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Julius Evola's Doctrine Put into Practice”

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## **Abstract**

Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, den Einfluss des Gedankenguts des italienischen Philosophen und Esoterikers Julius Evola (1898-1974) auf das politisch orientierte esoterische Milieu und den Bearbeitungsprozess des esoterischen Diskurses innerhalb der radikalen Rechten zu analysieren und zu definieren. Evolas Traditionalismus hat das gesamte Milieu stark beeinflusst, sowohl direkt als auch indirekt: Sein Werk hat in den letzten Jahrzehnten an Popularität gewonnen und wurde in mehrere Sprachen übersetzt.

Da die radikale Rechte insgesamt ein zu weites und vielfältiges Feld ist, wird die Arbeit von Paul Waggener (b. 1984), Mitglied der amerikanischen ethnicist-germanischen neopaganen Gruppe "Wolves of Vinland", und seinem Projekt "Operation Werewolf" zur spezifischen Fallstudie.

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There was a sound like a thousand metal voices shouting “Hail!” cut off abruptly. And there was a black dog in the road. It had to be a dog. It was dog-shaped. There are some dogs which, when you meet them, remind you that, despite thousands of years of man-made evolution, every dog is still only two meals away from being a wolf. These dogs advance deliberately, purposefully, the wilderness made flesh, their teeth yellow, their breath a-stink, while in the distance their owners witter, “He’s an old sippy really, just poke him if he’s a nuisance,” and in the green of their eyes the red campfires of the Pleistocene gleam and flicker...

Good Omens – Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett

## **1. Introduction**

Julius Evola (1898–1974; see Figure 1) is one of the most influential representatives of Traditionalism, a worldview based on the idea of a *philosophia perennis*, that is, a universal wisdom, transcending time, cultures, and religion. The so-called Traditionalist school of thought has its beginner in French intellectual René Guénon (1886–1951).

Evola developed his own heavily politicised strand of Traditionalism: he was defined as “one of the most respected fascist gurus” by semiotician Umberto Eco (1932–2016) (Eco 1995). The choice of a term such as ‘guru,’ with several layers of interpretation to its meaning, is not random and offers a multi-dimensional insight into this ambivalent and controversial figure.

In recent years Evola has been quoted and mentioned quite often in the public sphere by politicians and public figures, especially considering that he is a highly controversial figure and tightly linked to two dictatorial regimes of the twentieth

century. Steve Bannon's (b. 1953) case in the Vatican in 2014 (Feder 2016) is a fitting example of this. Moreover, Evola used to be present as a suggested author in the "Books" section on the website of the Greek Chrysi Avgi party (Sedgwick 2012). His work is praised and quoted by activists and representatives of the New Right, Alt-Right, and other radical Right groups like Richard Spencer (b. 1978), Jack Donovan (b. 1974), and Greg Johnson (b. 1953). More recently, he is also credited amongst the many and diverse sources of inspiration behind American Far-Right conspirational movement QAnon (Vv. Aa. 2021), members of which were directly involved in the storming of the Capitol in Washington D.C. at the beginning of January 2021, with one of the most emblematic pictures of the events capturing a self-appointed 'Q Shaman' in his regalia (Barry et al. 2021).

Paul Waggener (b. 1984), American author, musician and amongst the founders of a movement called Operation Werewolf, quotes Evola as one of the authors who influenced him the most, together with philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), fantasy authors Robert E. Howard (1906–1936) and H. P. Lovecraft (1890–1937), and scholar of Traditionalist leanings Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) (Johnson and Waggener 2021). Besides, the influence of Evola's body of work can be recognised in the structure and the mindset promoted by Waggener and his associates.

Most of the scholarly work about Evola analyses his thought from a political perspective and touches just incidentally the metaphysical, esoteric, or spiritual aspects of it, mainly because the two aspects are inextricably connected. Evola was an active esotericist, not merely a scholar, and his success even nowadays has probably very much to do with his esoteric activity and his metaphysical writings; this is well represented by the milieus in which he is popular, where the political

dimension of religion is saliently expressed. In many religionist approaches the realms of religion and politics are merged. See, e.g., Islam or many New Religious Movements.

Despite being very successful nowadays and seeing a rise in popularity in the mainstream in the last twenty to ten years, Evola's opus and the development of his thought are to be understood together with the history of Europe—and of Italy especially—during the most part of the twentieth century. He lived through most of it, was a very active actor in it for the first half of the century, and the disillusionment and pessimism in his work from the 1950s to the time of his death had a deep impact on the younger generations of his time.

Indeed, observed from the perspective of globalization, the racist heathen milieu of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in many ways parallels the pagan revival that emerged a century earlier in Europe, during what Roland Robertson terms the 'take-off' phase of globalization, from 1880 to 1924. In the wake of industrialization, modernization, urbanization, rationality, positivism, secularization, and imperialism arose a nostalgic idealization of the agrarian past, ancient traditions, magic, occultism, secret societies, lost worlds, paganism, vegetarianism, Theosophy, anthroposophy, and primitivism. This was the time of Wagner, Nietzsche, Evola, Blavatsky, Crowley, Jung, von List, and Spengler – all philosophers and artists who also exert a powerful influence in the current pagan revival (Gardell 2003: 18).

These parallels might be what makes the thought of Evola popular in the milieu of the first decades of the twenty-first century; in a postmodern world where traditional gender roles and norms are challenged, a great deal of socialisation happens online, and many people—young men especially—feel

alienated from modern consumerist culture. The Right has experienced a growing following of adolescents with a postmodern loss of identity, searching

for a sense of belonging and believing, as a result of the loss of grand narratives. Followers of the radical Right are Europeans in search of meaning and coherence in a world perceived full of arbitrary and capricious events, utilizing politics of identity as their means, and a revival of ‘pagan values’ as their goal (Senholt 2014: 264).

In this work, I will analyse Operation Werewolf; a phenomenon with origins in the USA and developed inside the broader American Germanic and Norse Neo-pagan milieu, appealing to men of various age groups—mainly white men of European ancestry—which possesses an ideology and a philosophy heavily indebted to Julius Evola’s *Weltanschauung*. Evolian Traditionalism holds particular relevance for the field of Religious Studies, as Evola corresponded with Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) during the latter’s youth, a close relationship and an influence that trickled down in Eliade’s vocabulary in scholarly works; terms such as ‘telluric,’ ‘uranian,’ ‘chthonic’ etc. are a result of Evola’s and Eliade’s relationship. Such influence does not need to be ‘cancelled’ but does indeed need to be addressed and acknowledged.

The purpose of this work is to contextualise a recent phenomenon like Operation Werewolf in the broader context of esotericism and Germanic Neo-pagan religious practices intersecting the radical Right milieu while tracing back much of its structure and inspiration to Traditionalism and especially to Evola, whose work, directly and indirectly, has had a significant impact on the faction of the cultic milieu politically aligned with the Right.

The research regarding Evola is based both on primary and secondary sources. The research on Operation Werewolf is based on Waggener’s publications: books and zines, online material such as blog posts, podcast episodes, youtube videos,

interviews; after a few attempts, he also accepted to be interviewed for this project: the interview was eventually conducted on May 5, 2021.

## **2. Julius Evola**

Evola “played a major role in conveying a radical political Traditionalism to anti-modern intellectuals” (Senholt 2014: 245), his own blend of Traditionalism is heavily politicised. He was very active in the political context: not as a politician, even though most of his work is metapolitical. He also was a practising esotericist, and he represents a clear example of overlap between esotericism and the radical Right, probably one of the most influential figures of this kind in the twentieth century.

