Pagan influence at the universities. Eugen Mattiat, one of his main collaborators in the ministry and a firm German Christian, did his best to prevent 'Pagans' from entering the field – and things did not change before the end of the 1930s.¹⁵

What is significant of many German religious studies scholars is that they became acquainted with the religions of the East through engaging in missionary activities or through discussions within mission societies which the *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* mediated in a Protestant and the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* in a Catholic context. Wüst was far away from being a Pagan at the end of the 1920s. Lacking a deep-seated personal religiosity, he fully stood on the ground of Protestant Christianity. But parallel to his reading of the publications of Herman Wirth (1885–1981), Wüst's religious views appear to have gradually altered. Wirth, a private researcher borne in the Netherlands (demonstrated by his first name Herman and not Hermann), developed a fanciful and imaginative theory of Nordic symbolism. In his book *Der Aufstieg der Menschheit. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Religion, Symbolik und Schrift der atlantisch-nordischen Rasse* (Man's rise. Studies in the religion, symbolism and scripture of the North-Atlantic race, Jena: Diederichs, 1928) he promulgated the existence of an extraordinarily old Nordic-Aryan culture around the Atlantic Ocean which originally came from the North Pole. Wandering southwards in early times, this eminent white race inhabited Atlantis before it sank, subse-

¹⁵ I cannot go into particulars here but I scrutinized Mattiat's enormous impact in another article on "Religionswissenschaft im Nationalsozialismus. Die Geschichte einer gescheiterten Emanzipation," in Jürgen Elvert and Jürgen Sikora, eds., *Nationalsozialismus und Kulturwissenschaften* (forthcoming) in detail. For the Christian views of Bernhard Rust, see Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich. Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 45f., p. 73, and p. 122f.

quently leaving its trace wherever it went. Wirth claimed that Nordic symbols, signs and artifacts could be found everywhere their creators had spread. Yet one ought to have a trained eye for them since later layers of a Christian time covered and obscured the original remains. Lacking scientific talent and grounding, Wirth collected his material in a typical amateurish and eclectic manner. Without any regard for historical contexts and alternative possibilities of interpretation, he pressed heterogeneous things together if they seemed to fit into his system by their outward appearance.

Wirth's theory remained banished from the universities though it achieved considerable success in voelkish circles. His editor Eugen Diederichs praised Wirth as an unappreciated genius and intervened in behalf of his case at the Prussian Ministry of Culture and Education in Berlin. In 1929 Wirth tried to obtain his habilitation at the University of Marburg where he had been living since 1923. The ministry supported his effort and moreover wanted to award him with the title of an honorary professor paying homage to his national merits. But the requested evaluation turned out to be a disaster for Wirth. The dean of Marburg's philosophy department Hermann Jacobsohn (as a German Jew: Hermann), a distinguished linguist who was said to have mastered about 30 languages and dialects, called Wirth in harsh words a total dilettante and his work below the level of scientific scholarship. Wirth's attempt to link his superficial understanding of linguistics with a rather confused Nordic world view upset Jacobsohn.¹⁶ His Marburg colleague, the archaeologist Gero von Merhart, seconded Jacobsohn's opinion that it would be a shame to the university allowing someone like Wirth to teach.¹⁷ But what followed is characteristic of the way things went in Germany. Jacobsohn, who had been full professor and director of the Department of Oriental and Indo-Germanic Studies since 1919, was

¹⁶ "Ein Mann der behauptet, dass der Konsonantenwechsel eine 'Jahreslautverschiebung', der Vokalwechsel ein 'Jahresablaut' sei, dass der Ablaut eine Folge kulturellen Empfindens sei, dass dem Winter der Vokal *u*, der Übergangszeit des Frühlings der Vokal *e*, dem frohen sieghaften Sommer das *i* usw. zuzusprechen sei, wer Äusserungen tut wie 'das ist das grosse Mysterium der Muttermacht, dass das *u*, der dunkle Vokal, der sich tief in der Höhle des Mundes befindet, zum *a* wird', steht ausserhalb jeder Wissenschaft, jedes vernunftgemässen Denkens. Und dabei handelt es sich nicht um zufällig herausgegriffene Sätze, Höhepunkte des Unsinnns. Sondern das ganze Buch steht auf diesem Niveau, auf jedem Wissenschaftsgebiet das Vf. heranzieht." Jacobsohn to the ministry on November 22, 1929, State Archive Marburg, 307d, acc. 1966/10, no. 221, fol. 14f.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 16 (n.d.).

dismissed on April 25, 1933 as soon as the Nazis came to power. His 'crime' consisted not only of his Jewish origin, Jacobsohn was also a staunch democrat and member of the "Deutsche Demokratische Partei" (DDP), then the "Deutsche Staatspartei." Befriended with Rudolf Otto and Martin Rade, Jacobsohn dreamt his whole life of a German nation in which Jews and Germans could live together as equals. In utter despair and unsuccessfully seeking help from Rudolf Otto – who was in Berlin that day to intervene in the case of Heinrich Hermlink – he committed suicide on April 27, one day after he received the telegram announcing his removal.¹⁸ Wirth, on the other hand, profited from the new political system and eventually received the title of an extraordinary professor from the University of Berlin in 1933 which brought him 700 Reichsmark a month without any teaching duties.¹⁹

In 1929, the year Jacobsohn so heavily criticized Wirth and his book *Der Aufgang der Menschheit*, Wüst published a long review article in the *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft*.²⁰ He aligned his examination with Wirth's theory of decay and the view that modern man has fallen victim to materialism. This kind of cultural criticism was widespread in Germany, for the most part a reaction to the lost war. Though Wüst avoided taking sides with Wirth and his Weltanschauung explicitly, it becomes clear that he shared Wirth's basic assumption that the German soul had lost its connection with its religious roots and that Germany's re-ascent to a strong and powerful nation depended on its spiritual rebirth, however it may have been imagined. But interestingly, Wüst completely avoided dealing with the role of religion in Wirth's narrative in which Jewish-Oriental Christianity formed the main opponent of the Nordic civilization. His religious convictions were rather ambivalent at that time and he apparently did not think Christianity

¹⁸ See Ruth Verroen et al., eds., *Leben Sie? Die Geschichte der deutsch-jüdischen Familie Jacobsohn* (Marburg: Universitätsbibliothek, 2000), pp. 57–81. Because his Protestant wife helped Jewish friends, Margarete Jacobsohn was imprisoned in 1944. Only thanks to the intervention of Heinrich Frick and the prison doctor, she escaped admission to a concentration camp (*ibid.*, p. 81).

¹⁹ Due to internal quarrels Wirth's certificate was not issued although Hermann Göring had already signed it. See Ingo Wiwjorra, "Herman Wirth. Ein gescheiterter Ideologe zwischen 'Ahnenerbe' und Atlantis," in Barbara Danckwortt et al., eds., *Historische Rassismussforschung: Ideologen, Täter, Opfer* (Hamburg-Berlin: Argument, 1995), pp. 91–112, here p. 105. Nevertheless Wirth bore the title of an extraordinary ("außerordentlicher") professor at the University of Berlin and used it in his letterhead.

²⁰ Walther Wüst, "Gedanken über Wirths 'Aufgang der Menschheit,'" *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* (1929), pp. 257–274 and pp. 289–307.

and Wirth's approach were mutually exclusive. Therefore he centered his examination on the book's scientific claims which he criticized from the standpoint of academic scholarship particularly for their linguistic and paleographic failings.²¹ In distinguishing between theoretical insufficiencies and, in his eyes, a brilliantly formulated critique of culture, Wüst articulated his commentary in the form of an appeal to push ahead and to improve on it in the future: "Praesens Imperfectum – Perfectum Futurum" was the phrase with which he ended his review.²²

In the following years Wüst's sympathy for the worldview of Herman Wirth matured. In 1932 he joined a committee that supported Wirth's project to establish a special museum for the material he had collected.²³ When the Nazis obtained the majority in the elections for Mecklenburg-Schwerin's state parliament in May 1932, these plans turned out well and Wirth succeeded at the end of the year in initiating a research institute and an open-air museum named "Forschungsanstalt und Freiluftmuseum für Geistesurgeschichte" in Bad Doberan in Mecklenburg near Rostock. At the same time, a research society "Studiengesellschaft für Geistesurgeschichte Deutsches Ahnenerbe," the precursor organization of the later "Ahnenerbe," was founded in Bad Doberan. It is impossible to adequately translate the terms "Geistesurgeschichte" or "Geistesurreligion," the headings of Wirth's whole endeavor. They meant something like a history of religious ideas extended and inflated by the prefix "ur." Wirth abundantly used the additive "ur" to designate the existence of a very old and very venerable pre-historic Nordic religion becoming visible through Pagan *hierophanies* in later historic times. To learn more about this religion required the study of its symbols and emblems in an approach he called "Urgeistes-" or "Urreligionsgeschichte." Scientifically spoken, Wirth's device involved a typical *circulus vitiosus*. His phenomenology of Nordic symbolism wanted to prove on what it relied: the assumption of a Nordic "Urreligion."

Private money and a subsidy from the Berlin Ministry of Culture and Education enabled Wirth to carry out his first "urreligionsgeschichtliche" exhibition titled "Der Heilbringer" (the "Savior") in Berlin from

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 272–274.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 307.

²³ Other members of this supporting committee (consisting of 25 persons) were Karl Bornhausen, Hugo Bruckmann, Niels Diederichs, Eugen Fehrle, Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, Mathilde Merck, Gustav Neckel, Konrad Theodor Preuss, Max Wieser.

May 1–14, 1933. It focused on the Thule culture and displayed Nordic artifacts of a primeval megalith religion dating back to the Stone Age and having a Pagan “Heilbringer,” the son of heaven and mother earth, as its main figure.²⁴ The exhibition aimed not only to memorize the Nordic legacy but to utilize it for the present. Wirth needed the success of such an exhibition and a continuing support from relevant people in order to receive official acknowledgment and public funds.²⁵

At the end of 1933 Wirth published his famous *Ura-Linda-Chronik* which he announced as a historic Friesian chronicle going back to the 3rd century BC.²⁶ The *Ura-Linda-Chronik* encompassed a wild mixture of sagas, memories and wise sayings of an extraordinarily old and respectable mythology. Wirth, without furnishing any kind of proof, asserted that the chronicle was a reliable document of a solemn Aryan cosmogony (“eine erhabene Kosmogonie des arischen Urglaubens”) even older than, and of course superior to, the Old Testament of Jews and Christians.²⁷ Full of antisemitic prejudices, the *Ura-Linda-Chronik* entered the public stage as a Pagan counter narrative to the Jewish-Christian tradition. Unfortunately, the Holy book of the Nordic race was nothing but a fake written in the 19th century and reflecting the romanticism of that period. Whereas some university professors such as Gustav Neckel, Alfred Baeumler, and Arthur Hübner had estimated Wirth’s previous publications with some sympathy, they now turned away, irritated by the apparent misinterpretation. Very few academics kept on supporting Wirth’s ideas. Among them were Walther Wüst and Otto Huth. On May 4, 1934 a public debate was held at the auditorium maximum of the University of Berlin in which the authenticity of the *Ura-Linda-Chronik* came under fierce fire.²⁸ Huth, who spoke in the name of the

²⁴ See Theodor Devaranne, “Der Heilbringer,” *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* (1933), p. 242f.

²⁵ On April 5, 1933 Wirth requested additional funds for himself and his assistant Otto Huth who had helped him to organize the “Heilbringer”-exhibition. Wirth added a leaflet containing the aforementioned list of supporters with Wüst as last name. Federal Archives Berlin, R 73, 11853.

²⁶ *Die Ura-Linda-Chronik* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1933), translated, edited and explained by Herman Wirth. The chronicle, in fact a compilation, consisted of not more than 128 pages followed by 200 pages explanation and 40 pages of pictures Wirth added.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁸ I refer here to an article by Gerd Simon, “Himmlers Bibel und die öffentlich-wirkksamste Podiumsdiskussion in der Geschichte der Germanistik,” published at <http://homepages.uni-tuebingen.de/gerd.simon/himmler-bibel.pdf>. See also I. Wiwjorra, “Herman Wirth,” p. 103f. and Sönje Storm, “Die öffentliche Aussprache über Herr-

“Reichsbund für Volkstum und Heimat,” referred to his studies on the Indo-Germanic Vesta cult with its virgin priestesses who light the holy fire and keep it under their surveillance. He experienced laughter from the audience when people shouted “mehr Feuer” (more fire) and “Hut(h) ab” (down the hat).²⁹ Wüst as second defender maintained the existence of an authentic and trustworthy core of the *Ura-Linda-Chronik* and, once again, suggested further research for a critical text edition that would allow the real essence of the chronicle to be separated from later modifications and external influences.³⁰

Wirth’s theories raised severe criticism not only from the academy but also from National Socialists and organizations affiliated with National Socialism. For instance, Wirth’s postulation of an old-Germanic matriarchy met, not surprisingly, a strong rejection as totally alien to the Aryan race and German mind. His assumption of a Nordic “Urchristentum,” that is the idea of a Christian dependence on non-Semitic roots, incurred the displeasure of decided anti-Christian Pagans such as Bernhard Kummer and Mathilde Ludendorff.³¹ Even within the NSDAP a great number of people estimated Wirth’s speculations to be incompatible with National Socialism, some even considered them as a threat to its respectability. Especially scholars connected with Alfred Rosenberg denied any scientific and political relevance of Wirth’s “Ur”-symbolism. Yet Wirth had fortune on his side. In Heinrich Himmler he found a prominent supporter who himself held such exaggerated views of an idealized life of the old Germans. Wirth first met Himmler during a party Johannes von Leers – who was married to Wirth’s former secretary – organized in October 1934.

man Wirths ‘Ura-Linda-Chronik’ in Berlin (1934),” in Birgitta Almgren, ed., *Bilder des Nordens in der Germanistik 1929–1945. Wissenschaftliche Identität oder politische Anpassung?* (Huddinge: Södertörns Högskola, 2002), pp. 79–97.

²⁹ G. Simon, “Himmlers Bibel,” loc. cit., p. 7.

³⁰ “Als zweiter Verteidiger sprach als ein sehr wendiger Advokat für die Echtheit der Chronik der Münchner Indologe Professor Walt[h]er Wüst. Statt sich nüchterner sauberer Sachlichkeit verpflichtet zu fühlen, war ihm vor allem daran gelegen, Erfolg und Gunst beim Publikum zu erhaschen. Die Rolle des Verführers lag ihm näher als diejenige eines ehrlichen Führers des Volkes. Er stellte es als das Ziel der weiteren Forschung über die Ura-Linda-Chronik hin, eine kritische Ausgabe der Chronik zu schaffen, um mit ihrer Hilfe den alten Kern herauszuschälen.” *Ibid.*, p. 7, quoting the report of a Max Wegner.

³¹ See Wiwjorra, “Herman Wirth,” p. 102f.

3. *Walther Wüst and the "Ahnenerbe" of the SS*

On July 1, 1935, Herman Wirth, Heinrich Himmler, Richard Walther Darré, and a handful other voelkish Nazis founded the "Ahnenerbe. Studienurgesellschaft für Geistesurgeschichte." Herman Wirth was the central intellectual figure at its inception. The way he referred to the assumed ancestral heritage of the Nordic race accepted the others as paradigmatic model. Consequently, Wirth became head of the first "Ahnenerbe"-department named "Pflegstätte für Schrift- und Sinnbildkunde," where the occupation with Nordic scriptures and symbols stood in the fore. Already in August 1935 Wirth started his first expedition to Scandinavia to examine ancient rock drawings and to reproduce plaster cards of them. A second research journey followed one year later.

Some months before the constitution of the "Ahnenerbe," Walther Wüst wrote a very submissive letter to Heinrich Himmler on January 27, 1935 "most humbly" reporting his readiness to become engaged in the activities of the new organization. At Himmler's request Wüst added his curriculum vitae rightly speculating that the backing he aspired at could be useful for his academic advancement.³² From 1926–1932 Wüst had worked as lecturer of Indian philology at the University of Munich, then holding the non-established position of an extraordinary professor before he was assigned to administer the chair of Hanns Oertel in April 1935 whom he eventually succeeded in October, nine months after his letter to Himmler. Concomitant with his appointment as a professor of "Arische Kultur- und Sprachwissenschaft" (the study of Aryan culture and language), he was nominated director of an institute with the same designation. Himmler derived much pleasure from the young scholar who was not only eager to make career but, as Himmler immediately realized, would do everything for it. Wüst's apparent opportunism and his keenness to subordinate himself under the authority of the SS-leader made him a perfect collaborator of the "Ahnenerbe."

Wüst seemed indeed the right man to transform the "Ahnenerbe" from a voelkish association of people with crude ideas into a scientific

³² Letter of W. Wüst to H. Himmler on January 27, 1935, Federal Archives Berlin, DH ZM, 1582, A. 4, fol. 11. It was Herman Wirth who asked Wüst to approach Himmler. Wüst ended with the obedient phrase "mit dem Ausdruck gehorsamsten Danks für die Ehre, durch Ihre Aufforderung ausgezeichnet worden zu sein." Though the 33-year-old scholar thought it better to remain in Munich and to take over the chair of his teacher Hanns Oertel, he generously declared his willingness to succeed Heinrich Lüders at the University of Berlin if necessary.

think tank. Lacking academic reputation and representing the lunatic or, even more, the lunar fringe of the society, it was far away from being the effective brain trust Himmler needed to compete with his rivalries. Vis-à-vis that aim Wirth had become a problem. According to Kater, Himmler decided at the beginning of 1936 to get rid of him. In March 1936 Himmler prohibited Wirth from autonomously corresponding in the name of the "Ahnenerbe" and in October of the same year Wirth got a sharp directive not to surpass his position and capacity.³³ Certainly Himmler had not abandoned his views concerning Germany's ancestral heritage. But he ought to be more careful lest face derision either from the established sciences or from Rosenberg's associates. Therefore he interdicted public discussions on the *Ura-Linda-Chronik* and engaged an Otto Mausser, a germanist, in 1936 to scrutinize internally what could be said about it without leaving safe ground. Himmler also disallowed publications on the "Externsteine," a massive stone monument near Detmold held to be a center of pre-Christian Paganism. Instead, he triggered intensive excavations to sustain a voelkish Pagan interpretation of the "Externsteine," however without any success.³⁴ Not at least under the influence of Wüst, Himmler reached the conclusion that it would be impossible to receive the acknowledgment of the Ministry of Science and Education and public funding from the German Research Foundation if the "Ahnenerbe" would remain on the level of heathenish sectarianism. Himmler had no qualms about removing Wirth and to substitute him with Wüst when he became aware of that relationship. Appointed corresponding member of the board of the "Ahnenerbe"-curators on May 11, 1936, Wüst was officially nominated head of a newly established department called "Wortkunde" (a Germanizing translation of linguistics) in October. Shortly before that, he had the honor of being invited to a working conference at Himmler's home in Tegernsee on August 31, 1936. On February 1, 1937, Wüst became president of the "Ahnenerbe."