### **2.1. The Path of Cinnabar: Evola through his Own Eyes**

It would not be an empty boast on my part, but rather an objective observation to claim that I am the only person from the *Sturm und Drang* phase of Italian culture to have maintained my original position, and to have sought positive-points of reference without coming to any compromise with the world we had all once rejected (Evola 2009: 12-13).

Julius Evola was born Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola in Rome on May 19, 1898; his family originally stemmed from Sicily. Biographies often report him holding the title of baron, despite him not referring to himself as such and no traces of it in his family line. According to Hans Thomas Hakl, the title “could date from a



provocative Dadaistic pose of his youth, when he was known for his dandyish behavior” (Hakl 2019: 54). His autobiography *Il Cammino del Cinabro* (The Path of Cinnabar) is the author’s own guide to his work and through the evolution of his thought. It constitutes more a reader than an autobiography: information regarding the author’s life is relatively scarce, for he avoids any personal information unless strictly necessary, as he himself puts it:

The best way to provide a guide to my words is to begin by describing their genesis, premises and original aims. While it will prove impossible to completely avoid autobiographical references, autobiographical details will be left out as far as possible, and employed mainly to draw light on secondary elements present in my books (Evola 2009: 17).

As Rota points out in *Intellettuali, Dittatura, Razzismo di Stato* (Rota 2008: 72-73), even the accident that led to his paralysis is discussed almost *en passant*, and willingly so, the lack of other biographical sources (at least, readily accessible ones) regarding Evola makes it so that scholars studying his work have to rely on it heavily—regardless of their views on Traditionalism—this constitutes a limit.

Even though *Il Cammino del Cinabro* undisputedly constitutes an important document, it should not be considered a fully reliable source, considering that he had a clear agenda writing it, and succeeded in creating a specific narrative regarding his persona.

Evola was very active—although not always popular—in Italy’s political and intellectual discourse from the end of the First World War onwards (and briefly in Germany as well, where he worked for the *Ahnenerbe*).<sup>1</sup> He was never a member

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<sup>1</sup> *Ahnenerbe* (*Forschungsgemeinschaft Deutsches Ahnenerbe*; literally, Research Foundation for the German Ancestral Heritage) was a research institution active in Germany from 1935 to 1945. It operated under the patronage of the NSDAP. The head of the Ahnenerbe was Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945).

of the Fascist Party nor always on best terms with the Italian regime, yet he wrote for *Critica Fascista*, the intellectual periodical of the Fascist Party; *Il Cammino del Cinabro* was published in 1963—that is about two decades after the end of Second World War—and has been then revised and expanded in 1972. The political climate in Italy and Europe definitely changed during these two decades, and Evola's views were subject to a change, too—if partially so. At the time of the 1972 edition, Italy had entered the period of social and political turmoil known as *Anni di Piombo* (Years of Lead),<sup>2</sup> marked both by Far-Left and Far-Right acts of terrorism. Despite his autobiography not being a complete revisionist take on his own past, the context in which it came to be cannot be dismissed.

### 2.1.1. Personality and Intellectual Influences

I owe very little to the milieu in which I was born, to the education which I received, and to my own blood. I found myself largely opposed to both the dominant tradition of the West – Christianity and Catholicism – and to contemporary civilisation – the ‘modern world’ of democracy and materialism. I felt removed from both the prevailing mentality of the nation where I was born –

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<sup>2</sup> *Anni di Piombo* is the name given to a period of Italian History spanning from the late 1960s to the late 1980s, characterised by social and political turmoil and marked by political terrorism, of both radical Left and radical Right origin. One of the first and most famous terror episodes is the bombing of Piazza Fontana in Milan, perpetrated by radical Right activists, killing seventeen. At first radical Left groups were under suspicion, this led to the death of anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli (1928–1969) while in police custody as one of the suspects. Across the 1960s and 1970s civilians, unionists, and law enforcement figures were targeted both by Right and Left-wing terrorist groups. In 1978 Aldo Moro (1916–1978), former Prime Minister and then president of *Democrazia Cristiana* or DC (Christian Democracy), the Italian majority party at the time, was kidnapped and subsequently murdered by members of the *Brigate Rosse* (BR, Red Brigades). On August 2, 1980, a bomb at the main train station of Bologna wounded two-hundred people and killed eighty-five. The bomb had been planted by members of the Neo-fascist organisation *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* (NAR, Armed Revolutionary Nuclei). Some of the people involved or allegedly involved in this attack subsequently fled the country and scattered mainly across different European countries, where they came in contact with local like-minded groups.

Italy – and from my own family milieu. Rather, such elements exercised an indirect, negative influence on me, as they forced me to react (Evola 2009: 8).

Evola portrays himself as an outsider from the get-go and quotes Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863–1938), Nietzsche, Carlo Michaelstaedter (1887–1910), Otto Weininger (1880–1903) and Max Stirner (1806–1856) amongst his primary influences during his youth.

When it comes to his personality, he describes himself through two main character traits: an “impulse towards transcendence” manifesting itself in the form of

a spontaneous detachment from what is merely human, from what is generally regarded as normal, particularly in the sphere of affection, [...] whenever such a detached disposition manifested itself in the sphere of my individuality, it was the cause of a certain insensitivity and cold-heartedness on my part (Evola 2009: 6-7);

and what he calls his “*kshatriya* bent”<sup>3</sup> which he defines in Traditionalist terms as

in India, the word *kshatriya* was used to describe the human type inclined to action and performance: the ‘warrior’ type, as opposed to the religious, priestly and contemplative type of the *brāhmaṇa*.<sup>4</sup> [...] something which I theoretically expressed through my doctrine of power and autarchy. Yet this trait was also the one existential trait which allowed me to appreciate those anachronistic values of a different world: the world of a hierarchical, aristocratic and feudal civilisation. [...] As my predominant mental disposition, this *kshatriya* trait is also responsible for my tendency to take a clear-cut, uncompromising stand [...] (Evola 2009: 7).

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<sup>3</sup> *Kshatriya*, Sanskrit: “governing, endowed with sovereignty” and “a member of the military or reigning order (which in later times constituted the second caste)” in the Monier Williams Dictionary.

<sup>4</sup> *Brāhmaṇa*, Sanskrit: “one who has divine knowledge (sometimes applied to Agni), a Brāhmaṇa, a man belonging to the 1st of the 3 twice-born classes and of the 4 original divisions of the Hindū body (generally a priest, [...] the name is strictly only applicable to one who knows and repeats the Veda)” in the Monier Williams Dictionary.

### 2.1.2. The Artist

Like with many others, the First World War had a lasting impact on Evola: the years leading to the war were a time of political and intellectual unrest, and he formed personal ties with several exponents of Futurism such as Ignazio Balla (1885–1976), Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944), and Giovanni Papini (1881–1956), the only avant-garde artistic movement active in Italy at the time. At the outbreak of the war, Futurists were very vocally campaigning in support of Italian irredentism and interventionism; one of the points in the Futurist Manifesto by Marinetti reads: “war is the only hygiene of the world” (Marinetti et al. 1914: 6). Evola states not sharing the anti-German sentiments widespread amongst the Futurists, yet, aged nineteen, he enrolled, as he “believed war to be necessary from a strictly revolutionary perspective. [...] Italy, we all believed, was to awaken and renew itself through combat” (Evola 2009: 14) In the later stages of the war, he served as an artillery officer at the Austrian front on the Asiago plateau. Not having had part in any major operation, he seems unimpressed with his bellic experience.

After the war, his interest turned to the Dada movement, developing a friendship with its founder Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), and he went on to become the main representative of the movement in Italy, the only one of some international relevance. He found Futurism too loud and superficial, unlike Dadaism—the latter being more radical and superior in comparison with the former because of its manifest intellectualism, which he considered a positive trait, “as it affirmed the supremacy of will over spontaneity” (Evola 2009: 21); his essay *Arte Astratta*

(Abstract Art) outlines the theory behind it and speaks of art as coming out of “higher” consciousness (Hakl 2019: 57).

### **2.1.3. The Magician**

The Italian National Fascist Party was founded in 1921 and rose to power in 1922,<sup>5</sup> around the same time Evola abruptly ended his artistic career, allegedly because he felt that he “had exhausted the possibilities in this field, and chose to move on” (Evola 2009: 23). His interests shifted to the fields of Magic, Occultism, Alchemy, and ‘oriental’ Religions—filtered by Theosophical writings at least at the beginning, and started experimenting with drugs as well.

At the time, most of the knowledge about anything coming from India was mediated by the interpretation of it given by the Theosophical Society:

Blavatsky’s view of Hinduism imagined a mystical “Brahmanism.” In search of an esoteric philosophy, she and subsequent Theosophists sought to retrieve a noble spirituality that the West had lost [...]. This led her to distinguish between what she clearly believed to be the exoteric crudities of popular Hinduism and the sublime esoteric teachings of Brahmanism (Partridge 2013: 326).

Effects of this Theosophical bias are still lingering to this day (Djurdjevic 2014: 141).

Decio Calvari (1863–1937), then president of the Roman Independent Theosophical League, introduced Evola to Tantrism, who soon afterwards began to correspond with Sir John Woodroffe (1865–1936). The British Orientalist

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<sup>5</sup> The March on Rome in October 1922 is regarded as the official beginning of the Ventennio Fascista: after a demonstration held by the Fascist Party and its paramilitary organs, in which they entered the city of Rome, King Victor Emmanuel III (1869–1947) appointed Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) as the Prime Minister of the then Kingdom of Italy.

published several works on the Tantras—the most famous being *The Serpent Power: The Secrets of Tantric and Shaktic Yoga* (1919) under the pseudonym Arthur Avalon; Woodroffe's work was to become the main source for Evola's book *L'Uomo come Potenza* (Man as Power) published in 1927.

It is crucial to keep in mind that Evola was not simply an armchair intellectual; besides being a practising esotericist and being active in the political world, he was also an expert mountaineer,<sup>6</sup> trying to embody what he held as the ideal, archetypical man.

#### 2.1.4. Magical Idealism

During this time, Evola developed the philosophical system called *Idealismo Magico* (Magical Idealism) and the theory of the *Individuo Assoluto* (Absolute Individual),<sup>7</sup> core features of his thought, the latter notably expanding a concept first employed by the German Romantic Novalis (1772–1801). As T. Sheehan puts it:

Evola's first philosophical works from the 'twenties were dedicated to reshaping neo-idealism from a philosophy of Absolute Spirit and Mind into a philosophy of the "absolute individual" and action. At first Evola seemed to follow Gentile's anti-intellectualist turn toward action and becoming (*verum et fieri convertuntur*, Gentile wrote), and he sought to reread Hegel's speculative dialectics of necessity in terms of a voluntaristic dialectics of freedom ruled by the maxim *tu devi diventare Dio*, 'You must become God' (Sheehan 1981: 52).

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<sup>6</sup> *Meditazioni delle vette* (Meditations on the Peaks), a collection of essays, was published posthumously in 1974.

<sup>7</sup> "My encounter with Lao Tzu, however, served to awaken certain elective affinities in me: it provided a glimpse of that Olympian superiority which is opposed to Western activism and exuberance" (Evola 2009: 32).

in Evola's words:

Beyond Magical Idealism, nothing remains for philosophy unless, of course, philosophy is to go bankrupt and become the mere expression of personal opinions subject to present contingencies. If a further development beyond Magical Idealism is to be imagined, this will be not a philosophical development, but a kind of action [...] (Evola 2009: 21).

In his philosophical works, he already used a substantial amount of terminology deriving from systems such as Alchemy and Tantra, acquired through his Theosophical contacts.

### **2.1.5. Practical Magic**

The question of Evola's own personal spiritual practice is not as important as that of Guénon's, since Guénon's practice was an example to other Traditionalists whereas Evola's practice was not. It is, nevertheless, still of some interest. It almost certainly included Hermetic elements, which are probably principally what Evola was contrasting with 'degenerate' magic. The Hermetic practice that most interested Evola was alchemy, which, he maintained, was not the 'infantile' stage of chemistry, for which it was often mistaken, but 'an initiatic science explained under a metallurgic-chemical disguise.' This interpretation of alchemy was later to be popularized by the widely read Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho in his novel *Alquimista* [The Alchemist].

To alchemy can almost certainly be added some form of neo-paganism, and also sexual magic (the techniques of managing states arising during sexual intercourse in order to manipulate various energies). [...] in 1967, toward the end of Evola's life, a French Muslim Traditionalist named Henry Hartung [...] asked Evola how he believed that self-realization was to be achieved. Evola replied that initiation was one possibility, 'but which, and under what circumstances?'

Elsewhere he indicated that he believed that Guénon's personal path 'offered very little' to people who 'don't want to turn themselves into Muslims and Orientals,' something Evola evidently did not want to do. In this he cut himself off from the central strand of Traditionalist spiritual practice. In conversation with Hartung, he listed six practices as alternatives to initiation: learning, loyalty (defined as 'interior neutrality, the opposite of hypocrisy'), withdrawal, 'virile energy,' 'symbolic visualization,' and 'interior concentration.' We can safely assume that at some point in his life Evola had tried all of these (Sedgwick 2004: 103-104).

The relationship with Arturo Reghini (1878–1946), mathematician and “a Pythagorean and a Freemason” (Hakl 2019: 58), was very important for the development of Evola's thought. They were both active in the same scene and wrote for the same publishers and journals revolving around esoteric and initiatic themes, such as *Atanór* (1924) and *Ignis* (1925); it is in an article written for the latter that the fundamental Evolian concept of deification is explicitly mentioned for the first time (Hakl 2018: 148-149).

“Evola longed for the ‘absolute individual’ with absolute freedom and absolute power, but also absolute responsibility. [...] Evola considered absolute freedom to be a primary sign of being ‘God,’ as it required being grounded in oneself alone and not depending upon any external factor” (Hakl 2018: 148-149). His interest wandered to different initiatic traditions, Mithraism amongst others. In his article *La via della realizzazione di sé secondo I Misteri di Mithra* (The Way of Realisation of Oneself According to the Mysteries of Mithras) from 1926 “he declares that at a certain stage (of inner development) it becomes clear that the myths of the (ancient) mysteries are essentially allusive transcriptions of a series of states of consciousness along the path of self-realization” (Hakl 2018: 150).