Counter to the assumption of Kater, a protocol of that notable August meeting between Himmler, his special representative Bruno

³³ Kater, *Das Ahnenerbe der SS*, p. 43.

³⁴ See Uta Halle, *Die Externsteine sind bis auf weiteres germanisch! Prähistorische Archäologie im Dritten Reich* (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2002). The best contemporary account of the "Externsteine" as a possible Pagan sanctuary originated from Carl Clemen, "Waren die Externsteine ein germanisches Heiligtum?" *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* (1935), pp. 210–233.

Galke, the "Ahnenerbe"-secretary Wolfram Sievers and Wüst exists.³⁵ The consultation had great significance since Himmler articulated his further plans and projects he pursued with the "Ahnenerbe." Wüst himself was given in Tegernsee the unique opportunity to present a detailed statement about his scientific views in general and the way he would exploit the Indo-Germanic tradition for the purposes of the "Ahnenerbe" in particular. Himmler was so impressed that he instantly appointed Wüst director of a new department "Wortkunde" which his authority allowed him to establish on the spot.³⁶ Point 6 of the protocol notified a lengthy report of the Munich professor about the meaning of the notion "Odal." Himmler had a special interest in that concept which he thought to be an old Nordic law of hereditary nobility. He ordered Wüst to complete his research on this ideologically important issue as soon as possible. Additionally he commanded Sievers to instruct Wirth to wait with his own "Odal" book until Wüst would have finished his linguistic investigations (point 7). Himmler asked Wüst to survey and correct Wirth's 320 page "Odal" manuscript which he already had in hand and which, even in Himmler's eyes, needed to be rethought and revised (point 8). Another order of Himmler forced Wirth to restrict himself on his symbol studies ("Schrift- und Zeichenkunde") and to seek the help of Wüst before going to publish any of it (point 9). One half of the protocol's 16 paragraphs was worded as an "order" or "command." The other 8 mostly contained strong recommendations of Himmler accounting his fancies the "Ahnenerbe" should execute. While Wüst proposed bestowing the *venia legendi* on Wirth at the beginning (point 4), he recognized in the course of the meeting that the wind blowing Wirth's sail was about to veer. He did not fail to seize on the opportunity and wholeheartedly assured Himmler of his firm will to comply with his every wish. A new self-confidence led Wüst at the end to submit the suggestion that the translation of the Rig Veda should be included to the working schedule of the "Ahnenerbe," a proposal that Himmler immediately moved into an official order (point 14).

The item with the most practical relevance for Wüst was point 13 instructing him with Himmler's directive to deliver speeches in front

³⁵ Galke's "Erinnerungsprotokoll" dated September 1, 1936, Federal Archives Berlin, NS 21, vol. 669 (n.p.).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, paragraph 5 of the protocol.

of SS-personnel throughout the country.³⁷ In June 1936 Wüst had given for the first time a talk about "Des Führers Buch 'Mein Kampf' als Spiegel arischer Weltanschauung" (Hitler's book 'Mein Kampf' as mirror of the Aryan worldview) at the University of Munich. It met with such a positive response that Himmler now directed its perpetual repetition in order to edify the ordinary SS-man in all parts of the country with the racial legacy of the Indo-Germans and the political duties arising from it. Several adaptations of the speech exist. In the following I quote from the version published in the journal of SS-sponsors *FM-Zeitschrift* based on the lecture Wüst gave at the Munich beer hall Hackerbräukeller on March 10, 1937.³⁸

The talk was structured like a Protestant sermon. Starting with an anecdote about Hegel, Wüst then turned to the explanation of the word "Weltanschauung" before he elaborated on the benefits of the Aryan tradition and finally advanced to a comparison of Buddha and Adolf Hitler. His expounding of the German notion "Weltanschauung" went along with a strong critique of its Jewish counterpart. Though Wüst did nothing else than repeat common Christian prejudices, he declared "with utmost scientific thoroughness" that the Aryan worldview surpasses the Semitic one by far. Grounded on the very ancient scriptures of the old Indians and Iranians, only the Aryan race was able to develop a worldview characterized by 1) a meaningful cosmic order, 2) a solar mythology, 3) an expansive growth shaped by the laws of life and nature ("lebensgesetzliches Wachstum") and 4) by a forward-moving Indo-Germanic vigor.³⁹ None of these characteristics are to be found among Jews. Compared to a three-dimensional frame of mind the Aryans were provided with, the Jews possessed only two

³⁷ "RFSS [Reichsführer SS, H.J.] ordnete an, dass Professor Wüst im Winterhalbjahr vor sämtlichen Oberabschnitten der SS sprechen solle." Galke and Sievers were ordered to promote ("aufziehen") a lecture series in great style as a sort of advertising campaign in favor of the "Ahnenerbe." *Ibid.*, NS 21, 669, point 13.

³⁸ *FM-Zeitschrift* 4.3: 1.3.1937. "FM" means "Fördernde Mitglieder." The journal is very rarely to be found in libraries (for instance in the Berlin State Library). See for a copy, Federal Archives Berlin, NSD 41/259, and for other non-published, slightly modified and partly commented versions: *ibid.*, NS 21, vols. 292, 681 and 811 as well as Wüst's BDC-file (BDC AE, fol. 254-270). Karla Poewe, *New Religions and the Nazis* (New York-London: Routledge, 2006) shows a picture of Wüst on p. 27 lecturing in Munich, most likely in the Hackerbräukeller.

³⁹ "Des Führers Buch 'Mein Kampf' als Spiegel arischer Weltanschauung," *FM-Zeitschrift*, 1.3.1937, p. 3f.

dimensions.⁴⁰ No wonder that only the Indo-Germanic race was so successfully taking possession of the world in space and time. Particularly in their painting Wüst detected that the mind of the Jews was restricted to two dimensions: surface and abstraction. Utilitarianism and a superficial materialistic orientation on the Jewish side correlated to an Indo-Germanic attachment to the fate, Nietzsche's amor fati, on the other. Contrary to the cosmic order of the Aryans, the Jewish world was created by chaos and emptiness. It was – as the Old Testament reads in Genesis 1:2 – waste and void (“wüst und leer”) from the outset. Wüst, nomen est omen, pointed to the Jewish understanding of the world as a pure vale of tears (“Jammertal”) in which a healthy relation to life and nature was replaced by the frail concept of the original sin (“Erbsünde”).

Wüst's critique of the Jewish perception of the world partly derived from the old Christian-Jewish antagonism and partly relied on a shallow anti-religious criticism of Christianity now concentrating on its Jewish fundamentals. Such a voelkish reference to post-Enlightenment currents gained momentum among many Nazi leaders particularly during the so-called church struggle and the vexations it caused. In Wüst's case the growing disapproval of the churches was fuelled by his professional inclination towards the language and culture of the Indo-European peoples. Due to his affirmative comprehension of things religious in general, he nevertheless emphasized traditional Protestant values even in such a speech on Adolf Hitler's Aryan roots as to be found in *Mein Kampf*. Above all Wüst attributed the secularized version of a “Tatchristentum” (Christianity of deeds) and a religiosity that becomes effective within the world and as part of its progress (“Weltfrömmigkeit”) to the “Führer.” Taken this way Hitler displayed the paradigmatic model of a self-sacrificing personality who dedicated his whole life to the service of his people. Having overcome the egocentric nature of man, Hitler perfectly epitomized the heroic fulfillment of one's duties (“Pflichterfüllung”). In the way he described the uniqueness of Hitler's conduct Wüst noticeably relied on a long-established canon of Protestant virtues which themselves originated from characteristics customarily attributed to Jesus Christ. What Wüst did was to expand this Protestant type of inner-worldly religiosity to the East and the Aryan culture. Only at first

⁴⁰ “Der Jude hat niemals eine dreidimensionale Weltvorstellung gehabt.” Ibid., p. 3.

glance does it seem curious that Wüst switched immediately to Buddha after his description of Adolf Hitler as another example of moral leadership. This has to be understood as further extension of the credence of a Protestant intellectual to the East. Shaped by idiosyncrasies such as anti-dogmatism, anti-clericalism, anti-Catholicism, anti-Judaism, a strong historical orientation and scientific leaning, it aimed to revive withered or semi-secularized religious values with new life and faith.

Buddha entered Wüst's tale in the conventional form of a Christian miracle: After a long period of meditation and spiritual seclusion Buddha felt the necessity to return to his people and to normal life. In a wrestle that shattered the foundations of the world Buddha had gained a new understanding of the world.⁴¹ On his way back to ordinary society he met a couple of unbelievers sitting near a grove. Despite the strong inner resistance of the five infidels, Buddha's supernatural power and the transcendent clearness on his face immediately forced them to discard their defiance. Then they easily found their way out of the incarceration amid the desire of selfish materialism and an eccentric self-abnegation inimical to the obligations of life. Exactly the same happened 2500 years later in Austria. The “Führer,” at that time an unskilled worker who lived in Vienna under the spell of suffering, became acquainted with the hardship of the poor when walking through the pitiful flats of the workers (“wo er als Hilfsarbeiter im Bannkreis des Leidens stand, durch die Elendswohnungen schritt und die Not der Arbeiter sah”).⁴² His Viennese experience prevented Hitler either from getting lost in abstract theories or to become subject to a shallow realism. Instead, he arrived at an inspired vision (“geniale Zusammenschau”) of reality similar to the one Buddha once had. Realizing the stunning parallelism between Buddha's and Hitler's enlightenment, Wüst felt overwhelmed. The only reason he found to explain the astounding correspondence was the racial kinship between the two.⁴³ Since Buddha and Adolf Hitler belonged to the same hereditary community, they reacted the same way to the problems of their time. Moreover, their common genetic constitution endowed them with the capacity to guide their people from subjugation to freedom.

⁴¹ “Der Buddha hat in einem welterschütterten Ringen sich seine tiefsten weltanschaulichen Erkenntnisse errungen.” Ibid., p. 4.

⁴² Ibid., p. 4.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 4.

If we put the question aside what the "Führer" himself would have thought about such a foolish nonsense, we should not ignore the fact that for Himmler and other leading SS-figures, Wüst's fantastic journey into the history of Indo-Germanic religiosity made some sense. Wüst had been careful enough to evade the impression of an unpleasant Aryan proclivity towards self-castigation and long Lentens without eating and drinking. It is somehow bizarre to imagine SS-members sitting in the Munich Hackerbräukeller behind their second or third beer mug considering Buddha's holy life in linen and teetotalism so far away from everything worth living in Catholic Bavaria. Wüst did well to declare swiftly that the Buddhist negation of life was not directed against life itself. What Buddha meant was only the rotten life and the decayed morality of the big cities in India.⁴⁴ Since the statement obviously alluded to Berlin and other dens of iniquity in Weimar Germany under the influence of Jewish wickedness, a good beer and a respectable roast pork was not in danger from Wüst's encounter of East and West.

On the other hand, Himmler's notorious asceticism was well-known not to say dreaded in the SS. Its members often had the opportunity to experience that the expression "Himmler-Sekt" was not only a mere saying but another word for mineral water. The SS-records of the Federal Archives contain many admonitions of Himmler concerning alcohol abuses or other improper behavior of SS-members. The great number of internal reprimands clearly indicate the disproportion between moral claims (in terms of SS regularities) and reality. But observed or not, the frequent assertions of puritanical self-discipline strengthened the apprehension of the SS as an honest order with veracious principles. It must have been a great feeling for Wüst, as son of a school teacher, to ascend to the top of such a highly regarded and undoubtedly powerful organization. Having joined the SS on January 26, 1937, he was nominated "Hauptsturmführer" only four days later. From then on he quickly advanced to a "Sturmbannführer" on September 12, 1937, an "Obersturmbannführer" on September 11, 1938, a "Standartenführer" on November 9, 1940, and a SS-"Oberführer" on November 9, 1942.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ "Der Buddha hat nicht das Leben verneint, sondern er hat das angefaulte Leben der indischen Großstädte, das Leben einer verrotteten Sittlichkeit gemeint." Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁵ The military equivalent of a "Oberführer," Wüst's highest rank, corresponded to a rank between an "Oberst" (colonel) and a "Generalmajor" (brigadier general) in the Wehrmacht. It was nearly impossible for civilians to get such a high rank outside the army.

The enormous success of his ideological output led Wüst to believe that his permanent references to the Indo-Germanic tradition constituted a crucial part of the SS doctrine. In his opinion the SS formed the spearhead of the German master race, and the "Ahnenerbe" was the driving force behind it with the task of elaborating a reasonable and authoritative Weltanschauung.

In the formative phase of the "Ahnenerbe," when the SS-elitism gained intellectual contour, Wüst became acquainted with the prominent Italian fascist Julius Evola (1898–1974). Wüst met Evola on July 13, 1937 when the Italian baron traveled to Germany to promote the cultural exchange between the two axis powers. Seeking to build up an anti-bolshevist frontline in Europe, Evola tried to find possible allies among leading National Socialists. Wüst exhorted him to contact Himmler as well, and Evola swiftly promised. Directly after their meeting Wüst wrote a letter to Wolfram Sievers, the secretary general of the "Ahnenerbe," reporting his very interesting encounter and asking to purchase Evola's book *Erhebung wider die moderne Welt* as soon as possible.⁴⁶ Wüst was extremely excited about the German edition of Evola's *Rivolto contra il mondo moderno* which he considered as aristocratic version of popular German cultural criticism. Similar to the verbose and long-winded style of authors such as Oswald Spengler, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and Herman Wirth, Evola employed the same unscientific and eclectic method of reasoning. However, Evola endeavored at demonstrating a noble discretion in politics and abstained from clumsy agitation in this publication. Besides his aristocratic reticence Wüst appreciated Evola's accentuation of the Eastern world being one of his main reference points. Evola's book, rightly esteemed as his 'masterpiece', was akin to Wirth's *Aufgang der Menschheit* – only better.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ "Ich teile mit, dass ich heute die sehr interessante Bekanntschaft des Baron J. Evola – Rom gemacht habe. Baron Evola ist führend tätig auf dem Gebiete der faschistischen Kulturpolitik und plant die Errichtung einer über ganz Europa ausgehenden antibolschewistischen Front des Geistes... Ich habe ihn darauf aufmerksam gemacht, dass unbedingt auch der Reichsführer SS angegangen werden müsse, was Baron Evola gern zu tun versprach." Letter of W. Wüst to W. Sievers on July 13, 1937, Federal Archives Berlin, NS 21, vol. 343, n.p. Two days later Sievers answered that the book was ordered and on July 23 that the book had arrived. Ibid., NS 21, vol. 730 and vol. 596.

⁴⁷ Though criticizing Wirth's errors, Evola beneficently conceded that also noteworthy things are to be found in his works. See for instance J. Evola, *Erhebung wider die moderne Welt* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1935), p. 406f., n. 6; p. 432, n. 6; p. 442, n. 7; p. 443, n. 9; p. 446, n. 7; and p. 451, n. 29.

The more Evola's apparent anti-positivism linked positivism, materialism, and rationalism not only with the "Hebrew factor" in general but with the study of religion and its Jewish representatives in particular, the more Wüst became attracted by it.⁴⁸

Invited by the "Studienkreis der Deutsch-Italienischen Stiftung," a study group of the German-Italian Society, Evola gave a lecture on December 10, 1937 in Berlin about "Abendländischer Aufbau aus urarischem Geist."⁴⁹ Here he emphasized in much clearer words the need for a traditionalist counter revolution that should be based on the old Aryan spirit and that would lead to a reconstruction of the Occident. The enemies to be defeated before were the Jews, the bolsheviks, and the Freemasons. A successful fight first had to overcome the solely negative attitude typical of many political and spiritual counter movements leading up to the fight. Instead, a positive worldview was required, a worldview rooted in a higher idea. Evola promised to deliver precisely that. Two months later the distinguished fascist lectured a second time in Berlin, now on the topic of "Gralsmysterium und Reichsgedanke."⁵⁰ Since the German Foreign Ministry had taken notice of Evola's public activities, it asked the "Ahnenerbe" for an expert to step in to provide a proper understanding of Evola's ideas and intentions. For that reason Joseph Otto Plaßmann, the editor in chief of the "Ahnenerbe"-journal *Germanien*, wrote a short expert opinion in which he argued in two directions: a qualified approach, but, regarding politics, possibly problematic. To avoid confusion and heated discussions about the status of Italy in the medieval German Reich, it should not be published in *Germanien*. In March 1938 Sievers sent the official "Ahnenerbe"-statement to the Foreign Ministry. Using Plaßmann's words he pleaded for political reservation,

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 482, n. 13 where Evola heavily draws on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. The statement that Jewish scholars such as Durkheim paved the way for a "befleckende 'Religionswissenschaft' auf 'soziologischer' und 'ahnenmäßiger' Grundlage" refers to Evola's article "Sulle ragioni dell'antisemitismo" in *Vita Nuova* 5-8, 1933.

⁴⁹ J. Evola, "Abendländischer Aufbau aus urarischem Geist. Vortragsabend im Studienkreis Berlin, 10.12.1937," Federal Archives Berlin, NS 21, vol. 343, 11 pages.