### 2.1.5.1. Tantra

Like Aleister Crowley, P. B. Randolph, and Theodor Reuss, Evola closely linked Tantra and a spiritual vision of sexuality to an ideal of liberation and freedom; it was the most powerful means to wage his ‘revolt against the modern world.’ The difference is that, for Evola, this meant a radical liberation from the old, decaying world of modern Christian Europe and a ‘counter revolutionary’ return to the hierarchical, imperial society of pre-Christian Rome. In so doing, however, he introduced a powerful new interpretation - and some might argue severe misinterpretation - of Tantra and sexual magic, by transforming it into a path of power, martial strength, and war. For Evola, this radical liberation must of necessity come by means of violence, and at least in his early years, he saw fascism as perhaps the most expedient means to achieve this violent liberation and return to ‘heroic,’ ‘masculine,’ and ‘virile’ ideals’ (Urban 2006: 142).

The quest towards self-realisation—understood as a godlike state, deification—and the ways to possibly reach it, concretely and not just speculatively, lies at the very core of all of Evola’s thought and body of work.

“The unfolding of this self-power is to be brought about by self-realisation which is to be achieved through Sadhana (practice)” are words of Sir John Woodroffe that Evola was keen on quoting (Hakl 2018: 151-152). This pragmatic and rather systematic approach to the process leading to self-realisation for the individual is one of the main reasons behind Evola’s fascination in and study of Tantrism: his main interest lingered toward

the *Shakti-Tantras*, the *Tantras* of Power (or *Shakti*). The so-called ‘Left-Hand Path’ – that of Kaulas, Siddhas and Viras – combines the aforementioned Tantric worldview with a doctrine of the *Übermensch* which would put Nietzsche to

shame. The East as a whole has generally avoided the fetish of morality: at a higher level, every moral, for Eastern thought represents the means to an end. A classic illustration of this point is the Buddhist portrayal of law as a raft that is built to cross a stream and later discarded. The Vira – which is to say: the ‘heroic’ man of Tantrism – seeks to sever all bonds, to overcome all duality between good and evil, honour and shame, virtue and guilt. Tantrism is the supreme path of the absolute absence of law – of *svecchacarī*, a word meaning ‘he whose law is his own will’. [...] Some Tantric texts point to the chief taboos to be overcome: pity, the tendency towards disappointment (which is overcome by the development of equity when faced with success or failure, happiness or misery, etc.), shame, ideas of sin and disgust, as well as all that which pertains to family and caste, conventions and forms of ritual, and sex taboos [...] (Evola 2009: 70).

This lengthy passage from *Il Cammino del Cinabro* is worthy of being quoted in almost its entirety, as it is highly representative of Evola’s specific language, of his understanding of the concept of power and of his own rather syncretic rendition of Tantra, especially in the 1927 edition of *L’uomo come potenza*. He will later heavily revise the book, published under the title *Lo yoga della potenza* [The Yoga of Power] in 1949, stripping it of some of the Western intellectuality which was characteristic of the first edition. As we will see, his interest in Indian religions and literature will have a key role in the development of his idea of History, which pervades all of his work.

Hakl has aptly summarised Evola’s concept of power:

For him, power was definitely something that did not merely derive from the earthly plane, but had to have a higher reference point. As a result, in a practical sense it can also be seen as being a ‘divine’ attribute with which one can identify. Power is essentially a natural quality of someone who is truly (spiritually) strong and unshakable. It is by necessity bound to such a person,

just as the power of water surges around a strong bridge pylon in a river, without the pylon itself doing anything. True power is simply there and operates on its own. It is the unity of subject and object. This peculiar usage of Evola's concept of power also holds true for his political work (Hakl 2018: 152).

In his elitist and aristocratic view, one is not hierarchically superior to others because he has power; one is spiritually, mentally, and physically superior to others, therefore is superior. "Superiority is not based on power, but rather power is based on superiority. To use power is impotence [...]" (Hakl 2018: 153) he explains in *Heidnischer Imperialismus* (Pagan Imperialism) the expanded German 1933 edition of his 1928 political work *Imperialismo Pagano*, bringing as an example the "super powers" (analogue to tantric *siddhis*) developed by initiates, saints, and ascetics. Being very critical of Christianity, the mention of saints might seem counter-intuitive, it is nevertheless valuable for articulating his concept of power, as he describes their "path of renunciation" as "masculine" because based on "not needing" and "being satisfied" (Hakl 2018: 153), power is a necessary characteristic of someone who is spiritually strong.

#### **2.1.5.2. The *Ur* Group**

The term 'Ur' derived from the archaic root for 'fire'; as a prefix in German, it is also used to describe what is 'primordial' or 'original'. To talk of the Ur Group is to talk of esotericism (Evola 2009: 88).

Evola's political book *Imperialismo Pagano* (1928) had been written and influenced by his acquaintance with Arturo Reghini;<sup>8</sup> in 1927, the two started to

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<sup>8</sup> The publishing of *Imperialismo Pagano* created what proved to be an irreconcilable fracture between Reghini and Evola: "Reghini had already published an essay of the same title in 1913 and then republished it in *Atanòr* in 1925. The basic premise of this essay corresponded to that of Evola's book. Reghini was understandably incensed and felt that Evola had undermined him.

publish a journal called *Ur* and founded a magical group under the same name (*Gruppo di Ur* in Italian). “When discussing the UR Group one should not imagine a ‘magical’ order with a hierarchical grade system which regularly met for rituals. More likely it was a loose organization in which everyone made individual contributions that Evola then attempted to pull together” (Hakl 2012: 62). Reghini was a well-known Freemason, and the Fascist regime prohibited secret societies as of 1925; therefore, he could not be the editor of the journal, and Evola took over. The group members mostly wrote under a pseudonym—or more than one; many of their identities are still not clear. The articles covered any theme that could be defined as ‘esoteric’: Catharism, Roman paganism, Magic, Freemasonry, Pythagoras, Hermetism, Buddhism, Tantrism, Mithraism, amongst others. The journal also published translations of original texts and began to move in the direction of Neo-paganism

The Evola of this period was immortalized in a work of fiction, *Amo, dunque sono* [I Love, Therefore I Am] (1927) by Sibilla Aleramo,<sup>9</sup> whom he met in 1925 and who was his lover, although he was twenty-two years younger than she. Evola is the basis for the character of Bruno Tellegra, a magician inhabiting an old castle in Calabria (Sedgwick 2004: 99).

According to Aleramo’s fictionalised depiction, Tellegra possessed a mephistophelic, luciferian charm and would have the habit to announce his departure from Rome for a spiritual retreat but would instead stay in the city, in

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There were further grounds for their dissension. Evola found the pro-freemasonic stance of Reghini and Parise too provocative in light of the legal situation, and for this reason bowdlerized some of their texts, which in turn enraged them. [...] Gianfranco de Turris, the director of the Julius Evola Foundation in Rome, also reports an attempt to oust Evola from the editorial directorship by bringing a man into the equation who was allegedly willing to finance the publication. This eventuality would have cost Evola his position as editor” (Hakl 2012: 67-68).

<sup>9</sup> Sibilla Aleramo (1876–1960) was an Italian writer and poet. Her work is mostly autobiographical. Notably, she always was an anti-fascist: in 1925 she supported the Manifesto of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals, and was a lifelong communist.

his own apartment, to meditate and experiment with magical rituals and drugs as well, especially ether (Rota 2008: 80-81).

Beside individual practices there was also ‘group work’ by the leading members, aimed at creating a ‘subtle’ entity for magically influencing Mussolini, who had spoken of the ‘Return of the Empire after fifteen centuries to the destined hills of Rome,’ which was also Evola’s and Reghini’s ambition, in the sense of their *Pagan Imperialism* (Hakl 2019: 58).

Evola envisioned and idealised archaic Indo-Aryan society ruled by the superior social classes of priests and warriors. According to his views, the ancient Roman patriciate and the organisation of the Roman empire represented the ideal state; therefore, he was at first enthusiastic when Fascism and its symbols appeared and emerged in the Italian political world.

Fascist imagery had been around in Italy since the First World War: the movement called *Fascio d’Azione Rivoluzionaria* (Fasces of Revolutionary Action) was an interventionist and irredentist movement founded in 1915 by Benito Mussolini, the name changed in 1919—after the war—in *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* (Italian Fasces of Combat) (Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti was amongst the authors of the Manifesto),<sup>10</sup> this paramilitary group became the *Partito Nazionale Fascista, PNF* [National Fascist Party] in 1921. The Italian *fascio (littorio)* in the names of these three groups derives from Latin *fascis lictorius* (pl. *fasces lictorii*: the English “fasces” derives from the plural), *fascis* means “bundle” and the *lictors*, “lictors,” were a class of civil servants in Etruria and Rome: the term indicates the weapon they carried, a bundle of birch rods with an axe bound to it. The lictors originally acted as a personal guard of the *rex* in the Roman Kingdom.

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<sup>10</sup> *Il manifesto dei fasci italiani di combattimento* (The Manifesto of the Italian Fasces of Combat), commonly known as Fascist Manifesto, published in *Il Popolo d’Italia* on June 6, 1919, by syndicalist Alceste De Ambris and poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti.

In later Republic and Imperial ages, they protected magistrates, so the fasces was an insignia representing their authority; their duties included guarding a magistrate's residence and escorting him while in public (see Figure 2).

Although Mussolini was known as *Il Duce* (The Leader, from Latin *dux*) and the party members who led the March on Rome, which resulted in the first Fascist Government in 1922 as *quadrumviri* (quadrumvirs), the references to imperial Rome were more superficial than Evola and the Group of *Ur* hoped. Both Evola and Reghini "hoped for the spiritual education of the new political elite" (Sedgwick 2004: 101) but the proximity of fascists to the Catholic Church as well as Mussolini's populist approach led to Evola's harsh criticism of Fascism rather soon. A pagan Rome was not possible under the powerful influence of the Vatican, the Lateran Pacts of 1929 between the Vatican and the then Kingdom of Italy. The same year the *Ur* Group disbanded; consequently, its journal ceased publication, the relationship between Evola and Reghini suffered because of the publication of *Imperialismo Pagano*. All of this, together with growing ideological incompatibilities, led to the ousting of Evola from his role as editor.

From the start, though, Evola had been appointed as the editor and proprietor responsible for *UR*. A compromise was therefore arrived at whereby Evola was allowed to continue publishing the journal but was obligated to change its name. Evola chose the new name *KRUR*, which he created from the Sumerian root *k-r*, *k-u-r* with the meaning of 'dwelling place, house' together with the added phonetic element 'ur'. So as not to be entirely left without a mouthpiece, Parise and Reghini revived the journal *Ignis* in 1929, but were only able to publish a single issue which was mostly filled with polemics against Evola. Evola in turn reported in his autobiography *Il cammino del cinabro* (The Path of Cinnabar), that those on the 'side of freemasonry' had attempted to depose him and, when this was unsuccessful, to force him to cease the publication of *UR*. The

arguments finally led to mutual legal complaints from both parties, with allegations of plagiarism on the one side and slander on the other (Hakl 2012: 68-69).

In his autobiography, Evola expresses a highly negative opinion regarding Freemasonry, which he considers anti-Traditional, corrupted because of its politicisation serving the “Third State” (Evola 2009: 147). During his time as editor of *Ur*, he often heavily edited the articles of his colleagues, which he considered too openly pro-Freemasonry. The movement had been banned by the Italian Government, and he was preoccupied with possible repercussions had he published them unedited (Evola 2009: 91). After Evola and Reghini went on separate ways, the journal *UR* ceased publication, and Evola founded a new one under the name *KRUR* “which he created from the Sumerian root *k-r*, *k-u-r* with the meaning of ‘dwelling place, house’ together with the added phonetic element ‘Ur’” (Hakl 2012: 68); *KRUR* can be considered an evolution of *UR*, both in content and scope.

Although *KRUR* retained its magical character with numerous essays that touched on practical magic and personal experiences, it developed into more of a philosophical and cultural magazine. Its aim was to lay the spiritual foundation for a national renewal in Italy, and in this regard it reflected Evola’s new interests. [...] Having fulfilled the ‘tasks relative to the technical mastery of esotericism’, there was now a desire to dedicate oneself with renewed vigor to Western culture and to the problems ‘that, in this moment of crisis, afflict both individual and mass consciousness’. The political had now been introduced, and out of *KRUR* emerged *La Torre* (The Tower), a ‘combat journal’ published every fourteen days which aimed ‘to erect an unbreachable bulwark against the general decline of every value in life’ and to reach a broader audience (Hakl 2012: 69).

Reghini was a correspondent of René Guénon and introduced Evola to his work: if at first Evola was not particularly impressed, by the time he and his mentor took different paths, he began to elaborate his strand of Traditionalism (Sedgwick 2004: 98).

## **2.2. Tradition**

For Evola, Tradition is spiritual energy comprised of elements that transcend the course of history: ideas of authority, hierarchy, discipline and order, but also those of individuality, spirituality and qualitative differentiation (that is, inequality between people alongside solidarity in a society that is hierarchically organized). Tradition therefore embraces, according to Evola, a set of virtues: honour, courage, loyalty, obedience and sacrifice. [...] Evola, and those subsequently inspired by him, finally perceived Tradition to be a category enabling an interpretation of the world. This starkly contrasts with the permissive ‘modern’ attitude: too open to tolerance, and based on the belief that people are both equal and deserve to be responsible for their own lives. A concept that is closely related to Tradition is Imperium, literally ‘empire’ but used by Evola, according to the original meaning in Latin, as a synonym of ‘authority’ or ‘the responsibility and right to rule absolutely’ (Cassina Wolff 2016: 480-481).

If Evola’s analysis of modernity is a clearly recognisable variation on a theme typical of Traditionalist philosophy, his solution is rather original and was to become very influential throughout the twentieth century and still is to this day.



### 2.2.1. History as Decadence

It is during this time and through such endeavours, both speculative and practical (with the *Ur* Group), that the core of Evola's thought took shape; the encounter with Tantra and Traditionalism is crucial. *La crise du monde moderne* (The Crisis of the Modern World; 1927) by René Guénon played a critical role in the development of Evola's philosophy, which can be defined as "antiegaltarian, antiliberal, antidemocratic, and antipopular" (Ferraresi 1996: 44). Guénon's interpretation of history as a process of involution and as cyclical strongly influenced Evola's pessimistic perspective: the Indian doctrine of the four ages, the *Kali Yuga* specifically, and an apocalyptic conception of history are central in his opus:

[...] according to what might be termed Tantric historiography, the Tantric system conveys those truths and those spiritual paths most adequate in the so-called *kali-yuga* (or 'dark age'). Because of the profound changes which characterise the *kali-yuga*, general existential conditions in this age differ from the original conditions on the basis of which the doctrines of the *Védas* had first been formulated. It is elementary forces which now prevail: man finds himself connected to such forces and unable to retreat; hence, man must face these forces, control them and transform them, if he wishes to find liberation and freedom. The path to this goal can no longer be the purely intellectual path, nor the ascetic-contemplative path, nor the ritual one. Pure knowledge in our day must lead to action: for this reason, Tantrism describes itself as a *sadhana-shastra*: a system based on techniques, and on a concrete effort towards self-realisation. According to the Tantric perspective, knowledge must serve as a means towards self-realisation and radical self-transformation (Evola 2009: 68-69).