⁵⁰ The lecture took place between February 13 and 23, 1938. Drawn from the version in the monthly *Geist der Zeit* (March 1939, pp. 145-154) it was translated and republished as "Il mistero del graal e l'idea imperiale," in *Julius Evola nei documenti segreti dell'ahnenerbe*, a cura di Bruno Zarotti (Quaderni di testi Evoliani 30) (Roma: Europa Libera Editrice, 1997), pp. 17-25.

however he also underscored that Evola stood in high esteem by the "Ahnenerbe"-president Wüst.⁵¹

Additionally a series of three lectures followed close in June 1938. Evola gave talks titled "Arische Lehre des heiligen Kampfes" (Aryan doctrine of the Holy War, June 13), "Gral als nordisches Mysterium" (Grail as Nordic mystery, June 20), and "Die Waffen des geheimen Krieges" (The weapons of the secret war, June 27).⁵² The "Ahnenerbe" sent five envoys to Berlin, among them Sievers and Plaßmann. Wüst refrained from joining the group lest give the false impression of an official SS acknowledging Evola. In his lectures Evola once again stressed the necessity to form an anti-communist and anti-Jewish alliance in Europe. As he said in the foreword, occult forces intended the downfall of the world ("Weltumsturz"). Therefore it was of vital importance to have a valid and operative counter ideology in order to resist the agents of the darkness. In describing the secret aims and malicious practices of the enemies, Evola again referred to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion which unmistakably revealed that the Jews were the main perpetrators of the world revolution ("Haupttäter des Weltumsturzes").⁵³ What was at stake was the fight between the forces of tradition and anti-tradition, of spiritual hierarchy and revolutionary chaos, generally between light and darkness. While he defined traditionalism as connection with the metaphysical world, Evola denied Christianity any positive role in the resistance block he aimed to establish. Moreover, he saw it as a part of the problem and not of the solution although he eschewed tackling Christianity, obviously for opportunistic reasons. He did not hesitate to criticize groups and movements with a theosophical, occult or 'orientalizing' background which he subsumed under the category of new spiritualism ("Neuspiritualismus"). Their general claims were not bad in his opinion, sometimes even good, but they painted more often than not a distorted picture of the metaphysical world. This was no wonder because these groups were usually headed by dreamers and half-educated experts in spiritual knowledge leading their good intentions to a bad end.

⁵¹ Siever's to SS Obersturmführer Professor Langsdorff on March 16, 1938 answering a request from January 1. Federal Archives Berlin, BDC, personal file Evola, fol. 121, Plaßmann's statement, fol. 122.

⁵² The manuscripts of all three lectures are to be found in the Federal Archives Berlin, NS 21, vol. 776 (20, 17, and 15 pages, together with a foreword of two pages).

⁵³ J. Evola, "Die Waffen des geheimen Krieges," p. 2. Himself he called a pioneer of antisemitism in Italy ("Vorkämpfer des Antisemitismus in Italien"), *ibid.*, p. 10.

Evola believed that only a small elitist minority would be able to act as vanguard of the new order to come. With his idea of spiritual superiority and heroic virility he became rather interesting for a league of ascetic warriors such as the SS. In the first of his three speeches Evola expounded the Iranian doctrine of Mithra, "the warrior without sleep," who leads the "fravashi," the transcendental elements among his followers, into war against the satanic enemies of the Aryans.⁵⁴ Together with other examples taken from the religious history of the Indo-Germans, Evola developed an Aryan doctrine of the Holy War, a war that was not primarily undertaken in behalf of material interests but for metaphysical purposes. Culminating in bloody frenzies, the Aryan wars and conquests appear in Evola's explanation as a way of spiritual elevation. Even the "aristocratic idea of immortality" resulted from the Indo-Germanic understanding of heroic fighting.⁵⁵ According to Evola's interpretation of the Aryan tradition the victory of the victorious was an observable sign, more than that, an ordeal of a successful initiation and mystical renovatio.⁵⁶ What a powerful tautology! In contrast to the half-witted apostles of "Neuspiritualismus," Evola had to submit a skilled proficiency in hermetic traditions. He astutely intimated that there existed certain rites and "objective spiritual techniques" to gain influence over the divine potency either to tame or to unchain it, or, at least, to guide it in specific directions.⁵⁷ Evola concluded his lecture in summarizing the destructive elements on the side of the enemies (rationalism, individualism, collectivism, altogether culminating in bolshevism) whose agents were about to prepare their final attack. It was against them in particular he wanted to uphold tradition and the symbolism of the Holy War: "Eine neue Front soll sich bilden und alle die zusammenfassen, die noch standhalten und Träger der Tradition sind."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 7. "Die fravashi heissen 'die schrecklichen, die allmächtigen', diejenigen, die im Sturm angreifen und den Sieg dem geben, der sie anruft." Ibid., p. 16. Cf. Karl Friedrich Geldner, "Fravashi," in *Die Religionen in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (1928), col. 747, for the personification of what was only a credo at the beginning.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁶ "Krieg: sagen wir es mit lauter Stimme: der Krieg soll für uns weder ein grausames Gemetzel, noch eine traurige Notwendigkeit sein, sondern der Weg zu einer höheren Lebensform und die Prüfung der göttlichen Sendung eines Volkes." Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

⁵⁸ "A new front shall be established to unite all those who keep on resisting, those who are still the bearers of the tradition." Ibid., p. 19.

Such a metaphysical justification of imperialistic warfare ought to be a perfect ideology for an organization such as the SS. With the set up of the four year plan in autumn 1936, the leaders of the Third Reich had begun actively preparing the next military conflict which they commenced exactly three years later. It is not surprising that Wüst revealed a very assertive opinion about the way Evola utilized the Aryan tradition, a tradition that the "Ahnenerbe"-president thought to provide an excellent substantiation of the aristocratic warrior caste the "Männerbund" of the SS was. However, Wüst's persuasion did not represent the mainstream in the SS. This becomes quite evident from an evaluation that originated from the Secret Service of the SS, strictly speaking from the SD department II 2112, which openly repudiated Evola's theories and projects.⁵⁹ Its author, an SD collaborator named Hancke, probably Kurt Hancke, took great pains to explain over 12 pages why the views of the Italian fascist were not compatible with National Socialism. Hancke criticized Evola's individualism, his overaccentuation of spiritual agency, the lack of a deeper understanding of politics as well as his speculative arguing and high-flown utopia without grounding. After all, Hancke saw in Evola a typical representative of the old nobility, a reactionary Roman ("reaktionärer Römer") entirely shaped by the feudalism of a bygone time. He ended his assessment with four recommendations: 1) no concrete support for Evola's plans and projects, 2) no continuation of his public lectures, 3) to prohibit Evola from taking up high level contacts with party or state agencies, 4) to keep an eye on his propaganda activities in the neighboring countries.⁶⁰

A second evaluation came from the "Ahnenerbe" itself. It was again written by the germanist Joseph Otto Plaßmann, head of the "Ahnenerbe"-department of Germanic cultural sciences ("germanische Kulturwissenschaft"). Plaßmann articulated the official position of the "Ahnenerbe" also taking Evola's Berlin lecture series as starting point. Tone and content were quite different to Hancke and the SD. Already in the first sentence Plaßmann affirmed that the Italian fascist was

⁵⁹ "Bericht Vortragsreihe Evola," 12 pages, June 30, 1938, Federal Archives Berlin, Dahlwitz Hoppegarten ZB 1, 1224, fol. 645-656 as well as Federal Archives Berlin, BDC, personal file Evola, fol. 83-94.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

principally regarded as a positive figure.⁶¹ Then he continued with a moderate critique of Evola's insufficient familiarity with real politics and with the nature of National Socialist statesmanship. Evola's comprehension of Italy as an outpost of Nordic solar mythology in the Mediterranean world was, from his point of view, neither false nor dishonorable, nor his highlighting of a fascist alliance between Italy and Germany. But in a typical Italian manner of thinking Evola's Aryan forces of the light ("arische Lichtkräfte") had an existence too airy and too far away from the concrete social and political life. As a result of his poor understanding of political reality, Evola did not shy away from seeking contact with reactionary intellectuals such as the Catholic universalist Othmar Spann, hereby totally ignoring their anti-voelkish bias. Pläßmann's arguments were included by Sievers in the official statement of the "Ahnenerbe" forwarded to Himmler on July 13, 1938.⁶² The most relevant part of it was the final paragraph. In following Pläßmann and in recapitulating the former assessment for the Foreign Ministry, Sievers pleaded again for an attitude of reserve. It would not be advisable to sustain Evola's propaganda campaign, not at least because it had remained unclear whether Evola really represented the official standpoint of fascist Italy. Nevertheless – and here Sievers relied on the judgment of Wüst – lines of communication with Evola should remain open. Basically seen as a valuable thinker and as a companion in the ideological warfare at stake, either stimulation or constraint might be applied to guide him in the right direction. How close the relation and a possible cooperation might become in the future should depend on a further maturation of Evola's ideas. Sievers ended with the words:

Dagegen wird es auch nach Ansicht von SS-Obersturmbannführer Wüst, der mit Evola früher bereits gesprochen hat, für notwendig gehalten, dass man mit Evola, der an sich eine wertvolle geistige Erscheinung darstellt, in ständiger Fühlung bleibt, ihm Anregungen gibt und ihn im Notfalle zügelt, wobei man auch von ihm wertvolle Anregungen gewinnen könnte. Wie sich eine solche Kraft auf die Dauer auswirkt und wie man sie einmal in ein politisches Gesamtziel einordnen kann, das kann erst eine längere Zeit der Beobachtung und der Reife seiner Gedanken erweisen.⁶³

⁶¹ "Die Grundeinstellung von Evola ist von unserem Standpunkt aus im allgemeinen positiv zu werten." "Aktenvermerk betr. Baron Evola," July 2, 1938, Federal Archives Berlin, NS 21, vol. 815, 2 pages, here p. 1.

⁶² Sievers to the Reichsführer SS on July 13, 1938, "Stellungnahme zu den Vorträgen des Baron Evola," Federal Archives Berlin, NS 21, vol. 815, 2 pages.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 2, emphasis in the original.

One and a half week after the "Ahnenerbe"-statement was sent to Himmler, Wüst received a handwritten message from Sievers indicating him that the matter of Evola had some delicacy.⁶⁴ Yet a telegram dated August 11 from Himmler's personal adjutant Rudolf Brandt made clear to Sievers that the Reichsführer SS fully agreed with the assessment of the "Ahnenerbe," especially with its final passage.⁶⁵ Evola was to be accepted as a collaborator without endorsing his metaphysical agenda. In the internal quarrels concerning an appropriate estimation of the Evolian sort of Italian fascism, the ambivalent, though generally positive, "Ahnenerbe"-position prevailed. The further relationship of the SS with Evola followed this direction, and Wüst was clever enough not to insist on Evola's spiritual doctrines.

Ironically, the SD delegated "Obersturmführer" Hancke to resume contact with Evola. After a first meeting on April 27, 1939, Hancke wrote a very interesting three page report about it.⁶⁶ Referring to the former SD rejection from June 1938, he pointed to its success insofar Evola's plans to found a new transnational and bilingual fascist journal had been thwarted.⁶⁷ Because Evola had managed to contact other influential state agencies, for instance the Ministry of Propaganda, and because his official support from the Italian government had become manifest, the Secret Service should reconsider and modify its position. To his great surprise Hancke learned from the conversation with Evola that the Italian fascist was not only very well informed about the earlier SD repudiation but constantly maintained close contacts with high-level SS leaders, namely Alexander Langsdorff, Werner Best, and, of course, Walther Wüst. Yet Hancke met also an Evola who had considerably cut down his expectations and wishes and who no longer wanted material

⁶⁴ Sievers to Wüst on July 22, 1938, Federal Archives Berlin, NS 21, vol. 776.

⁶⁵ Brandt to Sievers on August 11, 1938, *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Hancke's statement dated from May 2, 1938, Federal Archives Berlin, Dahlwitz Hoppegarten, ZB 1, 1224, fol. 657–659.

⁶⁷ The name of the journal should have been *Sanguis e Spirito* (Blood and Spirit). It aimed to balance the German and Italian version of racism. Evola acted here in compliance with Mussolini himself who later withdrew his approval. See H.T. Hansen in his foreword to Julius Evola, *Menschen inmitten von Ruinen* (Tübingen: Hohenrain, 1991), p. 100. See also the 22 "Posizioni italiane sulla questione razziale per la rivista italo-tedesca 'Sanguis e Spirito'," in Nicola Cospito and Hans Werner Neulen, eds., *Julius Evola nei documenti segreti del Terzo Reich* (Rome: Europa, 1986), pp. 93–100 and the list of 15 Italian collaborators, *ibid.*, p. 92. However, this new attempt was undertaken in 1942, that is four years later. Cf. also the report of a Dr. Vollmer from the Foreign Ministry, February 19, 1942 "Colloquio con il Barone J. Evola a riguardo della fondazione di una rivista sulla razza," *ibid.*, pp. 85–91.

support from the SS. What Evola now hoped for was Himmler simply to consent to his publication plans. Evola even agreed to send in the proofs of his new book on the Grail mystery in order to get an official SS imprimatur for the German translation. Moreover, he obediently admitted to rearranging the circle of authors for the intended journal in full accordance with SS interests.⁶⁸ Then the proud Italian aristocrat and anti-Catholic dissenter used the occasion to submissively request a personal audience with Himmler. Finally Evola asked for an admission to German archives because he wanted to investigate the secret aspects of Freemasonry. This time Hancke concluded his report with two suggestions: 1) to confer the requested *internal* imprimatur, 2) to await Evola's further research activities if a cooperation might be in the interest of the SD.⁶⁹ As a result of their encounter, Evola was allowed to make the personal acquaintance with Hancke's superior Professor Alfred Six, then head of the department VII of the Reich Security Main Office.⁷⁰ The "Reichssicherheitshauptamt," established in September 1939, had a special section dedicated to Freemasonry (VII B 1) as well as a division "Archive, museum, special research assignments" (VII C).⁷¹ An undated and unsigned statement to be found in the same file after the aforementioned letters – evidently originating from the Secret Service – informs us that Evola's research work on the Freemasons required not only normal sources but also the use of confidential material confiscated by the German Reich.⁷² His aim to write an anti-Freemason book noticeably coincided with the new readiness of Six and the SD to accept Evola as informant and co-worker.

⁶⁸ "... die negativ beurteilten Vorschläge zum Mitarbeiterkreis [seien] nur vorläufiger Natur und jederzeit im Sinne der SS zu ändern." Federal Archives Berlin, Dahlwitz Hoppegarten, ZB 1, 1224, fol. 658 (p. 2).

⁶⁹ Ibid., fol. 659 (p. 3).

⁷⁰ See the letter of Evola to an unnamed addressee from June 15 and to Six from August 20, 1939, Federal Archives Berlin, Dahlwitz Hoppegarten, ZB 1, 1224, fol. 680 and fol. 662f. In his letter to Six Evola referred to a meeting they had in Rome before.

⁷¹ See Reinhard Rürup, ed., *Topography of Terror. Gestapo, SS and Reichssicherheitshauptamt on the 'Prinz-Albrecht-Terrain'. A documentation*, 4th ed. (trans. from the 7th rev. and enl. German ed. from 1989 by Werner T. Angress) (Berlin: Willmuth Arenhövel, 1995), pp. 78–82. The amount of objects seized by Gestapo and SS grew into enormous dimensions. The SD even entertained a special (non-public) "Freimaurermuseum" in Berlin since 1936. See Helmut Neuberger, *Winkelmaß und Hakenkreuz. Die Freimaurer und das Dritte Reich* (München: Herbig, 2001), p. 199.

⁷² Federal Archives Berlin, Dahlwitz Hoppegarten, ZB 1, 1224, fol. 681 (recte et verso). Thus the author argued for a financial and practical support of Evola.

Instead of becoming an organic intellectual of the SS warrior caste, Evola ended as one of the great many subaltern collaborators. In the course of these activities Evola was seriously wounded during an air raid in Vienna on March 12, 1945.⁷³

The relationship between Wüst and Evola is of outstanding significance in several regards. First it shows a remarkable change in Wüst's development whose perspective turned from the voelkish narrow-mindedness of a Herman Wirth to Evola's aristocratic idea of an imperial Reich. Though not principally different, Evola's cultural pessimism stood in Wüst's view high above the doctrinaire and pedantic casuistry of Wirth. In the 1920s Evola played a comparable role as Pagan Zealot and anti-Catholic rabble rouser in Italy especially with his book *Imperialismo pagano* appearing in the same year (1928) as Wirth's *Aufgang der Menschheit*. However, Evola became more moderate through defending himself against the counterattacks launched by prominent Catholic fascists such as Egilberto Martire and better comprehending Mussolini's flexible "dual" policy regarding the church.⁷⁴ This kind of reflective and controlled animadversion towards the Catholic church became more attractive to Wüst the more so Evola emphasized the Jewish traits of Christianity and resorted to the world of the Aryans in seeking an alternative. Evola's more spiritual and less biological racism came across to Wüst as useful in supporting his endeavor of anchoring the doctrines of the SS in the history of the Aryan tradition. It must not be forgotten that Wüst, who came from a lower middle-class background, was fascinated by Evola's noble appearance and his aristocratic reasoning on large scale and in dimensions previously unknown to him.

Second, Wüst's assessment of Evola clearly demonstrates that within the SS different and even contradictory positions were not only possible but quite normal. If such a rigorous corporation lacked a uniform not to say consistent theoretical basis, one should not expect National Socialism as a whole to have had or to have been a coherent ideology. Wüst's relations with Evola, generally Germany's relations with Italy, offer compelling examples for the wide range of attitudes to be designated by the rubric "fascism." Besides many other issues of minor importance religion was such a highly problematic field of controversial debates

⁷³ The date is given by H.T. Hansen in Evola, *Menschen inmitten von Ruinen*, p. 111.

⁷⁴ See Richard Drake, "Julius Evola, radical fascism, and the Lateran accords," *The Catholic historical review* 74 (1988), pp. 403–419.

concerning the ideological substance of a fascist worldview. Fascism and National Socialism should more appropriately be understood as flexible aggregations of fitting components prone to modification under the influence of political, social, economical, and other factors rather than monolithic blocks. Similar to the concept "religion," the concept "fascism" implies plurality and variegation, its 'universal' meaning and semantic function as general notion notwithstanding.