These concepts will be fundamental throughout his whole body of work as well as his life, especially after the Second World War he tries to create a model of an *Übermensch*, the ideal image of a man striving to reach the “absolute” in his own self (Evola 2009: 68-69), that is the kind of man who would uphold high the primordial Tradition even during the *Kali Yuga*. This image of the “active nihilist,” of “differentiated” or “detached men” able to stand during the *Kali Yuga* and to live amongst the ruins of the modern world, of strong and spiritually developed warriors capable of performing the “transformation of poison into remedy” (Evola 2009: 72)—a concept that Evola derived from Tantrism (Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 53-54)—proved to be highly influential.

### **2.2.2. Revolt Against the Modern World**

In 1934 Evola published *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* (Revolt Against the Modern World), “his most important Traditionalist work.” Already from the title, the reference to Guénon’s *La crise du monde moderne* (1927) is apparent, together with the differences between the two authors. As Sedgwick summarises:

The difference between the two titles is the key to the difference between the two authors: while Guénon wished principally to explain the crisis he saw, Evola was keenly aware of what the Surrealist sympathizer of Traditionalism, René Daumal, had called ‘that law... that necessarily pushes that which there is in us of man towards revolt’ (Sedgwick 2004: 98).

Evola did not merely wish to understand and analyse the time he lived in but also, and this is another theme underlying his whole opus—strived to find some kind of solution to what he perceived as dire and apocalyptic times, that being active,

“revolt,” “against rationalism and the Enlightenment, positivism, egalitarianism and democracy” (Cassina Wolff 2016: 480). He does not passively accept the circumstances in which he finds himself, he reacts to it, he acts, as action is a core tenet of his whole philosophy and worldview.

Guido Stucco, translator of *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* for Inner Traditions clarifies the matter further in his Preface to the book:

While Evola is undoubtedly indebted to Guénon for several seminal ideas, it would be wrong to assume that he is just the Italian epigone of Guénon, with whom he disagreed on matters such as the correct relationship between action and contemplation, the role of Catholicism as a future catalyst of traditional forces, and the hierarchical relationship between priesthood and regality in traditional civilizations.

In *Revolt Against the Modern World* Evola intended to offer some guidelines for a morphology of civilizations and for a philosophy of history, as well as to advocate a psychologically and intellectually detached stance toward the modern world, which he regarded as decadent. In *Revolt* the reader will find strong criticism of the notions of equality and democracy, which in turn led Evola to praise the role that the caste system, feudalism, monarchy, and aristocracy have played in history (Stucco 1995: xxiii-xxiv).

*Rivolta* is divided into two main sections: the first one, “Il Mondo della Tradizione” (The World of Tradition), describes the structures of an idealised traditional world of the past. According to Evola, the “man of Tradition” had a broader understanding of what we call ‘reality’ than modern man does. He criticises how modern man cannot help but see reality exclusively through the lens of materialism since what he calls invisible realities were not automatically equated with the supernatural in the Traditional world. He differentiates between a world of becoming—physical—and a world of being—metaphysical; this dualism

is fundamental in his worldview. He further discusses categories such as caste, initiation, consecration, action, and Empire; Indo-Aryan civilisation is amongst the idealised traditional societies brought forth as an example.

On the topic of caste:

The correspondence of the fundamental natural possibilities of the single individual to any of these functions determined his or her belonging to the corresponding caste. [...] This is why the caste system developed and was applied in the traditional world as a natural, agreeable institution based on something that everybody regarded as obvious, rather than on violence, oppression, or on what in modern terms is referred to as 'social injustice.' By acknowledging his own nature, traditional man knew his own place, function, and what would be the correct relationship with both superiors and inferiors (Evola 1995, *Revolt*: 90).

Evola, like many scholars of his time, espoused Georges Dumézil's (1898–1986) thesis of a tripartite ideology intrinsic to Indo-Aryan society and regarded the rigid Hindu caste system as an expression of said hypothetical (and in Evola's case, ideal) Proto-Indo-European tripartition of society with warrior-priests at the top of the hierarchy.

The second part of the book, "Genesi e Volto del Mondo Moderno" (Genesis and Face of the Modern World), proposes an interpretation of history from the point of view of Traditionalism and compares the decadent state of the modern world to the higher values of traditional societies: it begins with the origins of humankind, discusses Darwin's theory of evolution, the spreading and popularisation of which he is very critical of, as he considers this kind of emphasis on a positivistic worldview focused on progress a deliberate promotion of anti-Traditional ideas, distorting the original knowledge (that had been already expressed in the form of

myths) and exacerbating the decline of modern society and modern man. “Evolutionists believe they are ‘positively’ sticking to the facts. They ignore that the facts per se are silent, and that if interpreted in different ways they can lend support to the most incredible hypotheses” (Evola 1995, *Revolt*: 180), he comments, and justifies the lack of archaeological proof through the doctrine of the root races.

Modernity, with its progress, is considered amongst the leading causes of the degeneration of humanity:

it is no wonder the superior races are dying out before the ineluctible logic of individualism, which especially in the so-called contemporary ‘higher classes,’ has caused people to lose all desire to procreate. Not to mention all the other degenerative factors connected to a mechanized and urbanized social life [...]. Thus proliferation is concentrated in the lower social classes and in the inferior races where the animal-like impulse is stronger than any rational calculation and consideration. The unavoidable effects are a *reversed selection* and the ascent and the onslaught of inferior elements against which the ‘race’ of the superior castes and people, now exhausted and defeated, can do very little as a spiritually dominating element (Evola 1995, *Revolt*: 168).

Evola developed his doctrine from a concept based on Theosophy founder Helena Petrovna Blavatsky’s (1831–1891) model of root races, in which the first root race, the Polarian, had an ethereal form whereas subsequent races (Hyperborean, Lemurian, Atlantean, Aryan) were incarnate:

[...] these races are all connected via an over-arching concept of spiritual progress. Via the mechanism of reincarnation, even those who at one point in history are born as members of a purportedly ‘inferior’ race will later be reborn in a higher stage. Seen from one perspective, ‘races’ are characterized by their evolutionary level, and are hierarchically ordered. Seen from another, ‘races’ are

just the temporary abodes of reincarnating spiritual entities (Lubelsky 2013: 336);

In Evola's interpretation of the model this is a process of decadence (Evola 1995: 167-171).

Another significant influence in his work were the theories of swiss scholar Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887), who formulated a theory of evolutionary development of society from the lower or baser levels—sensual, chthonic, telluric, lunar, and matriarchal—to the—spiritual, cosmic, uranic, solar, and patriarchal—civilisation of his time (Furlong 2011: 59-60; Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 59).

Evola adapted Bachofen's theory to his views, inverting it completely. He claimed that civilisation is degrading from masculine uranism to feminine tellurism and

speaks of a hyperborean center that was localized in prehistoric times in the Arctic, and where Nordic 'god-men' ruled until 'Cosmic' catastrophes forced them to leave their homeland, thereby spreading their upward-directed ('heavenward'), solar, and heroically masculine view of life throughout most of the world. On the other side there had arisen the downward-directed ('earthward'), lunar, and matriarchal cultures of the southern peoples, leading to warfare but also to miscegenation with northerners (Hakl 2019: 60).

Unlike Guénon, who believed that in Traditional society the priestly caste held power over the warrior caste, Evola argued that both castes initially constituted a single one, which split into two different ones as a result of the weakening of the masculine solar principle and the taking over of the lunar feminine one.

It is this degradation, or decadence that, according to Evola, leads to the same desacralisation of the world that Guénon denounced in his *La crise du monde moderne*; Evola, though, saw Christianity not as a manifestation of the perennial

Tradition but instead as a telluric and decadent phenomenon, which therefore needed overcoming. Modern civilisation is the antithesis of Tradition.

*Rivolta* is the most important Traditionalist work of Evola; with this book, he firmly situated himself in the Traditionalist current and distanced himself from its founder at the same time.

For Guénon, the transformation of the individual through initiation was the means of the transformation of the West as a whole through the influence of the elite. Evola was never explicit about his own prescription, perhaps intentionally, but called for self-realization through the reintegration of man into a state of centrality as the Absolute Individual, this to be achieved through uranic action.

This precept has been interpreted in various fashions (Sedgwick 2004: 100-101).

Guénon eventually left Europe. He criticised the state of things and what he perceived as the decadence of western civilisation from a distance; Evola, on the contrary, did not intend to surrender to the decadence of the Kali Yuga: *Boia chi molla*, “who surrenders is a lowlife” (Belardelli 1999: 33) read a slogan very popular both during the Fascist Era and with the Italian neofascist underground of the 1970s.

### **2.3. Relationship with Fascism and National Socialism**

Evola wrote that in the late 1920s he had sympathized with Mussolini as he would have sympathized with anyone who opposed the post-First World War democratic regime and the political Left, though he disliked the dubious origins of the Blackshirts<sup>11</sup> and also disliked Fascists’ nationalism. However, he forgave

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<sup>11</sup> Blackshirts, after the color of their uniforms (camicie nere or squadristi in Italian), is how the Voluntary Militia for National Security (Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale) was commonly called. It was a volunteer militia with its origins in the paramilitary organ of the Fascist Party.

Mussolini his 'socialist and proletarian origins' when Mussolini spoke of the 'ideal of the Roman State and Imperium' and of 'giving birth to a new type of Italian, disciplined, virile, and combative (Sedgwick 2004: 101).

Despite regularly writing for the official press of the regime, for example, contributing to *Critica Fascista*, Evola was never at any point a registered member of the Fascist Party, and in 1942 his activities in Austria and Germany caused him the revocation of his passport by Italian authorities (Sedgwick 2004: 104-109).

In *Il Mito del Sangue* (The Myth of the Blood; 1937), he respectively offered an overview and critique of the development of various racist theories of his time and how they came to be. In contrast, in *Sintesi di Dottrina della Razza* (Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race; 1941), he laid out his own racial theories. The term "spiritual racism" summarises Evola's views on the topic of race. He did not reject the concept of races, but at the same time, he found the mere biological classification reductive:

[...] one cannot understand this word 'race' in the absolute sense of a primary ethnic group, analogous to what in chemistry are the elements or simple and non decomposable bodies. In this absolute sense only but a few and rare types can be racially pure. In modern people there can be just a kind of relatively stable racial compound, to which a sort of common type corresponds. Secondly, for a coherent, totalitarian and fascist formulation of a doctrine of race, it is appropriate to go beyond such unilateral assumptions of it, as they would put it in danger of being degraded into a sort of zoological materialism (Evola 1940).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “[...] non si può intendere questa parola «razza» nel senso assoluto di un gruppo etnico primario, analogo a quel che in chimica sono gli elementi o corpi semplici e indecomponibili. Razzialmente puri in questo senso assoluto non possono essere che alcuni rari tipi. In un popolo moderno può solo trattarsi di un certo composto razziale relativamente stabile, al quale corrisponde un certo tipo comune. In secondo luogo, ad una formulazione coerente, totalitaria e fascista della dottrina della razza è proprio superare certe assunzioni unilaterali di essa, che minaccerebbero di degradarla in una specie di materialismo zoologico.” [Translation from Italian by the author].  
Evola, J. “Sul significato razziale della mistica fascista (II parte). Tratto da ‘Vita Italiana’, aprile



In his doctrine of race, Evola postulates a tripartition of the human being into body, soul, and spirit somewhat parallel to the tripartition of Traditional forms of civilisation. All three spheres of action (physical, the soul, spiritual) concur in shaping man and making up his racial makeup, determining his belonging to either a higher, uranic level or to a lower, lunar one.

Evola did not have an ambivalent relationship just with Fascism, his position on matters of race, as well as his criticism of Adolf Hitler's (1889–1945) populism, made him controversial to national socialist eyes as well: the year after the successful publishing of his revised, expanded and Traditionalised *Heidnischer Imperialismus* (Sedgwick 2004: 104), that is, in 1934, he began to deliver lectures in Germany and Austria, he did not merely criticise the mass ideology of the NSDAP and the materialistic biological theory of race, he pretty much openly looked down on Alfred Rosenberg (1893–1946) and other biological racists of the Third Reich. Regardless, he had a very positive view of the SS, which he saw as a new form or new incarnation of an idealised chivalric order, and as a warrior elite (Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 65-66).

He was in Vienna in 1945, “where he had been helping the SS recruit international volunteers” (Sedgwick 2004: 108) during the bombing that left him paralysed and wheelchair-bound for the rest of his life.

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1940.” *RigenerAzione Evola*, 30 June 2017, <https://www.rigenerazionevola.it/sul-significato-razziale-della-mistica-fascista-ii-parte/> (accessed: April 23, 2021).

## 2.4. Men Among the Ruins

After the war and a few years spent in hospitals, Evola eventually returned to Rome and “became the spiritual focus of a group of mostly young followers, who tried to emulate his sharply formulated spiritual and political views” (Hakl 2019: 64). This put him under the radar of law enforcement. In 1951, he was arrested, amongst others, under the accusation of apology of Fascism (which roughly amounts to attempting to reestablish the Fascist Party), even though he was acquitted, “the publicity surrounding this trial, however, helped launch Evola on his postwar career” (Sedgwick 2004: 180). In 1953, he published *Gli uomini e le rovine* (Men Among the Ruins). In this work, he further develops the themes already treated in *Rivolta*, adapting them to postwar Europe; he harshly criticises modern democracy, sets the course for a narrative depicting the identifying as a reactionary, as a Traditionalist, as a heroic act:

To [...] call oneself ‘reactionary’ is a true test of courage. For quite some time, left-wing movements have made the term ‘reaction’ synonymous with all kinds of iniquity and shame; they never miss an opportunity to thereby stigmatize all those who are not helpful to their cause and who do not go with the flow, or do not follow what, according to them, is the ‘course of History.’ While it is very natural for the Left to employ this tactic, I find unnatural the sense of anguish that the term often induces in people, due to their lack of political, intellectual, and even physical courage; this lack of courage plagues even the representatives of the so-called Right or ‘national conservatives,’ who, as soon as they are labeled ‘reactionaries,’ protest, exculpate themselves, and try to show that they do not deserve that label (Evola 2002: 112-113).