Fascist ideologies embrace a deep-seated animosity towards Jews as one of their main features. Both Wüst and Evola shared the opinion that almost all problems exhibited by modern societies resulted from a Jewish influence. The omnipresence and omnipotence of the secret Jewish threat approached in Evola's thinking sometimes even a pathological dimension. In his infamous foreword to the second Italian edition of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, published by the Catholic fascist Giovanni Preziosi in 1938, Evola's main point was that their truth and reliability could in no way be injured by a perhaps lacking authenticity. He unwaveringly believed that the Protocols "contain the plan for an occult war, whose objective is the utter destruction, in the non-Jewish peoples, of all tradition, class, aristocracy, and hierarchy, and of all moral, religious, or supra-material values." Wherever he looked, Evola discovered that the Protocols veraciously describe how the Jews corrupt Western civilization from within: "Liberalism, individualism, egalitarianism, free thought, anti-religious Enlightenment, and various additions which, following from these, bring about the revolt of the masses and communism itself."⁷⁵ What is astounding here is that a devout Pagan and a firm Catholic joined arms in their fight against the Jews. Under the patronage of the fascist state, antisemitism functioned as a powerful agent to overcome different, even conflicting religious persuasions for acting in court against a common adversary. Next to anti-bolshevism, antisemitism was the chief propulsive power to reconcile or, at least, to

⁷⁵ "Introduzione a L'Internazionale ebraica." *I 'Protocolli' Dei 'Savi Anzani' Di Zion* (Roma: La Vita Italiana, 1938), pp. 9–33, quoted from the English translation which is to be found on the right wing website http://thompkins_cariou.tripod.com/id68.html. In Preziosi's journal *Vita Italiana* two antisemitic articles of Evola appeared shortly before: "Il processo di Berna e l'autenticità dei 'Protocolli'" and "La volontà di potenza ebraica e l'autenticità dei 'Protocolli,'" *ibid.*, October and December 1937. Evola did not hesitate to repeat his heinous propaganda in *Menschen inmitten von Ruinen*, pp. 323ff., the German translation of *Gli uomini e le rovine* (1st ed., Roma: Ed. dell'Ascia, 1953).

set back otherwise dominating societal conflicts. The greater the enemy, the greater the need to join forces.

Evola's attempt to extend the front of his anti-bolshevist campaign to Southeastern Europe is another confirmation of the ideological interplay between fascism in general and fascism in particular. Some days after his second and some weeks before his third lecture in Berlin, Evola traveled to Romania where he met with the Iron Guard leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu in March 1938. Evola continued in Bucharest what he had started in Berlin: to both incite and unite traditionalist impulses to prevent the victory of the forces of the darkness. Their meeting at the "Green House," the guardist center in the suburbs of Bucharest, was made possible "grazie alla mediazione dello scrittore moldavo Lovinescu e di Mircea Eliade," as Francesco Cassata writes.⁷⁶ Evola and Eliade had corresponded with each other for an extended period of time. Their fellowship can be described as congenial, perhaps even cordial. It is more than likely that Evola not only wanted to discuss the possibility of an anti-communist alliance with Codreanu in Bucharest but sought to win Eliade as collaborator for his new journal *Sangue e Spirito* as well. If one compares Eliade's articles of that period with the arguments Evola brought forth in his own publications or, more openly, in his lectures given in Berlin, the resemblance is not to be overlooked.

Although an English edition of Eliade's contributions to legionary or pro-legionary periodicals is still missing, the evidence provided by Leon Volovici in his book on *Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* clearly validates the correspondence.⁷⁷ Most of the catchwords used by Eliade are also part of Evola's reasoning: a national awakening based on the reconciliation of metaphysics (god) and politics (Romania), the political need of a spiritual rebirth, the regeneration of humiliated hierarchic and cosmic structures, national messianism, ethnic unity and so forth. The most striking example for that parallelism is probably Eliade's eulogy of "legionary aristocracy" that appeared shortly before Evola arrived in Bucharest. In a typical Evolian manner Eliade propagated

⁷⁶ Francesco Cassata, *A destra del fascismo. Profilo politico di Julius Evola* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003), p. 222, see also F. Turcanu, *Mircea Eliade*, p. 283f. and p. 386f.

⁷⁷ Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism. The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Oxford et al.: Pergamon Press, 1991), pp. 77–149. The pro-legionary articles published by Hannelore Müller, *Der frühe Mircea Eliade. Sein rumänischer Hintergrund und die Anfänge seiner universalistischen Religionsphilosophie* (Münster: Lit, 2004), here pp. A63–A107 point at the same direction.

the strengthening of aristocratic European values, a new "awareness of the historic mission, worthiness, manliness, contempt and indifference toward the powerless, scoundrels and clever fellows."⁷⁸ The laudation of the Iron Guard's unique achievements and spiritual primacy – "Replacing aristocracy of the blood, the Legion creates a new aristocracy: that of the spirit."⁷⁹ – concurred to a large degree with the intention of Evola's new journal *Sangue e Spirito*. Two decades later Evola contributed five articles to the "Journal for the Free World" *Antaios* that Eliade edited together with Ernst Jünger from 1959–1971.

Despite the fact that the Iron Guard was a purely Christian movement with no affiliation with the old Aryans of India and Iran whatsoever, Evola instantly detected an Aryan type when he met Codreanu.⁸⁰ The chief characteristic that qualified Codreanu to become a representative of the Aryan tradition was his fervent antisemitism. As it was the case with the Catholic fascist Giovanni Preziosi, we have to notice here the same phenomenon that religious contradictions were annulled in attacking the common Jewish enemy. In fighting against the antagonists of every metaphysical and hierarchic order, the legionaries displayed typical Aryan values. Their success was more than a proof an ordeal for the righteousness of their behavior. What impressed Evola the most considering the Iron Guard's war against the "Yids" was that it totally emerged from a spiritual grounding. The legionaries perfectly accomplished the "Aryan doctrine of the Holy War" which Evola highlighted soon after in Berlin on June 13, 1938. The subject of this lecture was a rationale of heroic fighting and dying not in favor of personal or materialistic interests but for metaphysical reasons. Could Evola have found a better example than the dauntless death of the two Guardist martyrs Ion Moța and Vasile Marin who lost their life in combat on

Spanish soil having fought "with all and every means against the powers of the darkness" voluntarily sacrificing themselves "for the victory of the Savior," as Eliade put it:⁸¹ Evola's entire speech about the holy war of the Aryans was an adoration of the heroic death of the initiated for whom dying was a medium to achieve a higher spiritual level. Even the wild frenzies attributed by Evola to the Iranian Mithra and his enraged followers found expression in Guardist behavior. When ten legionaries murdered the traitor Mihael Stelescu in July 1936, their fervor was so great that they not only shot him dead but chopped his body in pieces. "Then they danced around the corpse, made the sign of the cross, kissed each other and wept for joy."⁸²

It is essential in a historical perspective to disclose the underlying truth, viz. the underlying lies, of an ideological preaching such as Evola's. Neither were Jews exempted from material spoliation for the sake of metaphysical reasons nor led the holy war of the Aryans to any spiritual enhancement on the side of the enemies and the defeated.⁸³ Long before the outbreak of World War II, the Iron Guard as well as the SS revealed on plenty of occasions their real nature as terrorist organizations. Evola's justification of Aryan warfare has an exceptional character in so far he argued straightforwardly without any religious or other deviation. As an ideologue *sans phrases* he offers the opportunity to better differentiate the positions of less extreme thinkers. Wüst reached Evola's level of direct and unambiguous ideological arguing in the second half of the 1930s. As we will see in the next chapter, he then used the Aryan tradition to corroborate the ideology of National Socialism without any intermediating factors. Significant differences notwithstanding, the common denominator between Wüst, Evola, and Eliade was the collective goal of setting up a spiritual countermovement against bolshevism, a "antibolschewistische Front des Geistes," as Wüst had correctly described Evola's endeavors in Germany. Evola's 'opus

⁷⁸ M. Eliade, "Noua aristocrație legionară," *Vremea* 522, January 23, 1938, quoted from L. Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism*, p. 91.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism*, p. 134.

⁸⁰ "...azure grey eyes, open forehead, genuine Roman-Aryan type: and, mixed with virile traits, something contemplative, mystical in the expression. This is Corneliu Codreanu, the leader and founder of the Romanian 'Iron Guard', the one who is called 'assassin', 'Hitler's henchman', 'anarchist conspirator', by the world press, because since 1919, he has been challenging Israel, and the forces which are more or less in cahoots with it, at work in the Romanian national life." Julius Evola, "La tragedia de la Garda di Ferro," *La Vita Italiana* 309, December 1938, quoted from the English translation provided by the already mentioned Thompkins-website. Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L'oubli du fascisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002) p. 194 quotes this passage from a French translation of Evola's article.

⁸¹ M. Eliade, "Ion Moța și Vasile Marin," *Vremea* 472, January 24, 1937, Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism*, p. 83.

⁸² "Sie feuerten jeweils mehrere Schüsse auf den Wehrlosen und zerstückelten die Leiche mit Äxten. Danach tanzten sie um die Kadaverteile, bekreuzigten sich, küßten einander und weinten vor Freude." Armin Heinen, *Die Legion 'Erzengel Michael' in Rumänien. Soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1986), p. 280f. Cf. H. Müller, *Der frühe Mircea Eliade*, p. 79f.

⁸³ Cf. here Cristiano Grottanelli, "Fruitful Death: Mircea Eliade and Ernst Jünger on Human Sacrifice, 1937–1945," *Numen* 52–1 (2005), pp. 116–145 and the articles of Gustavo Benavides and Eugen Ciurtin in this book on p. 263f., p. 272, pp. 350–352 and on pp. 355–357.

magnum' *Rivolto contra il mondo moderno* functioned for both Wüst and Eliade as a key text allowing them to conceptualize their own theoretical agendas. Eliade was even more enthusiastic than Wüst about the way Evola described modern man's decadence, the reasons for his decay and the possibilities to regenerate the metaphysical fundamentals of a fallen world. In the review that Eliade published in March 1935 in the Romanian journal *Vremea*, he pronounced an extraordinary positive assessment of Evola's thinking.⁸⁴ Eliade was particularly delighted at the rigor of Evola's analysis, his critical stance, and his courage to oppose mainstream positivism. Appropriately, Eliade put Evola in one line with Gobineau, Chamberlain, Spengler, and Rosenberg.⁸⁵ Evola's prodigious erudition ("*érudition vraiment prodigieuse*") made him inaccessible "aux dilettanti" but also prevented a greater diffusion of his ideas. It was for that reason why Eliade proclaimed it as his task to spread the views of Evola in Romania to an even further extent than he had already been doing starting in 1927.⁸⁶ This was much more than the "Ahnenerbe"-president accomplished in promoting Evola's fascist theories in Germany.

One and a half year after Wüst had taken over the presidency of the "Ahnenerbe" he delivered a speech in July 1938 in which he resumed the "Ahnenerbe"-development of the foregoing period.⁸⁷ Wüst declared that now 20 departments and 72 collaborators were part of Himmler's brain trust, a number that increased until the end of the war to about 40 departments. Most of the "Ahnenerbe"-collaborators were funded by the German Research Foundation if they did not have

⁸⁴ Mircea Eliade, "Recension de 'Rivolto contro il mondo moderno' de Julius Evola," *Vremea* 382, March 31, 1935. I am quoting from the French translation that appeared in the right wing paper *Les deux étendards* 1, September/December 1988, pp. 42-44.

⁸⁵ "On peut dire qu l'oeuvre d'Evola se situe dans la ligne de Gobineau, Chamberlain, Spengler, Rosenberg." *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸⁶ "...il est intéressant de rappeler que j'ai écrit une longue étude sur son oeuvre, qui a paru en plusieurs parties à partir der 1927, tandis qu'en 1928 j'ai entamé toute une étude sur sa philosophie magique, étude restée à l'état de manuscrit. Depuis, le seul qui ait mentionné son nom, dans notre pays, a été, en 1933, notre camarade de la rédaction, V. Lovinescu." *Ibid.*, p. 43. The editors added the note that Vasile Lovinescu had published an essay under the pseudonym "Geticus" on "La Dacie hyperboréene" in the journal *Études Traditionelles* in 1936/37, republished as Geticus, *La Dacie hyperboréene* (Pardès: Puisseaux, 1987).

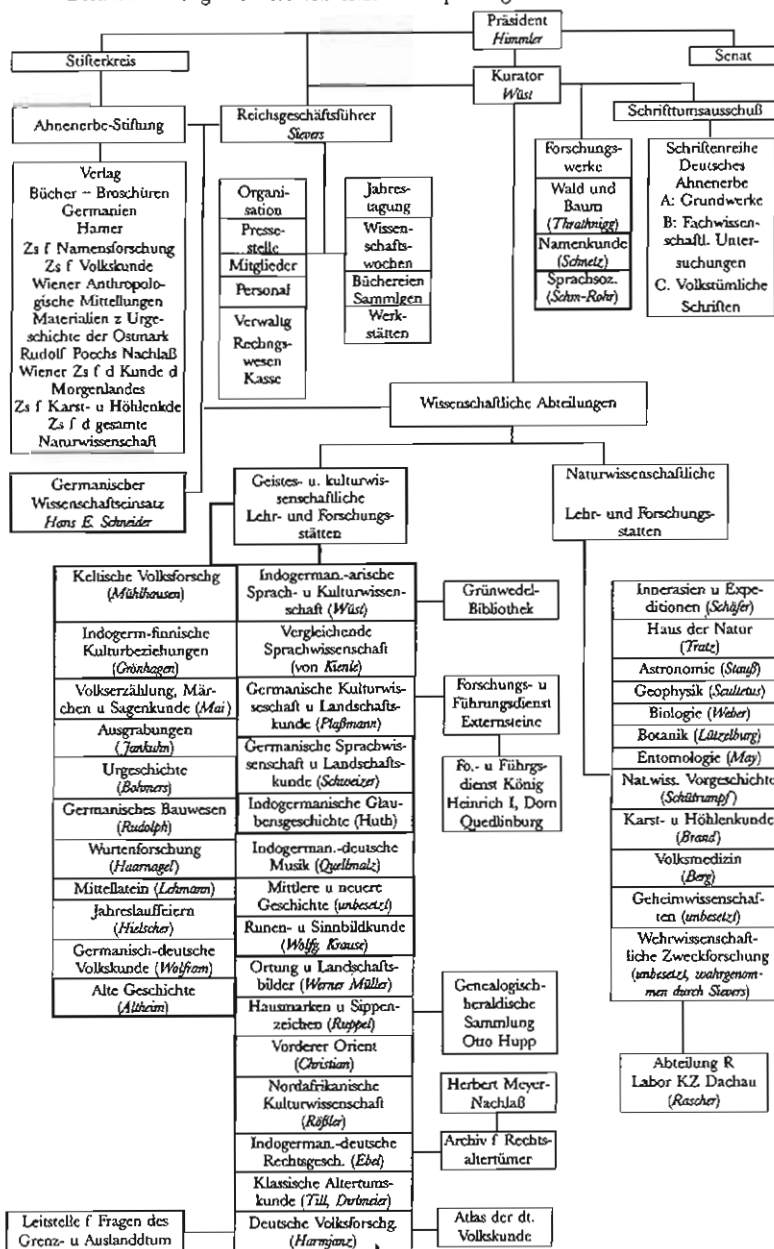
⁸⁷ "Die Forschungsgemeinschaft 'Das Ahnenerbe'," protocoll of Wüst's speech given at "Schloß Niedernfels" during a "Gaudozentenlager" (July 16, 1938), Federal Archives Berlin, NS 21, vol. 792. This sort of both physical and ideological training camps ("Dozentenlager") had become obligatory for lecturers to raise their qualification from the habilitation to an official "Dozentur" (lectureship) in December 1934.

an established position at one of Germany's universities. For financial reasons alone it was vital for the "Ahnenerbe" to keep in frequent contact with the Reich Ministry of Science and Education and to win university professors for co-operation. In fact, the "Ahnenerbe" had a clear (and successful) strategy to infiltrate the Berlin ministry with SS members. In pursuing the aim of a greater scientific seriousness, Herman Wirth had been pushed back to the position of an honorary president in March 1937 before he was urged to depart completely in December 1938. Parallel to the first measure Wüst arranged for the name "Deutsches Ahnenerbe. Studiengesellschaft für Geistesurgeschichte" to be freed from the Wirth-additive and changed into "Das Ahnenerbe" in March 1937. With similar intentions, Wüst replaced the designation of his own department "Wortkunde" with the more scientific heading "Abteilung für Indogermanisch-arysche Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft" on March 8, 1938. Another example for someone who released himself from an earlier impact of Herman Wirth was Otto Huth who joined the "Ahnenerbe" in March 1937. He likewise distanced himself from Wirth to proceed with his career. In April 1938 Huth was nominated provisional head of the "Ahnenerbe"-department "Indogermanische Geistes- und Glaubensgeschichte," but became its official director after he attained his *venia legendi* at the University of Tübingen under Jakob Wilhelm Hauer. With the support of the SS and the "Ahnenerbe," Huth was nominated professor of science of religion ("Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft") at the "Reichsuniversität Straßburg" in occupied France on April 1, 1942.⁸⁸

To open up better fundraising possibilities, Wüst changed his position with Himmler on January 1, 1939, becoming the new curator and Himmler president of the "Ahnenerbe." The diagram on p. 142 shows that many "Ahnenerbe"-sections had a traditional philological-historical leaning. This resembled Wüst's own scientific background and resulted from his efforts to organize the work along normal academic structures. Space does not allow more than a superficial view of the "Ahnenerbe"-departments. Of course, disciplines dealing with such matters as the old Germans and the Indo-Germanic heritage were strongly emphasized. In both the natural sciences and humanities, excursions like the one Herman Wirth had undertaken in Sweden

⁸⁸ To Huth's career, see H. Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft*, chapter 18, pp. 248-268.

Diagram of the SS-„Ahnenerbe“ (1943/44)
 Bold frame designates research fields with a philological-historical orientation.



Source: Joachim Lerchenmüller and Gerd Simon, eds., *Im Vorfeld des Massenmords. Germanistik im 2. Weltkrieg* (Tübingen: Götting, 1997), p. 88.

had been an issue of considerable interest. The greatest project in that regard was Ernst Schäfer's Tibet expedition between April 1938 and August 1939.⁸⁹ In addition to normal botanical, geographical and anthropological studies, the expedition intended an ethnological survey of the Tibetan populace according to racial criteria. Speculations about secret or even occult aims of the research journey, concerning for instance the World Ice Theory of Hans Hörbiger or Helena Blavatsky's theosophical guesswork about a lost Aryan knowledge that might have survived in Tibet, gained some popularity in the last years. However, while such things might have played a role in Himmler's thinking, no hard evidence for an occult background of the expedition has been revealed. Its scientific and political success led to the establishment of a new "Ahnenerbe"-department called "Innerasienforschung und Expeditionen" (Research on Inner Asia and Expeditions) in January 1940 with the zoologist Ernst Schäfer as its director. Two years later it was reorganized and transformed into the "Sven Hedin-Reichsinstitut für Innerasienforschung," named after the famous Swedish researcher. On June 17, 1942 Wüst applied to the Reich Ministry of Science and Education for funding the institute framing its intention in the context of a new "Großraumpolitik" (policy in large areas).⁹⁰ At the beginning of the next year a pompous inauguration was held in the auditorium maximum of the University of Munich on January 16, 1943.⁹¹ Starting with the expedition film "Geheimnis Tibet" in the afternoon, an honorary degree was bestowed on Sven Hedin in the evening. Wüst, who had taken an active part in the erection of the institute and in the exploration of "Inner Asia" as such, held the main speech of the ceremony in front of a great number of invited guests. According to Mircea Eliade's Portuguese diary, the Romanian press, then cultural attaché to Lisbon was personally invited by Wüst to join the Munich opening ceremony in January 1943.⁹² Although the context of Eliade's

⁸⁹ See Isrun Engelhardt, "Tibetan Triangle: German, Tibetan and British Relations in the Context of Ernst Schäfer's Expedition, 1938-1939," *Ariatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 58-1 (2004), pp. 57-113.

⁹⁰ One half of the requested 300,000 Reichsmark was scheduled for labor costs, alone 13,000 for its director and ca. 7,500 for its assistant Bruno Beger. Federal Archives Berlin, R 21, 10.996, Sven Hedin Institut, fol. 1-20.

⁹¹ A program of the event is to be found in Hartmut Walravens, ed., *W. A. Unkrieg (1883-1956). Korrespondenz mit Hans Fundaisen, der Britischen Bibelgesellschaft und anderen über Sibirien und den Lamaismus* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), p. 162f.

⁹² I thank this information Mihaela Timuş and her both extensive and thorough foreword of eadem, ed., *Intoldeana Oriental. Correspondența Mircea Eliade - Știg Wikander*

invitation, delivered by the German ambassador to Romania, remains unclear, it is certain that earlier contacts must have existed – and not only on a superficial level. Otherwise such an invitation in the middle of the war which certainly included the absorption of traveling and lodging costs makes no sense. But of course, Eliade could not journey to Germany in the middle of the war.

The beginning of World War II brought new problems and new centers of interests. The ideological substantiation of the Third Reich's 'Germanization' policy in Nordic countries such as Norway and the Netherlands now became an important focus of the "Ahnenerbe"-work. The more countries Germany's troops occupied, the better possibilities emerged to carry out examinations, excursions, and excavations to justify the various claims of National Socialist ideology. As a consequence of the change from a more theoretical, worldview oriented, to a more practical, application-oriented approach, it was decided to modify the organizational structure of the "Ahnenerbe." On April 1, 1942 it was incorporated as "Amt A" in the SS "Hauptamt" and Himmler's "Persönlicher Stab." Wüst's title changed from "Kurator" to "Amtschef." The establishment of the notorious "Institut für wehrwissenschaftliche Zweckforschung" (Institute of Scientific Research for Military Purposes) with Wolfram Sievers as provisional director has to be seen as a further step towards a closer military orientation. Under its umbrella top secret experiments were undertaken which included medical experimentations with different sorts of poisons and bacteria as well as lethal tests to find out, for instance, how long humans take to die in cold water or under a progressively decreasing atmospheric pressure. August Hirt, professor at the "Reichsuniversität Straßburg," 'ordered' more than 100 persons from the concentration camp in Auschwitz to use them as 'testing animals'. Then they were killed and functioned as 'stockpile' for a skull and skeleton collection he wanted to establish.⁹³ Shortly before Allied troops reached Strasbourg in the fall of 1944, Hirt and many other scholars (among them Otto Huth

(1948–1977) [C'est toujours l'Orient. Correspondance Eliade-Wikander] (Iasi-Bucarest: Polirom, 2005), pp. 15–91, here p. 73 with reference to the entry of January 13, 1942 in Eliade's *Diario portugués* (Barcelona: Editorial Kairós, 2001). See also E. Ciurtin in his article on p. 354.

⁹³ Cf. H. Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft*, pp. 264–268. See also Hans-Joachim Lang, *Die Namen der Nummern. Wie es gelang die 86 Opfer eines NS-Verbrechens zu identifizieren* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2004). Lang succeeded to identify the names of 86 victims of this horrible crime.

fled to Tübingen whose university provided them with shelter and with the opportunity to continue their work as far as possible. After the war, Wolfram Sievers was hanged due to his responsibility for these crimes. His superior Wüst, however, declared to have known nothing about it – undoubtedly a lie. As chief of the "Amt A," Wüst was not only informed but was certainly involved in one way or another.

Between 1991 and 1992, new archival material came to light in a special repository ("Sonderarchiv") in Moscow. Among other things it contained Himmler's official diaries the SS leader had used between 1941 and 1942.⁹⁴ Since Wüst's relations with Himmler were mostly informal in character, he does not appear very often in the record. The entry of July 9, 1942, for example, discloses that Wüst acted as Himmler's translator in a meeting of the "Reichsführer-SS" with the Indian nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose.⁹⁵ Soon after we can read the July 14 entry regarding an encounter between Himmler, Wüst, and Dr. Sigmund Rascher who reported on his freezing and high altitude experiments in the concentration camp of Dachau. To stimulate discussion, a film feature of the deadly testing in a low pressure chamber was shown after dinner.⁹⁶ Moreover, the entry of July 17 reveals that Wüst accompanied Himmler to an inspection tour to Auschwitz. On July 7 Himmler had ordered the establishment of the "Institut für wehrwissenschaftliche Zweckforschung" and on August 12 Hirt officially affiliated with the "Ahnenerbe." Three days later Rascher started with his freezing experiments in Dachau on August 15. This was the direct context of the journey Himmler and his team carried out from July 17–20 (Friday to Monday), 1942. It aimed to check the orderly functioning of the whole extermination process and, as the contextual relationship indicates, had also to do with the kind of SS-research named "wehrwissenschaftliche Zweckforschung." The group inspected all sorts of installations, the prisoner camps, agricultural laboratories, the IG-Farben factories, building projects and discussed organizational problems with various administrative agencies. A freshly arrived transport of Jews deported from the Netherlands offered an excellent opportunity

⁹⁴ Published as *Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers, 1941/42*, ed. by Peter Witte et al. (Hamburg: Christians, 1999).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 482. With Wüst's assistance Himmler discussed on July 15 with Bose the possibility of including Indian units to the "Waffen-SS." *Ibid.*, p. 490.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 489. The military aim of the experiment was to discern in which maximum altitude pilots and parachute jumpers could leave an aircraft and, in a second step, how long they would be able to survive in cold sea water.

to examine the separation measures to which these Jews were subjected from the beginning. The high point of the program was the survey of the gassing of several hundred Jews in Birkenau.⁹⁷

Another example of Wüst's connection with Auschwitz is to be found in a thrilling correspondence between Franz Altheim, head of the "Ahnenerbe"-department "Alte Geschichte," and his friend Karl Kerényi. After Kerényi's daughter Grazia was imprisoned on April 3, 1944, she was subsequently committed to Auschwitz because her mother (Kerényi's first wife) was a Jew. Kerényi sent coded messages to Altheim whom he rightly expected to be able to approach higher SS leaders in behalf of her.⁹⁸ His letters caused irritations and serious frictions on the side of his friend.⁹⁹ But finally Altheim complied with the increasingly urgent requests of the desperate father. He contacted Wüst who used his relations to Heinrich Himmler to have Grazia Kerényi delivered from Auschwitz to the concentration camp Ravensbrück. Ultimately, she survived. What this dramatic story makes clear is that Wüst had entered a level in the political hierarchy of Nazi Germany giving him enough power to arrange for someone's release from Auschwitz. In stressing Grazia Kerényi's rescue, Losemann completely disregards the political and ethical implications of Altheim's and Wüst's behavior. Why Wüst had such power and which role the "Ahnenerbe" played in the interchange between ideology and politics, between ideology and crime, were questions which Losemann does not ask. The moral bankruptcy and intellectual corruption characteristic of the "Ahnenerbe"

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 491–497. As a result of the inspection, Rudolf Höß, the commander of Auschwitz, received an order of Himmler to open all mass graves and to burn the corpses.

⁹⁸ See Volker Losemann, "Die 'Krise der Alten Welt' und der Gegenwart. Franz Altheim und Karl Kerényi im Dialog," in Peter Kneissl and V. Losemann, eds., *Imperium Romanum Studien zur Geschichte und Rezeption. Festschrift für Karl Christ zum 75. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1998), pp. 492–518. On June 15, 1944 Kerényi wrote: "Meine kleinen Töchter sind gesund, die kleinere von den größeren, Grazia, wurde vor 5 oder 6 Wochen in ein Sanatorium [sc. to Auschwitz, H.J.] gebracht. Es ist eine furchtbar verzweifelte Sache, ich kann es Dir nicht erklären, aber es kann sich sehr wohl um einen ärztlichen Irrtum handeln. Ich wollte Dich bitten, vielleicht kennt jemand von Deinen wissenschaftlichen Mitarbeitern einen von den dortigen Professoren, der die Sache anders ansieht als einen gewöhnlichen Patienten. Du musst Dich aber sofort umsehen, denn gerade in diesen Tagen entscheidet sich viel." Ibid., p. 499.

⁹⁹ Now you are seeking help from the same people you have insulted before, wrote Altheim in July 1944 to Kerényi. Not saying on which source he relied, Altheim continued that his friend ought to recognize that his daughter already received a preferential treatment compared to others: "Andere müssen ganz anderes mitmachen." Ibid., p. 501.

as a whole culminated in its scientific director Wüst. It goes without saying that Wüst understood the case of Kerényi's daughter and his own involvement in it as an exception to the rule. Wüst undoubtedly knew the "rule" and he agreed with it, to say the least.

4. Religion and the Study of Religion in Wüst's Perspective

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Herman Wirth had to leave the "Ahnenerbe" as a result of his fantasy-laden conjectures about Nordic "Ur"-symbolism which hampered Himmler's and Wüst's attempt to transform the "Ahnenerbe" into a scientific brain trust. But the lacking academic respectability of Wirth was only one half of the truth. The other one pertained to Wirth's religious affiliation with the German Faith Movement. It was a combination of both that led to his estrangement from the "Ahnenerbe" and his supporters in the SS. Before the church struggle voelkish religious groups such as the ones constituting the "Deutsche Glaubensbewegung" could evolve to a certain degree in the NS state. But their margin drastically diminished in the course of only two or three years. Already in spring 1936 the German Faith Movement – the main of the small number of Pagan organizations – fell apart due to internal dissent and external pressure.

When the working community of the German Faith Movement ("Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutsche Glaubensbewegung") constituted at the end of July 1933, Wirth became a member of its leaders' council ("Führerrat"), but functioned as a co-editor of and contributor to Hauer's journal *Deutscher Glaube* as well.¹⁰⁰ In March 1934 Wirth wrote a letter to the "Führer" of the German Faith Movement in which he declared that he would be pleased to participate in the work for a textbook of Indo-Germanic religious sources Hauer was about to prepare.¹⁰¹ Besides that the letter addressed some other, for Wirth more urgent issues. One referred to the impending Berlin discussion about the *Ura-Linda-Chronik*. Wirth expressed his confidence that Walther Wüst and Hermann Güntert (Güntert with a question mark) would partake and defend his cause. Starting on May 1 Wirth and Wüst would edit a new *Zeitschrift*

¹⁰⁰ See Ulrich Nanko, *Die Deutsche Glaubensbewegung. Eine historische und soziologische Untersuchung* (Marburg: Diagonal Verlag, 1993), esp. p. 147.

¹⁰¹ H. Wirth to J.W. Hauer on March 24, 1934, Federal Archives Koblenz, literal remains of Hauer, vol. 61, fol. 430.

für *Geistesgeschichte* and, together with Wüst's pupil Dr. Otto Paul, he would publish a new text edition of the *Ura-Linda-Chronik* until the end of the year. Both projects did not materialize. The main problem for Wirth was the harsh critique of other National Socialists who accused him of having taken money from Jews to conduct his research. Rather than deny it, Wirth said that he had thought it a good idea to fight against the Jews with the money of the Jews. His new book should be understood as the final destruction of all Jewish claims and the liberation of the North from them.¹⁰²

Wüst was repeatedly confronted with Hauer's wish to become engaged in the activities of the German Faith Movement. Because such an attachment did not conform to Wüst's own religious views he steadily rejected and refrained from any collaboration. Hauer's and Wirth's heathenish sectarianism disgusted Wüst even more when he realized that A) the German Faith Movement would never play a leading role in Nazi Germany and B) that an involvement of that sort would harm his academic advancement. In 1935 Wüst and Hauer, nevertheless, embarked on a close liaison. But this resulted from the broader frame of an Indo-Germanic or Aryan worldview and not from a commonly shared Pagan religion. And again, antisemitism constituted the pivotal mechanism to render their Aryanism coherence. Even in the Weimar years, when the Aryan Myth was stirring up, anti-Jewish preconceptions were involved as the following example shows: Induced by his friend Rudolf Otto, Hauer had taught indology at the University of Marburg from 1925–1927. When leaving Marburg Hauer received the proposals of two prominent colleagues, Hanns Oertel and Wilhelm Geiger, who supported Wüst to become his successor. Hauer reacted very positively to their suggestion and started reading the publications of the young "Privatdozent" (lecturer) Wüst.¹⁰³ Although he finally recommended Helmuth von Glasenapp, Hauer's first goal was to prevent

¹⁰² "Und die *Heilige Urschrift* ist die endgültige Zertrümmerung aller geschichtlichen Ansprüche des Judentums und die Befreiung des Nordens davon." Letter of H. Wirth to Werner Haverbeck on August 6 (ibid., fol. 431–433, the quotation fol. 432) given as confidential addendum to the aforementioned letter to inform Hauer. Wirth's book appeared as *Die heilige Urschrift der Menschheit. Symbolgeschichtliche Untersuchungen diesseits und jenseits des Nordatlantik* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1936).

¹⁰³ See Hauer to Hanns Oertel on October 11, 1927 (answering a letter from October 5) and Hauer to Wilhelm Geiger on October 12, 1927 (answering a letter from October 5), Federal Archives Koblenz, literal remains of Hauer, vol. 123, fol. 14f. and fol. 17f.

the appointment of the Jewish candidate Otto Strauß. This becomes clear from his statement sent to the Berlin ministry in October 1927 in which Hauer argued that Marburg's philosophy department already had enough Semitic blood ("hat schon ein reichliches Element semitischen Bluts").¹⁰⁴ The denunciation, introduced by Hauer's affirmation to be a strong opponent of ordinary antisemitism ("Ich selbst bin ein scharfer Gegner des landläufigen Antisemitismus."), aimed of course at Hermann Jacobsohn, a Jew, a democrat, and a gifted linguist, to wit a threat against Sanskrit studies at the University of Marburg. This nasty, though not uncommon, episode makes evident that antisemitism and Aryanism were inextricably intertwined with each other not only ideologically but also on a structural academic level.

Eight years later Hauer was well-situated to do more for Wüst. When the chair of Hanns Oertel was to be re-occupied in 1935, he was in the position to write the decisive expert opinion for the Munich philosophy department. In addition to that he also utilized his relations with Karl August Eckhardt, an important collaborator of the Reich Ministry of Science and Education and an early member of the German Faith Movement as well. Already in January Hauer had informed Wüst that he was trying to attain a reorganization of the *Orientalische Literaturzeitung*, the main journal of Oriental studies in Germany. There were too many Jews who, by their nature, were incapable of understanding the Indo-Aryan spirit. Hauer said that he would use his contacts to place Wüst on the board of the journal.¹⁰⁵ Wüst fully agreed with Hauer's opinion and was gratified about the offer to become a "Schriftleiter" (co-editor) of the *Orientalische Literaturzeitung*. Wüst promised to bring his own political contacts into play in order to achieve the necessary reform of German indology: "Ich bin gern bereit, mit Ihren und meinen ganzen Verbindungen für dieses wichtige Ziel zu kämpfen."¹⁰⁶ Party member since May 1, 1933, Wüst worked on various levels and occasions for the NSDAP. His relations with the "Gauleitung" of Upper Bavaria were excellent. One of his many assignments and monstrous

¹⁰⁴ Letter of Hauer to the Ministry of Culture and Education in Berlin (Prof. Windelband) on October 28, 1927, ibid. vol. 123, fol. 391–394. See also H. Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft*, p. 183.

¹⁰⁵ Hauer to Wüst on January 18, 1935, Federal Archives Koblenz, literal remains of Hauer, vol. 141, fol. 619.

¹⁰⁶ "I am willingly prepared to fight with your and my own relations for that important goal." Wüst to Hauer on January 26, 1935, ibid. vol. 141, fol. 616–618, here fol. 617 verso.

titles read "Referent für arische Geistesgeschichte, Wortkunde und arisch-indogermanische Weltanschauung bei der Gauleitung München-Oberbayern des NSLB."¹⁰⁷

On March 4, 1935 Hauer wrote a letter to K.A. Eckhardt advocating Wüst in every regard as a promising young scholar capable to take over a chair in indology even at the University of Berlin.¹⁰⁸ The recommendation was followed by a villainous diatribe against Jewish indologists, especially against Otto Strauß, the editor responsible for indology at the *Orientalische Literaturzeitung*, who, as a Jew, would always try to engage other Jews such as Betty Heymann and Walter Ruben. Thirdly Hauer agitated against the theological orientation of Germany's study of religion, particularly in the case of Johannes Witte at the University of Berlin. However, this was only the covering letter to an official petition he submitted the same day to the Reich Ministry of Science and Education, addressed to Bernhard Rust personally. In it Hauer pleaded for a total rebuilding ("Neuaufbau") of the German university system in general and indological and religious studies in particular, of course on the basis of National Socialism. Hauer therefore wanted to strengthen the Aryan legacy in opposition to the alien worldview of Judaism and Christianity. Every German university should get at least one lectureship or professorship concerned with Germanic or Indo-Germanic traditions. It should be high time to remove general history of religions ("Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte") from all theology departments.¹⁰⁹

For that bundle of reasons Hauer tried to corroborate research into the Aryan past and to bring Wüst into the position of a full professor at the University of Munich. It comes as no surprise that Wüst entirely shared Hauer's opinion. Also from Wüst's point of view a complete reorganization of Indian studies was an urgent task. It meant in 1935, two years after the shameful Law for the Reestablishment of the Civil Service from April 7, 1933, to free the academe from Jewish, but also from liberal, democratic, and reactionary remnants. "We National

¹⁰⁷ Wüst's curriculum vitae – to be found in his personal files at the Munich University Archive, in the BDC-files of the Federal Archives Berlin, and in Hauer's literal remains, Federal Archives Koblenz – includes other designations of that sort. The NSLB ("Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund") then became the National Socialist Instructors' Union, NSDDB ("Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Dozentenbund").

¹⁰⁸ Hauer to Eckhardt on March 4, 1935, Federal Archives Koblenz; literal remains of Hauer, vol. 141, fol. 607f.

¹⁰⁹ Hauer to Bernhard Rust on March 4, 1935, *ibid.*, vol. 141, fol. 609–611.

Socialists," Wüst wrote to Hauer, must be aware and careful to accomplish our mission.¹¹⁰ Asked by the Munich philosophy department for an expertise, Hauer answered on May 14, 1935 in a very affirmative manner. Wüst would be not only a talented and scrupulous young scholar but also someone who would be able to show Aryan philology new paths in the future. While Oriental studies had concentrated too much on philological and historical work in the past, just collecting masses of material, it totally ignored concerning itself with the spiritual grounds from which all these findings emanate. What was in need instead was a new life oriented synopsis ("lebendige Wesensschau") of the Indo-Germanic traditions. Wüst would be a university teacher from whom a significant contribution to this new kind of scholarship could be expected.¹¹¹

An important if not the main trait of Hauer's and Wüst's inclination towards an Aryan worldview was their more or less openly expressed anti-Jewish resentment. In trying to consolidate the projected working community of National Socialist indologists, Hauer put on November 6, 1935 a second petition for the reorganization of indology in writing.¹¹² In addition to Wüst Hauer asked other like minded scholars such as Richard Schmidt (Münster), Herman Lommel (Frankfurt), and Bernhard Breloer (Berlin) to join the undertaking.¹¹³ Hauer repeated in his paper the topics of the first petition but argued more plainly: All remainders of a Jewish influence should be eliminated. A situation in which Jews were still allowed to be active in Germany's indology has to be ended. Even under the presupposition of an excellent philological talent Jews

¹¹⁰ "Insbesondere müssen wir beide vor der Lüders-Garde auf der Hut sein." Wüst to Hauer on May 5, 1935, *ibid.*, vol. 141, fol. 603. The menace Wüst connected with the "Lüders-Garde" referred to the influential Berlin indologist and Geheimrat Heinrich Lüders (1869–1943) who, "owing to his anti-Nazi attitude," was not permitted to continue lecturing after his retirement in 1935. Cf. Valentina Stache-Rosen, *German Indologists. Biographies of Scholars in Indian Studies writing in German. With a Summary of Indology in German Speaking Countries*, 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Max Mueller Bhavan, 1990), p. 167. The book includes articles on Geiger, Hauer, Heymann, Oertel, Strauß and many others. Wüst, however, is missing.

¹¹¹ Hauer to the vice-dean of the Munich philosophy department Robert Spindler on May 14, 1935, *ibid.*, vol. 141, fol. 462, answering Spindler's request from May 9 (*ibid.*, fol. 463) and getting Spindler's thanks on May 17 (*ibid.* vol. 461).

¹¹² *Ibid.* vol. 141, fol. 21. It seems that the request was not submitted.

¹¹³ For the National Socialist leaning of Breloer, Lommel, and Schmidt, see Sheldon Pollock, "Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj," in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament. Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 76–133, here pp. 91–94.

were not able to understand the Indo-Aryan spirit. Hauer closed with the voelkish racial credo that only the cognate would have the capacity to interpret the Indo-Aryan or Iranian worldview adequately.¹¹⁴

Though Wüst and Hauer were both distinguished ideologues of the Aryan Myth, they expected different things from their occupation with the Indo-Germanic world and from their relationship with each other. Hauer saw in Wüst a probable ally in his quest of a new Pagan religion called "Deutscher Glaube." Even after he had been forced to abandon his hope for a Pagan organization in April 1936, he remained the prophet of a new religion. Wüst instead had absolutely no liking for Hauer's Pagan dogmatism and missionary zest. His doctrinaire model of a "Deutscher Glaube" bore a certain resemblance to Hauer's pietistic past and his former career as Christian missionary to India having shifted now to an Indo-Germanic religiosity. Wüst's own understanding of the Aryan heritage lacked any passionate religious affection. It was much more instrumental than content dependent. The designation of his Munich institute and professorship "Arische Kultur- und Sprachwissenschaft" indicates that Wüst's interest in the legacy of the Aryan tradition had not primarily religious motives. Thus Wüst was also a gifted opportunist who cheerfully accepted the help of the "Führer" of the German Faith Movement to become a full professor in Munich. As soon as he had achieved this goal, Hauer's attractiveness lessened and went to zero after Wüst had been nominated president of the "Ahnenerbe." The role of his former benefactor changed to that of a rival. Although Hauer repeatedly tried to affiliate with the "Ahnenerbe," Wüst prevented any closer collaboration. Only in the so called "Wald und Baum Projekt," a huge project (funded by Hermann Göring) to examine the Indo-Germanic understanding of the German forest, Hauer was able to obtain a little grant. Wüst even wrote a negative assessment when Hauer tried to include "Arische Weltanschauung" in his lectureship at the University of Tübingen in 1939. He declared that

¹¹⁴ "Es muss aufhören, dass in Deutschland, wie das bisher der Fall war, Juden die Indologie betreuen. Ich bin der Meinung, dass auch bei guter philologischer und selbst abstrakt philologischer Begabung nur der Artverwandte die indo-arische oder iranische Weltanschauung zu deuten vermag." Federal Archives Koblenz, literal remains of Hauer, vol. 141, fol. 21.

Hauer held outdated views and had insufficient knowledge of Iranian philology, accidentally his own area of specialization.¹¹⁵

The relations of Wüst and Hauer with Heinrich Himmler also illustrate their deviating development and different stance within the SS. Hauer had joined the SS and the SD in 1934 and was honored with one or two personal meetings with Himmler and Heydrich.¹¹⁶ This was nothing compared to Wüst. Wüst stood in a much closer, even confidential relationship with the "Reichsführer SS," and in June 1942 Wüst and not Hauer held the funeral oration at Heydrich's burial. In his correspondence with Hauer Wüst liked to impress his senior colleague with incidental hints on important encounters he recently had with Himmler. Hauer, vice versa, asked Wüst several times if he could not arrange an appointment for him with Himmler, without success. Hauer did not realize that neither Wüst nor Himmler, nor the SS in general, were interested in his religious agenda. His aspiration to provide the SS with a Pagan substructure or, at least, to advance to its ideological advisor totally failed. In September 1942 Bruno Beger – participant of the Tibet expedition and the one who selected the human 'material' in Auschwitz for August Hirt – wrote a memo for his superior Ernst Schäfer about a meeting he had with Hans Endres, Hauer's assistant at the Aryan Institute at the University of Tübingen. Beger had discussed with Endres his participation in a new SS-expedition which aimed to survey the whole Caucasus region. Moreover, Endres ought to have accompanied Beger to Auschwitz if private problems would not have crossed plans.¹¹⁷ After the encounter Beger recorded that Endres had cunningly avoided to mention the name of his teacher Hauer because, as the memo reads: The Reichsführer SS as well as Standartenführer Wüst stay in opposition to him. "Den Namen Hauer hat Endres klu-

¹¹⁵ See H. Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft*, p. 158f. and Wüst's negative letter to the Reich Ministry of Science and Education (Heinrich Harmjanz) on June 21, 1939, Federal Archives Munich, personal files Wüst, O-N-14.

¹¹⁶ Cf. the reprint of two letters between Hauer and Himmler I added to my article "Das 'Arische Seminar' an der Universität Tübingen 1940-1945," in Heidrun Brückner et al., eds., *Indienforschung im Zeitenwandel. Analysen und Dokumente zur Indologie und Religionswissenschaft in Tübingen* (Tübingen: Attempto, 2003), pp. 177-207, here pp. 183-185.

¹¹⁷ See H. Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft*, pp. 280-284. In September 1944 Endres became a lecturer of science of religion with special reference to religion and race at the University of Tübingen (*ibid.*, p. 287f.).

gerweise nicht erwähnt, denn der Reichsführer-SS sowohl als auch Standartenführer Wüst stehen gegen denselben."¹¹⁸

Ensuing from the experience with the church struggle, Pagans in and outside the German Faith Movement had become the object of state surveillance by Gestapo and SD. Their religious sectarianism was seen as a potential threat to the ideological unanimity of the Third Reich. In the official NS historiography, and especially in the eyes of Adolf Hitler, World War I had been lost as a result of Germany's disunity. Therefore everything that could impair the unification of the German people in the preparatory phase of the next war had to be nipped in the bud. One of the lessons the Nazi leaders learned from the church struggle was that religious quarrels would lead to a disaster given free play. Considering the fact that the 'official' planning of World War II started in 1936, the policy of National Socialism towards Paganism appears in another light. Hitler was fully convinced that the war was not to be won without the support of the Christian churches. Yet how many members of the "Wehrmacht" did not belong to either the Protestant or the Catholic church? Who of them had read one sentence of the Vedas, had ever heard about Krishna and Arjuna, the famous Aryan warriors? A German army merely consisting of soldiers with an Aryan or Pagan preference would have been a rather negligible seize. Certainly the god appearing in the long-established slogan "Gott mit uns!" that escorted Germany's soldiers as engraving in their belt clasps to Poland, France, and the Soviet Union did not belong to the Aryan pantheon.

In view of that political context the role of Paganism, but also the position and function of the SS-"Ahnenerbe," have to be re-examined. Any interpretation of the "Ahnenerbe" as core of a Pagan counter religion is misleading.¹¹⁹ Particularly under Walther Wüst the "Ahnenerbe" never planned to establish something like an Aryan church, to develop Pagan rites or to educate Pagan clerics. Only very few "Ahnenerbe"-members deliberately rejected a traditional scientific approach in favor of occult hermetic traditions.¹²⁰ Their influence remained mar-

¹¹⁸ Memo of Bruno Beger on September 23, 1942, Federal Archives Berlin, R 135, vol. 48, fol. 164012.

¹¹⁹ Victor and Victoria Trimondi, *Hitler, Buddha, Krishna. Eine unheilige Allianz vom Dritten Reich bis heute* (Wien: Ueberreuter, 2002) is relying on this misinterpretation.

¹²⁰ The most important figure in that regard was Karl Maria Wiligut (1866–1946), named "Weisthor" or "Himmler's Rasputin." But Wiligut was a psychopath who stayed seven years in a mental hospital in Salzburg before he advanced to a spiritual advisor

ginal. It was Wüst who watched over the scholarly appearance of the "Ahnenerbe," who coordinated all projects and who maintained close relations with the Reich Ministry of Science and Education. Under the political circumstances described above, Wüst's religious and scientific development is not astonishing for someone familiar with the history of the academic study of religion: Confronted with rather unattractive religious alternatives, Wüst opted for a closer orientation towards the scientific occupation with religion. This decision was engendered by his personal religious penchant but was also influenced by the ideological function of the "Ahnenerbe." Wüst's famous Indo-Germanic credo is compelling in that regard. Consisting of six speeches delivered between 1936 and 1941, Wüst published in 1942 his *Indogermanisches Bekenntnis*, a profession of his personal worldview but also a manifesto of the "Ahnenerbe"-work in general.¹²¹

The largest and most important contribution to that book was Wüst's article "Von indogermanischer Religiosität. Sinn und Sendung" (On Indo-Germanic religiosity. Its meaning and mission) which originally appeared in 1939 in the restructured *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* (ARW) where it served as a key text to denote the journal's new course. Already in 1933 the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* had faced pressure from its publisher Teubner, especially from the Teubner manager Hermann Gieselbusch, to align with the ideology of National Socialism.¹²² This led to a first reorganization in 1936 and to the inclusion of the classical

of Himmler. Wiligut believed in an Indo-Germanic "Krist" who, in the year 12,500 BC, had proclaimed an "Irminglauben." Later Christianity adopted this "Krist" but distorted his teachings. Wiligut's occult capacities allowed him to hold contact with the ancestors and gods of the old belief. In 1939 he fell back in a state of mental derangement and left the SS. See <http://www.relinfo.ch>, s.v. Wiligut.

¹²¹ W. Wüst, *Indogermanisches Bekenntnis. Sechs Reden* (Berlin-Dahlem: Ahnenerbe Stiftungsverlag, 1942, 2nd ed. 1943): "Germanenkunde. Frage und Verpflichtung" (Detmold, October 5, 1936), "Das Reich. Gedanke und Wirklichkeit bei den alten Ariern" (Munich, February 2, 1937), "Deutsche Frühzeit und arische Geistesgeschichte" (Munich, May 12, 1939), "Von indogermanischer Religiosität. Sinn und Sendung" (Salzburg, August 24, 1939), "Indogermanisches Bekenntnis" (Munich, July 5, 1941), "Überlieferung als völkische Kraftquelle" (Strasbourg, November 24, 1941). Wüst dedicated the book in gratitude and loyalty ("in Dankbarkeit und Treue") to Heinrich Himmler.

¹²² I refer here to my article "Archiv für Religionswissenschaft" in Michael Fahlbusch and Ingo Haar, eds., *Handbuch völkischer Wissenschaften* (forthcoming). See also Martina Dürkop, "...er wird sehen, daß das Archiv wirklich ein Geschäft ist, wenn es richtig behandelt wird...". Wissenschaftlicher und wirtschaftlicher Existenzkampf des ARW 1919–1939," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 1 (1999), pp. 107–128. A listing of all ARW-articles is to be found under <http://pomocrium.com>, s.v. Archiv für Religionswissenschaft.

philologist Friedrich Pfister as third editor next to Otto Weinreich and Martin P. Nilsson. In the preface and in two articles Pfister articulated the political change emphasizing the need to incorporate voelkish and racial features which in his view had been underestimated thus far.¹²³ Hauer's former pupil Herbert Grabert highlighted in the same volume in plain language National Socialist racialism and the total dependence of any scholarship on voelkish prerequisites.¹²⁴ Hauer himself contributed to the 1937 edition an exposition of the 'natural' relationship between race and religion.¹²⁵ Not all articles appearing in the volumes 33–35 (1936–1938) had that open ideological proclivity. Other authors refrained from carrying favor with National Socialist ideas and followed academic rules and standards valid before. But the scientific level of the *ARW* came to grief alone from the fact that Jewish and politically undesired authors were excluded from publishing. Even the participation of foreigners not stemming from related nations had become a problem to the new voelkish scheme.

Nevertheless, the concessions set off were insufficient. Much more had to be done and a further political tightening was necessary. It is not surprising that an interference of the SS resulted from that situation. The "Ahnenerbe" was greatly interested in increasing its respectability with renowned scientific periodicals and Wüst was keen to take over the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*. Accordingly Otto Weinreich and Friedrich Pfister, but in particular the Swede Martin P. Nilsson, had to retire. With volume 36 (1939) the former flagship of the international study of religion had come under the patronage of the SS to appear now as a belligerent organ of National Socialist ideology. Besides Wüst, the SS-partisan and head of an "Ahnenerbe"-department Heinrich Harmjan, a professor of German folklore ("Deutsche Volkskunde") and high rank of the Reich Ministry of Science and Education, acted as second editor. Hauer wrote a bitter letter to Wüst lamenting over his omission and pointing to his political and scientific merits.¹²⁶ Wüst remained unimpressed yet allowed Hauer to write a long review article about the

¹²³ Cf. F. Pfister, "Die Religion und der Glaube der germanischen Völker und ihrer religiösen Führer" and idem, "Die religiöse Sendung des deutschen Volkes," *ARW* 36 (1939), pp. 1–14 and pp. 373–380.

¹²⁴ H. Grabert, "Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte und völkische Glaubensgeschichte," *ARW* 33 (1936), pp. 191–220.

¹²⁵ J.W. Hauer, "Religion und Rasse," *ARW* 34 (1937), pp. 81–97.

¹²⁶ Hauer to Wüst on March 4, 1939, Federal Archives Koblenz, literal remains of Hauer, vol. 140, fol. 310.

actual situation of Indo-Germanic studies in Germany.¹²⁷ However, the programmatic article in the new issue derived from Wüst's own pen. On more than 40 pages and nearly 200 footnotes Wüst made clear that he himself asserted the right to expound the new course of the *ARW*.¹²⁸ To exhibit his ideological hegemony Wüst gave an extensive and well informed overview of the state of affairs in contemporary religious studies. But it is interesting that Wüst's conceptual framework grounded on the same racial phenomenology characteristic of Hauer's approach. Wüst, like Hauer, sought to furnish evidence for the old paradigm of an intrinsic correspondence between religion and the study (student) of religion by using racial arguments. Only the racially kindred is able to understand things racially kindred, declared Wüst.¹²⁹ Yet Wüst preferred the notion religiosity ("Religiosität") as terminus technicus to describe the inner side of the history of religions rather than Hauer's "Glaube" which was too close to the traditional concept of a Protestant belief. But Wüst's study of religiosity ("Religiositätsforschung") had an identical intention compared with Hauer's "Glaubensgeschichte": to re-conceptualize a direct access to the religious essence of historically discernable religious phenomena. According to two newspaper articles Wüst had put in his public lecture even more emphasis on the racial aspects of the study of religion. A new racial theory would lead to the comprehension that belief and knowledge are not in opposition to each other. Wüst's critique of the failings of contemporary study of religion, and of Hauer's Paganism, must have been much more apparent in his speech given in Salzburg.¹³⁰

Contrary to Hauer, Wüst saw the main tasks of the academic study of religion in the political and not in the religious sphere. Lacking a

¹²⁷ J.W. Hauer, "Zum gegenwärtigen Stand der Indogermanenfrage," *ARW* 36 (1939), pp. 1–63.

¹²⁸ W. Wüst, "Von indogermanischer Religiosität. Sinn und Sendung," *ARW* 36 (1939), pp. 64–108 (= *Indogermanisches Bekenntnis*, pp. 51–91 and pp. 141–150). The article went back to a talk of Wüst during the so called "Salzburger Wissenschaftswochen," a conference with a strong anti-Catholic leaning jointly organized by the "Ahnenerbe" and the Reich Ministry of Science and Education on the eve of World War II. See Kater, *Das Ahnenerbe' der SS*, p. 116f. and p. 143f.

¹²⁹ "verstehen kann nur der rassisch Verwandte den oder das rassisch Verwandte." W. Wüst, "Von indogermanischer Religiosität. Sinn und Sendung," in idem, *Indogermanisches Bekenntnis*, p. 76 (*ARW* 36, 1939, p. 90).

¹³⁰ See the reports in *Die Zeit* (Reichenberg) from August 27, 1939 and in the *Kölnische Zeitung* from August 26, 1939, as copies in the Institute of Contemporary History, Munich, MA 609, fol. 56997 and fol. 56999.

deep-rooted and impassioned personal religiosity, it was much easier for Wüst to recognize the political needs the study of religion was confronted with and, moreover, its possibilities to comply with them. Any relevance of religion and the study of religion depended on their political function and possible utilization. In Wüst's understanding, the academic study of religion had the task to exploit religion as a vein of gold.¹³¹ Emphasizing its instrumental function and practical applicability, Wüst recommended the study of religion as a perfect tool for governance that should be made available to the state rulers' disposal. Though he paid some lip service regarding the necessity of scientific methods and standards, Wüst's voelkish conception completely discarded objectivity and general validity of knowledge. Principles of that sort had lost their value and meaning. They belonged to an antiquated period and had to be abandoned. Since voelkish subjectivity had seized power in Germany's academe, any scholarship devoid of the racial paradigm and not in conformity with the needs of the German people had to be eliminated. A scholar or a discipline unwilling to meet the voelkish demands as defined by National Socialism should and would have no future in Germany. In another article dealing with the "German task of indology" Wüst insisted in an analogous way that the rules of the voelkish order had to be obeyed.¹³²

At the height of Germany's military success, Wüst was nominated rector of the University of Munich. On July 5, 1941 he held his inauguration speech commencing it by praising Adolf Hitler and recounting the splendid victories the German army had achieved in the time before.¹³³ On April 27 the "Wehrmacht" had taken Athens occupying Crete at the end of May. The attack on the Soviet Union on June 22 was followed by the rapid capture of Riga and Lvov only a few days later. Under the fresh impression of these breathtaking victories Wüst wanted to relate the triumph of the German troops with the history of

¹³¹ "Daß ein Vortrupp deutscher Religionsforschung der Gegenwart nach verschiedenen beachtlichen Ansätzen in den letzten Jahrzehnten, im Drang nach Innen den entscheidenden Inhalt und die unerhörte Reichweite des Sinnwortes 'Religiosität' erkannt und diese Goldader der Erkenntnis auszubeuten entschlossen ist, wird – davon bin ich fest überzeugt – das Wesensmerkmal unserer gelehrten, aber volksverbundenen Arbeit im kommenden Vierteljahrhundert sein." Ibid., p. 67 (ARW 36, 1939, p. 79f.).

¹³² W. Wüst, "Die deutsche Aufgabe der Indologie," *Deutsche Kultur im Leben der Völker. Mitteilungen der Akademie zur wissenschaftlichen Erforschung und zur Pflege des Deutschtums, Deutsche Akademie* 3 (1939), pp. 339–348.

¹³³ W. Wüst, "Indogermanisches Bekenntnis," in idem, *Indogermanisches Bekenntnis*, pp. 93–118, here p. 95.

the Indo-Germanic tradition in his lecture. It was the superiority of the Aryan worldview that caused the military success. The swastika hoisted on the Acropolis just bore testimony of the Aryan legacy symbolized by the vases with swastika ornaments in the national museum of Greece beneath the hill.¹³⁴ The same historical process of a powerful worldview coming to fruition could be recognized in Cracow, Warsaw, and Bergen in 1939 and 1940 and occurred likewise in the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Yugoslavia. In an Evolian manner of arguing Wüst declared that the German conquest of these countries did not follow material interests but fulfilled the eternal laws recorded in the holy scriptures of the Aryans for thousands of years. Wüst underlined the expert knowledge provided by indology and religious studies to interpret these venerable texts for the benefit of the political presence. His own proficiency authorized him to declare that the German victories were an Indo-Germanic "Bekenntnis der Tat," a confession by deeds similar to the former "Tatchristentum" being extended to political Aryanism. The military success of the German troops confirmed the righteousness of the Indo-Germanic mission like an ordeal. In accordance with the program of the so-called "Kriegseinsatz der Geisteswissenschaften" – a project of the Reich Ministry of Science and Education to involve the humanities in the ideological warfare¹³⁵ – Wüst spoke about the task of the universities to practically and theoretically substantiate the reign of the Third Reich over Europe. Wüst was so exalted about the over-running power of the German "Wehrmacht" that he started reflecting about the post-war era and the duties of German scholarship in it.¹³⁶ He had no doubt that NS scholarship would again become *Præceptor Europæ* (Europe's teacher) making a significant contribution to secure Germany's supremacy in Europe in the next millennium ("während des kommenden Jahrtausends").¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 93f.

¹³⁵ Wüst played a leading role in the "Kriegseinsatz" organizing the part of Oriental studies in it. Cf. his "Schlusswort" in Hans Heinrich Schaeder, ed., *Der Orient in deutscher Forschung. Vorträge der Berliner Orientalistentagung, Herbst 1942* (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1944), p. 260f. See in general Frank-Rutger Hausmann, "Deutsche Geisteswissenschaft im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Die Aktion Ritterbusch' (1940–1945)" (Dresden: Dresden University Press, 1998, 2nd ed. 2002) and for the involvement of Hauer and other historians of religions, H. Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft*, p. 235f.

¹³⁶ W. Wüst, "Indogermanisches Bekenntnis," p. 96.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 117f.

Wüst's public lecture at the beginning of his rectorship at the second university of the German Reich marked one of the lowest points in the history of academic learning in Germany. Science as prostitution instead of Weber's science as vocation would be a correct description of the role Oriental and religious studies adopted in Wüst's Machiavelian understanding of scholarship. It contained a criminal implication insofar as Wüst deduced from the Aryan tradition that Indo-Germans always had, and still have, the duty to eliminate everything ill and alien to the voelkish community with deadly hatred ("tödlicher Haß gegen den Andersartigen").¹³⁸ To eradicate the inner enemy appeared in his speech as implementation of a divine order. With regard to such a teaching of the Indo-Germanic laws of life, Wüst's behavior in the case of the resistance movement "Weiße Rose" appears in another light. At the beginning of 1943 some students distributed leaflets at the University of Munich criticizing the banning of free speech and free learning in the academe. In particular they attacked intellectually corrupted professors who betrayed the academic autonomy. Out of the university with groveling opportunists and SS-ranks, Wüst had to read, and he could not be unclear who was meant. When the caretaker of the university caught Sophie and Hans Scholl while laying out their flyers, they were handed over to Wüst as rector of the university on February 18, 1943. Delivered to the Gestapo and immediately sentenced to death, both were killed by a criminal state apparatus four days later. It is hardly possible to overlook Wüst's role in that issue and to neglect the manifest interrelationship between his theoretical views and their practical consequences.

A comparison between Wüst's position and the religious agenda of Hauer and Wirth makes evident that Wüst lacked any passion for the foundation of a new Pagan church or religion. Especially his commitment to the SS-"Ahnenerbe" demonstrates the difference between their religious claims and his political worldview. To evade an involvement in religious squabbles – either between Pagans and Christians or between the various Pagan groups and individuals among each other – Wüst was keen on pushing Wirth out of the "Ahnenerbe" and on preventing Hauer from entering. Wüst took care not to jeopardize the scientific position of the "Ahnenerbe." Any funding from the Reich Ministry of Science and Education would have ceased if Pagan ambitions would

have come too much to the foreground. On the other side, a noticeable religious undercurrent gained some influence in Wüst's thinking that ought to be analyzed in terms of a Pagan counter identity to (Jewish) Christianity. But it is rather unlikely that this vague religious leaning would have shifted once to the level of a Pagan church, dogmas or rituals. The fate of the German Faith Movement exemplifies that a Pagan organization, even under National Socialism, had no chance to become the focal point of more than a few thousand outsiders. The failure of Hauer's and Wirth's religious hopes and fantasies should prevent us from taking their utterances for reality itself. For Wüst and the "Ahnenerbe" did the aim to revive the ancestral heritage of the Aryan tradition not mean that they intended to create a new religion. It is therefore necessary to differentiate Wüst's political worldview orientation from a genuine religious approach. The juxtaposition of a Pagan prophet such as Hauer and an unmitigated ideologue such as Wüst serves that purpose to differentiate between a religion and a worldview. Of course an intersection existed that could be labeled as a religious worldview though its religious substance was anything but clear. Neither were Wüst's convictions definitely pro Pagan nor the ideology of National Socialism decidedly anti-Christian. One can only speculate in which direction the religious situation in Third Reich might have developed in the future. The case of Wüst seems to indicate that a religious commitment would have been less traditional and more in the form of a modern civil religion whatever religious ingredients it might have had. Due to its dichotomy of a good and bad (true and false) religious behavior, the so called historiography of the church struggle totally failed to appropriately analyze the non-Christian history of religions under National Socialism until today.¹³⁹

Putting the content of Wüst's Aryan mythology aside, it becomes transparent that his views concerning the study of religion were anything but exceptional. They ranged among the mainstream concepts being in vogue in the interwar period. Seeking for a third way between atheism and dogmatic Christianity, many scholars of that time embarked on the academic study of religion as a possibility to reconcile the antagonism of their religious and scientific persuasions. This could lead to a generalization structured as religion per se (normally Christianity deprived of

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 101 and p. 108.

¹³⁹ A recent example for that type of interpretation is Karla Poewe, *New Religions and the Nazis* (New York-London: Routledge, 2006). See my review in *The Journal of Religion* 83-2 (2007), pp. 319-321.

its dogmatic features) or to a new religion outside the Christian realm (Germanic, Indo-Germanic, Aryan) usually followed by a theological agenda even more dogmatic than before. What distinguished Wüst from other scholars was his instrumental understanding of both religion and the study of religion. Compared to the possible utilization of a religion its religious truth claims lost much of their meaning and influence becoming an issue of minor importance. Such a perspective would be inconceivable for a homo religious. True or not, what mattered for Wüst was the political function of religion. The task of the academic study of religion, as he saw it, was to strengthen the sovereignty of National Socialism. Consequently, historians of religions mutated into technocrats of power.

5. *The Aryan Myth and Beyond? Some Final Remarks*

In light of his political opportunism and the total lack of moral scruples it was no wonder that Wüst advanced to one of the most prestigious and powerful academicians in Nazi Germany. The *ordinarius monachensis*, to use a designation of Stig Wikander for the "Munich professor," kept a close watch on university affairs as far as his power reached.¹⁴⁰ And his influence went far. Against his vote an appointment in Oriental studies had become almost impossible in the 1940s. In 1944 Hans Heinrich Schaefer expressed his opinion that without Wüst's consent nobody in Germany could become a professor or only a lecturer in indology.¹⁴¹ But as Wüst's might was inseparably attached to the NS regime it passed into nothing with its end. Dismissed in October 1945, Wüst was sentenced to three years internment in a labor camp. In 1950 the judgment was reduced to "minderbelastet" (less incriminated) although hardly a German university professor could be found more incriminated than Wüst. In any case, a further continuation of his university career was simply not feasible. His state pension allowed Wüst to live the life of a private researcher and in 1955 he founded a new

¹⁴⁰ Letter of Stig Wikander to Otto Höfler on November 27, 1937. Although Wikander called Wüst an ignorant dilettante he asked the "Ahnenerbe" to publish his book *Der arische Männerbund*. See the article of Mihaela Timuş, this volume, p. 211 and p. 213.

¹⁴¹ "... ohne dessen maßgebende Mitwirkung heute keine indologische Dozentur verliehen und keine indologische Professur besetzt wird." Letter of Hans Heinrich Schaefer to Christel Matthias Schröder on November 16, 1944, literal remains of Schröder, Department for the Study of Religion, Tübingen, s.v. Schaefer.

journal named *PHMA* (Rhema, word) in which he published linguistic studies. Since nearly no one wanted to contribute, Wüst had to write most articles by himself. Having become a persona non grata in the academe, everybody distanced themselves from him. This was not surprising in view of his former political involvement. But the exclusion of Wüst from the scientific community had, on the other hand, also resulted in avoiding any critical discussion about the past. Wüst was a perfect scapegoat whose undeniable guilt ought to bar the incriminations of many others from consideration. The historiography of NS scholarship of the last years has revealed how strong the group spirit among university teachers had been in the first decades after the war. It was unthinkable that a critique of particular disciplines and university teachers would have been articulated from within. Even Wüst was not openly blamed for his commitment to National Socialism. While Wüst's political engagement had been outstanding, his scientific views represented mainstream thoughts to be found among many others in the field of religious and Oriental studies. Therefore the question remains if parts of Wüst's thinking persisted although his person was subjected to a collective *damnatio memoriae*. The following two examples provide evidence of an affirmative answer to that question. They apply to the two main ideological reference points of Wüst I have discussed in this article: Herman Wirth and Julius Evola.

It is quite astonishing that the organizers of the 8th International Congress for the History of Religions allowed a distinguished Nazi ideologue such as Wirth to participate in the Rome convention in 1955. But not only Wirth, also a Bernhard Kummer and Otto Höfler, and in addition to them others like Franz Altheim, Herman Lommel, Gustav Mensching, and Wilhelm Emil Mühlmann who also had had a strong leaning towards National Socialism came to Rome presenting their lectures as if nothing had happened. No protest, not even a slight critical comment raised against the presence of former Nazi academics. Wirth, whose participation was promoted by Friedrich Heiler, resumed the old subject matter and talked about "Die Entstehung der Heerkönigsreligionen der indo-europäischen Völkerwanderungszeit und das Ende des kultischen Matriarchates" (The formation of military leaders' religions during the Indo-European migration time and the end of cult-matriarchy).¹⁴² Directly after the war Heiler had begun

¹⁴² See the *Atti dell'VIII Congresso Internazionale di Storia delle Religioni. Roma 17-23 Aprile 1955* (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni [1956]), pp. 373-375. The title of Höfler's lecture was

to intervene verbally and in writing for Wirth's release from internment.¹⁴³ His support enabled Wirth to restart spreading his views in the 1950s. Of course Wirth had to alter the former Indo-Germanic to a European vocabulary and to omit the previous goal of justifying the racial superiority of the Nordic people. The Rome conference acted as a stage for Wirth to carry on with a modified version of his theories and particularly to seek for assistance for his plans to establish a museum which now held the title of a "Ureuropamuseum." In Germany Wirth founded a new organization "Europäische Sammlung für Urgemeinschaftskunde" (ESU, European Collection for the Knowledge of Primal Community). Heiler sustained Wirth's endeavors as far as he could. He even became a member of the executive committee of the ESU. In a very positive assessment Heiler called Wirth an eminent researcher whom the study of primordial history owes valuable momentum. Heiler's expert opinion dated from 1954 and was of great help for Wirth in his advertising campaign.

It appears rather strange that the decided Christian Heiler bolstered the activities of the co-founder of the SS-"Ahnenerbe" and devoted Pagan Herman Wirth. Two reasons lie behind Heiler's behavior. First, Heiler naively believed that Wirth had been expelled from the "Ahnenerbe" due to a political opposition.¹⁴⁴ Relying on the widespread idea of a rightful beginning of National Socialism that had been distorted by radicals, Wirth was in Heiler's view a credulous but honest spokesperson of the worthy part of the Third Reich's aspirations. Wirth's maltreatment seemed him to prove that theory. On a similar misinterpretation depended Heiler's frequent reference to his own persecution in order to increase the authority of his arguing, not only in the case of Wirth.¹⁴⁵ But more important, Heiler wanted to include Wirth's collection of Scandinavian plaster cards to the "Religionskundliche Sammlung." Therefore he repeatedly appealed to the

"Der Sakralcharakter des germanischen Königtums" and that of Kummer "Sverre und Magnus. Ein Lebensbeispiel zur Frage nach Ursprung und Fortwirkung demokratischen und sakralen Königtums in Skandinavien" (ibid., pp. 359–361 and pp. 368–371).

¹⁴³ This and the following after the archive of the Religionskundliche Sammlung, Marburg, D II 8.

¹⁴⁴ Heinrich Frick argued similarly in a letter to Tor Andrae on December 7, 1953. Asking for support for Wirth, Frick said that Wirth had suffered political oppression in the Third Reich. Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ For a critique of Heiler's claim, see H. Junginger, "Christel Matthias Schröder (1915–1996) und seine Bedeutung für die deutsche Religionswissenschaft," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 9 (2001), pp. 235–268, esp. pp. 242–244.

Hessian Ministry of Culture and Education for financial and technical support to transfer Wirth's material to Marburg. And indeed parts of it were stored in the Marburg castle. Only in the preparatory phase of the 10th International Congress for the History of Religions that took place in Marburg in September 1960, Heiler distanced himself from Wirth. Wirth had demanded to use the conference as a platform to publicize his museum plans and to guide official congress excursions to his collection. Offended by Heiler's rejection Wirth abstained from participating. In his place other previous Nazi ideologues took part in the Marburg IAHR-conference, for instance Jakob Wilhelm Hauer and a whole 'delegation' of the former Amt Rosenberg.¹⁴⁶ In 1998 Wirth's plaster card collection finally found a new home in Spital am Pyhrn in Austria in the rock art museum of the former "Ahnenerbe"-collaborator Ernst Burgstaller.¹⁴⁷

In the context of Heiler and Otto one should remember that Wüst's first and Heiler's last semester at the University of Munich (Heiler taught from 1918 to 1920 in Munich) overlapped. Afterwards Wüst studied history of religions with Rudolf Franz Merkel, a pupil of Rudolf Otto, at the University of Munich. In the 1920s Wüst was quite receptive of Otto's phenomenological approach. When in February 1939 Heinrich Frick tried to assemble collaborators for a new *Festschrift* at the occasion of Otto's 70th birthday, he asked Wüst to join as well. Wüst, as Frick wrote, had already made a contribution to Otto's 60th birthday. Frick now hoped that Wüst might again share the idea that the holy had still a mission to fulfill.¹⁴⁸ Since Wüst does not appear among the contributors, it seems at first that he had donated money. Of course, in 1939 Wüst had no interest to become engaged in a *Festschrift* honoring

¹⁴⁶ Former Rosenberg affiliates were Eberhard Achterberg, Friedrich Cornelius, Matthes Ziegler, and, again, Bernhard Kummer. See the proceedings *X. Internationaler Kongress für Religionsgeschichte, 11.–17. September 1960 in Marburg/Lahn*, ed. by the Organisationsausschuß (Marburg: Elvert, 1961). The record of participants includes the names of Biczais, Eliade, Gundert, Kummer, Philippidis, and Wikander – appearing in this book as subject matter – as well.

¹⁴⁷ See Franz Mandl, "Das Erbe der Ahnen. Ernst Burgstaller/Herman Wirth und die österreichische Felsbildforschung" (with an English summary), in *Mitteilungen der Anisa* 1/2 (1999), pp. 41–67. Luitgard Löw, Bamberg, is currently finishing her habilitation on *Die skandinavischen Felsbilder in der Deutung völkischer Laienforschung. Das Beispiel Herman Wirth und sein Umfeld*; cf. her article "Der 'Fall Herman Wirth'," in *Archäologisches Nachrichtenblatt* 10–3 (2005), pp. 315–320.

¹⁴⁸ Letter of Frick to Wüst on February 13, 1939, personal files Walther Wüst, University Archive Munich, O-N-14.

Rudolf Otto. The political development of Wüst was probably also the reason why his assistant Hans Hartog – the later son-in-law of Friedrich Heiler – changed from the University of Munich to Marburg.¹⁴⁹

Julius Evola, the eminent Italian fascist and antisemite, replaced Wirth as Wüst's ideological reference point in the second half of the 1930s. Evola's less voelkish and more imperial critique covering (but not limited to) culture, materialism, liberalism, and Judaism attracted Wüst's interest when he had assumed a leading position in the "Ahnenerbe." Wüst was one of Evola's main supporters in the SS. Others rejected Evola's aristocratic thinking as inadequate to National Socialism and its claim to act in conformity with the interests of Germany's proletarians. Wüst met Evola several times in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁵⁰ He shared with him the intention of establishing a spiritual counter-movement against bolshevism and Judaism in Europe. The ideology of the Waffen-SS followed a similar approach to include as much nations and movements as possible into the war against the dark forces of evil, however under the auspices of a German dominion and not on the basis of Evola's ideas. Nazi Germany was, in Franco Ferraresi's words, not Evola's "natural habitat."¹⁵¹

After World War II Evola advanced to one of the leading intellectuals of the European far right. His ideological influence even increased with the end of communism in Europe. He is rightly called "a key reference-point for all modern far-right thinkers."¹⁵² To make Evola acceptable outside the radical right it was necessary to purify him from the accusation of being a mere fascist and antisemite. Over the last several years a strategy in bringing Evola in opposition to National Socialism has emerged. The Hancke-assessment of the Secret Service of the SS contributes greatly to that aim. Comparable in that regard is

¹⁴⁹ In a letter to his teacher Heiler Christel Matthias Schröder wrote on September 12, 1937 that Hartog had wanted to write a dissertation under Wüst. But his opinion that a conception of sin was to be found in the Vedas caused problems with Wüst. Literal remains of Ch. M. Schröder, Department for the Study of Religion, Tübingen, s.v. Heiler.

¹⁵⁰ See Evola's letter to Wüst on September 16, 1940 announcing his visit a few days later. Evola said that their first encounter took place during the second Nordic Thing in Bremen on October 22, 1934. Personal files of Walther Wüst, University Archive Munich, O-N-14.

¹⁵¹ Franco Ferraresi, "Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 28 (1987), pp. 107–151, here p. 107.

¹⁵² Peter Davies and Derek Lynch, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (London-New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 207.

another negative evaluation originating from Karl Maria Wiligut. It is obvious that these texts were translated and published to serve ideological and not scientific purposes.¹⁵³ A clear mention of the references is avoided in order to rely on an exclusive interpretation of a hermetic source – the opposite of an open scholarly debate. The "Ahnenerbe"-statement of Joseph Otto Plaßmann and other material from German archives pertaining to Evola is unknown or excluded. From a serious point of view it could be hardly possible to use the vote of a maniac such as Wiligut to 'prove' an antagonism between Evola and the SS or National Socialism. Wiligut's bewildered fantasies and his quest of occult magical forces becomes visible when he asked Bruno Beger before the start of the Tibet expedition, as Christopher Hale writes, to find evidence for his assumption that Tibetan women "carry magical stones lodged inside their vaginas."¹⁵⁴

Parallel to this strategy of distraction rightist theoreticians try to link Evola with more reputable thinkers many of whom are attached to the so-called conservative revolution.¹⁵⁵ In that scheme of raising Evola's respectability Mircea Eliade has become a corner stone. Particularly Philippe Baillet, Claudio Mutti, and H.T. Hansen emphasize a strong impact of Evola on Eliade.¹⁵⁶ The Austrian esotericist H.T. Hansen, who is esteemed as one of the main and best informed propagators of Evolian thoughts, contributed a foreword of more than 100 pages to the German edition of Evola's *Gli uomini e le rovine* that has become highly influential and is considered a definitive introduction to Evola's thinking.¹⁵⁷ The Hohenrain publishing house that printed the book

¹⁵³ See B. Zoratto, ed., *Julius Evola nei documenti segreti dell'Ahnenerbe*, pp. 33–43 and Gianfranco de Turris and idem, eds., *Julius Evola nei rapporti delle SS* (Quaderni di testi Evoliani 33) (Rome: Europa Liberia Editrice, 2000), pp. 11–13.

¹⁵⁴ Christopher Hale, *Himmler's Crusade. The True Story of the 1938 Nazi Expedition into Tibet* (London et al.: Bantam Press, 2003), p. 155.

¹⁵⁵ See H.T. Hansen, "Julius Evola und die deutsche konservative Revolution," *Criticon* 158, April-June (1998) pp. 16–32, separately printed as *Julius Evola et la Révolution conservatrice* (Montreuil: Les Deux Étendards, 2002).

¹⁵⁶ Philippe Baillet, "Julius Evola et Mircea Eliade (1927–1974): Une amitié manquée, avec des extraits de deux lettres d'Evola à Eliade," *Les deux Étendards* 1, septembre/décembre (1988), pp. 45–55, Claudio Mutti, *Mircea Eliade e la guardia di ferro* (Parma: Edizioni all'insegna del Veltro, n.d. [1989]), esp. pp. 38–55, and H.T. Hansen, "Mircea Eliade, Julius Evola und die Integrale Tradition," in *Über das Initiatische von Julius Evola. Aufsatzsammlung* (Sinzheim: H. Frietsch Verlag, 1998), pp. 9–50.

¹⁵⁷ H.T. Hansen, "Evola's politisches Wirken," introduction of J. Evola, *Menschen inmitten von Ruinen* (Tübingen: Hohenrain, 1991), pp. 7–132, English trans. *Men among ruins. Postwar reflections of a radical traditionalist* (Rochester: Inner traditions, 2002), with an English translation of Hansen's German introduction (pp. 1–104 and pp. 300–310)

belongs to the Tübingen Grabert-Verlag, a leading right wing publisher in Germany particularly proficient in Holocaust denial. Its founder Herbert Grabert was a member of the German Faith Movement and pupil of Jakob Wilhelm Hauer. After the death of his father, Grabert's son Wigbert continued publishing books pointing to a spiritual alternative to the Judeo-Christian model.¹⁵⁸ The second key text of Hansen trying to increase Evola's reputation is the long preface "Mircea Eliade, Julius Evola und die integrale Tradition" introducing a collection of Evola's *Antaios* articles published by Hansen under the title *Über das Initiatische*. Discussing an article of Paola Pisi Hansen accentuates the influence of Evola on Eliade.¹⁵⁹ Because Eliade embarked on an academic career and became a member of the establishment himself, he 'forgot' his former friend and hid the connection with him. Mutti, Baillet, and Hansen stress Eliade's political opportunism although admitting that traditionalist and hermetic ideas could not have been spread in this way without Eliade's belonging to the academe which remained closed for Evola. The metaphor used for Eliade's behavior is that of a Trojan Horse.¹⁶⁰

Whether (or how far) this is the case with Eliade, the analogy of a Trojan Horse certainly applies to Hansen himself. H.T. Hansen's real name is Hans Thomas Hakl, known as author of a well written and cautiously arguing study on the Eranos movement.¹⁶¹ To conceal his role as an advocate and propagator of the Italian fascist, Hakl uses Hansen as *nom de guerre* at the Evolian front. His non-fictitious identity is reserved for another kind of audience. Without such a camouflage, as Hakl rightly assumes, his influence in the academic world would be limited. The actual climax of Hakl's plan of action is the successful placing of an article about Evola in the second edition of the renown *Encyclopedia of*

and an additional preface by Hansen to the American edition (pp. xi-xvi and pp. 298-300).

¹⁵⁸ See Martin Finkenberger and H. Junginger, eds., *Im Dienste der Lügen. Herbert Grabert (1901-1978) und seine Verlage* (Aschaffenburg: Alibri, 2004).

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Paola Pisi, "I 'tradizionalisti' e la formazione del pensiero di Eliade," in Luciano Arcella et al., eds., *Confronto con Mircea Eliade. Archetipi mitici e identità storica* (Milano: Jaca Book, 1998), pp. 43-133, cf. in this context also Natale Spineto, "Mircea Eliade and traditionalism," *Aries* 1 (2001), pp. 63-87.

¹⁶⁰ Hansen, "Evola's politisches Wirken," pp. 21-26.

¹⁶¹ Hans Thomas Hakl, *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos. Unbekannte Begegnungen von Wissenschaft und Esoterik. Eine alternative Geistesgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Bretten: Scientia Nova, 2001).

Religion.¹⁶² To venerate a notorious antisemite and irreconcilable enemy of the Western democratic system seems to have become quite normal if accompanied by the expression of a few mental reservations which Hakl added to quiet possible criticism. Hakl went so far to quote his own pseudonym in the article. How stupid does the author think about the *ER*-readers? But what calls more attention are the reasons compelling the editors to include such an article. It remains unclear on the basis of which sort of accomplishments (religious, scientific, or political) they decided to reserve six columns for today's most important right wing intellectual in Europe. From Hakl's point of view it is a combination of all three elements that makes Evola an outstanding thinker. Since Evola had nothing produced in terms of ordinary scholarship, Hakl's aim must be to connect him with prominent historians of religions such as Raffaele Pettazzoni, Karl Kerényi, Angelo Brelich, Giuseppe Tucci, Franz Altheim, and, above all, Mircea Eliade. Even if the editors had no knowledge of the real identity of the author it is scandalous to honor one of Europe's most influential postwar fascists, someone who has written the preface of the heinous Protocols of the Elders of Zion, with an entry in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Having achieved such an excellent opportunity of advertising Evolian thoughts, Hakl correctly refers to this sort of self-fulfilling prophecy in writing: "Academic circles have become increasingly interested in Evola."¹⁶³

The desire to revive the myths and ideological mystifications prevailing in fascist Italy, National Socialist Germany, and other countries or movements with a fascist leaning after 1945 normally presumed a modification of the former ideas. At least the main fascist catch-phrases ought to be deleted. Evola never undertook the slightest attempt to do so with the result that his influence was restricted to right wing circles. But also Herman Wirth had no chance to be taken serious in Germany although he tried to impart his former Nordic symbol theory with a new European appearance and although he could come, with the help of Heiler, into a loose contact with the academic study of religion. More public success had the former head of the "Ahnenerbe"-department "Ortung und Landschaftsbilder" (Location and Landscape Scenes)

¹⁶² H.T. Hakl, "Evola, Julius," *Encyclopedia of Religion* 5 (2005), pp. 2904-2907. A similar article of him with a more plain language appeared ten years earlier in the German right wing dictionary *Lexikon des Konservatismus*, ed. by Caspar von Schrenck Norzing (Graz: Stocker, 1996), pp. 165-167.

¹⁶³ Hakl, "Evola, Julius," *Encyclopedia of Religion* 5 (2005), p. 2906.

Werner Müller (1907–1990).¹⁶⁴ Müller transmuted his previous occupation with the Indo-Germans into the study of the North American Indians, becoming a well-known specialist in that field in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁶⁵ But similar to the situation of his “Ahnenerbe”-colleague Otto Huth, it was impossible for Müller to establish himself as a university teacher in Germany after the war. The career of both Müller and Huth unfolded in parallel and ended in Tübingen’s university library.¹⁶⁶

Their connection with the Aryan Myth in the years of fascism impeded Grabert, Hauer, Huth, Müller, Wirth, Wüst and others from returning to a university position. If their theories still attained a marginal influence, it was restricted to groups at the fringe of the society. The political change after 1945 was connected with a Christian backlash that took effect specifically in the study of religion and barred the former agitators of an Aryan or Indo-Germanic mythology from reentering the academic stage. Under such circumstances a revival of any kind of Aryanism was rather unlikely. But with the end of communism in Europe a new situation emerged, a situation comparable to the ideological confusion at the end of the 1920s. The rising susceptibility to old myths, traditional knowledge, and hermetic texts met a new response from the side of Indo-European mythologies.¹⁶⁷ It brought Evola from an outsider position to the center of the political discourse. Yet a further success would require a more general understanding of what might become the ideological substructure of a new imperial Europe. It is probable that the future quarrels for religious hegemony will occur along the same lines for and against the significance of Christianity.

¹⁶⁴ See the diagram on p. 142. The task of this department was to detect places of Indo-Germanic relevance.

¹⁶⁵ See the very positive article of Mircea Eliade, “Werner Müller und die ‘allgemeine Religionswissenschaft,’” in *Unter dem Pflaster liegt der Strand* (1982), pp. 13–17.

¹⁶⁶ The parallels between Huth and Müller include a dissertation at the University of Bonn under Carl Clemen, the directorship of an “Ahnenerbe”-department, a teaching position at the “Reichsuniversität Straßburg,” a common escape from Strasbourg to Tübingen at the end of 1944, and a new beginning at Tübingen’s university library. Party member since 1933 and SS member since 1940, Müller was first involved in the “Ahnenerbe”-research on the *Ura-Linda-Chronik*. With the help of the SS he could achieve the habilitation and a lectureship at the German “Reichsuniversität Straßburg” in 1942 and 1944. See <http://homepages.uni-tuebingen.de/gerd.simon/ChrMueller-Werner.pdf> for further information.

¹⁶⁷ See H. Junginger, “Sigrid Hunke (1913–1999): Europe’s New Religion and its Old Stereotypes.” In Hubert Cancik and Uwe Puschner, eds., *Antisemitismus, Paganismus, Völkische Religion – Anti-Semäismus, Paganism, Völkisch Religion* (München: Saur, 2004), pp. 151–162, for a German approach to re-model the former Pagan tradition.

Which role the academic study of religion will adopt in this game is an open question. Its development in the 1930s and 1940s reveals a greater interest in creating myths instead of analyzing them. The enticement of leaving the academic margin and becoming influential not only at the university but in the society as a whole had an overwhelming charm which only very few historians of religions resisted.¹⁶⁸

Walther Wüst was a scholar who totally surrendered himself and his scholarship to the ideology of National Socialism. Although compensated with extraordinary might and influence, he served as an intellectual lackey of the NS regime. Wüst internalized his role to such a degree that he believed in the function of the academic study of religion as a mere tool for the exploitation of religious capital in order to secure and fortify the power relations on which his position relied. Though the state he supported lasted only twelve instead of thousand years, his comprehension of the study of religion has perhaps more general and modern features as we would appreciate. To abstract how well both religion and the study of religion functions from its content in behalf of a politically accepted order points far beyond the NS period. Surely opportunism and the lack of self-reflexivity was not confined to Wüst and characteristic of many other scholars attached to National Socialism. But the willingness to identify himself with a criminal regime, becoming all the more involved in criminal activities, distinguishes him from the majority of his colleagues. Since it is hardly possible to learn something positive from such an example, it may serve as a *memento mori* to remind later generations of the destruction of scholarship from within.

¹⁶⁸ A special issue of the *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* with the title “Das Überleben der Religionswissenschaft im Nationalsozialismus” (*ZfR* 9, 2001) is concerned with this group of scholars.

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