In *Gli uomini e le rovine*, he suggests a course of action meant to constitute an “Organic State,” eventually, a “true” State organised on antidemocratic,

anti-parliamentary, and Traditional principles. It is noteworthy that the Preface to the first Italian edition of *Gli uomini e le rovine* has been penned by Junio Valerio Borghese (1906–1974), military man, fascist politician, and organiser of the failed *Golpe Borghese* in 1970.<sup>13</sup>

Another theme touched upon in *Gli uomini e le rovine* that would be very influential and is very important for the scope of this work is that of the *Männerbund*, a league or society of men of what he calls the warrior type:

Love for hierarchy; relationships of obedience and command; courage; feelings of honor and loyalty; specific forms of active impersonality capable of producing anonymous sacrifice; frank and open relationships from man to man, from one comrade to another, from leader to follower - all these are the characteristic, living values that are predominant in the aforementioned view. These are the values found in what I have called the Mannerbund (Evola 2002: 195-196),

which he identifies as the fundamental organism necessary to build an “Organic State.”

*Cavalcare la Tigre* (Riding the Tiger), published in 1961, is the other fundamental postwar work of Evola. In this work, he assesses that the counterrevolutionary and transcendent solutions would also be of no use in the consumerist world of the so-called economic boom, for “nothing in this final stage of the Kali Yuga was worthy of survival. Evola sets up the ideal of the ‘active nihilist’ who is prepared to act with violence against modern decadence” (Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 67).

The pessimistic view on modern society, the low opinion of the middle class and its values and lifestyle, the disillusionment in politics all reach their peak in Evola’s thought with his very personal interpretation of the Stoic concept of

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<sup>13</sup> Borghese was amongst the organisers of an attempt at a Neo-fascist coup d’état in the December of 1970. After the events he fled the country and eventually died in Spain four years later.

*apoliteia*. Evola explains *apoliteia* as “the inner distance irrevocable by this society and its ‘values;’ or, not accepting being bound to it by anything spiritual or moral. When this is consolidated, those activities that in others would presuppose such bonds can be exercised in a different spirit” (Evola 1995, *Cavalcare*: 152).<sup>14</sup> *Apoliteia* is not the same concept encompassed by the expression “drop out” coined by Timothy Leary (1920–1996); instead, it is conscious and active distancing practised by the “differentiated” or “detached man” because of his superiority. The actions of the “differentiated” or “detached man” do not take place in the realm of politics, and Evola’s exegetes have interpreted the concept differently over the decades: from total retreat from the political world to a retreat from official politics but not from the physical fight (Ferraresi 1996: 50).

In Italy the aristocratic elitism and esoteric Aryan-Nordic traditions of Julius Evola inspired a whole generation of postwar neo-fascists. When wanted far-right terrorists fled abroad, they carried Evola’s ideas to far-right parties and groups elsewhere in Europe. By the late 1980s this little-known philosopher had become a major political icon of opposition to democracy and liberalism in the West (Gardell 2003: 4),

His ideas have had a massive impact on the radical Right milieu, directly and indirectly. “Revolt against the modern world” has become a catchy slogan beyond the realms of Traditionalism, and nowadays ‘sacred masculinity’ and *Männerbunde* are topics discussed on popular podcasts in the same tone and terms Evola did, whether or not he is credited or even considered as a source or an inspiration. For example, (former Wolves of Vinland member) Jack Donovan’s podcast Start the World revolves around “conversations, essays and more about

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<sup>14</sup> “Apolitia è la distanza interiore irrevocabile da questa società e dai suoi «valori»; è il non accettare di essere legati ad essa per un qualche vincolo spirituale o morale. Ciò restando fermo, con un diverso spirito potranno anche essere esercitate le attività che in altri presuppongono invece tali vincoli” (Evola 1995, *Cavalcare*:152) [Translation from Italian by the author].

masculine philosophy, men's spirituality, becoming the best version of yourself as a man, and staying solar" (Donovan 2021). Elitism and masculine strength—physical, mental, and spiritual—are crucial aspects of the philosophy brought forth by Paul Waggener through his project Operation Werewolf.

### **3. The Wolves of Vinland and Operation Werewolf**

"Wolves" is one of the ongoing projects of the photographer Peter Beste (b. 1978): he documents meetings and rituals of the group Wolves of Vinland. The group was founded by brothers Paul and Matthias Waggener (b. 1982) around 2005, and they describe themselves as a "tribe of folkish heathens" (Donovan 2014) based in Lynchburg, Virginia, in the USA. They draw heavily on "Norse and Germanic paganism, Julius Evola's Traditionalism, the manosphere,<sup>15</sup> motorcycle gangs, and powerlifting and mixed martial arts" (Lyons 2019: 253); they are often labelled as white nationalists or white supremacists, labels that they reject.

Before the project would get closed down at the end of December 2020, Operation Werewolf was the "larger feeder organization" (Lyons 2019: 253) of the Wolves of Vinland, with affiliates in the USA and several European countries as well (the Dire Dogs in Italy for example).

The Wolves of Vinland are still an active, living (and changing) organisation; they keep doing what they have been doing since their foundation, and more than that.

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<sup>15</sup> The term 'manosphere' comprises websites, blogs, and online forums promoting masculinity. It includes phenomena ranging from the father rights movements to pick up artists, antifeminism, misogyny, the men's rights movement, and incels.

Both Waggener himself and the Wolves underwent an evolution and a partial change of perspective, a fact that might be one of the many factors that led to Operation Werewolf being officially shut down at the end of 2020. The main reason offered by Waggener is that he did not approve anymore of the kind of people that were interested in Operation Werewolf; it got “bigger” in the last years, and he could not control who had access to it, what they did with it, and he thinks that many of these people have misinterpreted and misunderstood what he was trying to achieve with it (Waggener 2020). Another possible factor—but this is speculation—is that Waggener might have gotten wind of what was going to happen on January 6, 2021 (the storming of the United States Capitol), and since he did not want to be associated with it, he decided to shut down Operation Werewolf before the facts. He was—and likely still is—in contact with Right-wing groups such as the Proud Boys and the American Guard, and this seems to be one of the causes for the permanent ban from social media platforms imposed on him and many of his associates, as he discusses in the Youtube video “Yo! Just Wear A Mask While You Peacefully Protest, Dawg!” (Waggener and Waggener 2020). Summarising: considering Waggener’s connections, one could suppose that he might have known what would unfold at the beginning of 2021 and therefore pre-emptively shut down his main public platform so as not to risk being involved. This is nothing but a conjecture, though, and even in the case of this guess being correct, it would do nothing but corroborate Waggener’s statements on the matter. Every time he has been asked about the shutdown of Operation Werewolf, his answers have been consistent with the following statement:

I closed Operation Werewolf down [...] because I had definitely started to feel [...] that I was no longer connected to a lot of the individuals that associated with it. In fact, I can say that I disliked a great number [...] of the individuals that I saw associated with it, and I disliked a great amount of what I saw people associated with it putting out there, because it's very difficult to create something with one intention, and then seeing it used with another intention. And in a lot of ways it embarrassed me, and in a lot of ways it made me feel very sorrowful to have done a lot of it, in a way (See Research Interview with Paul Waggener).

Waggener's readers, listeners, and followers did not necessarily scatter after the disbanding of Operation Werewolf: several of the groups that formed following its programme are still active; other people, newcomers and "solitary practitioners" (Waggener 2016, *Zines*) can connect with him and with each other through his Telegram channel and personal website (Waggener 2020: *Paul Waggener*) as well as through Waggener's new main project (which includes a website, a blog, a podcast, and a mailing-list): Power Aesthetic. While dealing with themes already present in the material of Operation Werewolf, in Power Aesthetic posts and podcast episodes, Waggener's tone is different, more philosophical and measured, if you will, possibly appealing to a different (or older) audience (Waggener 2019: *Power Aesthetic*).

Despite the shutdown, the books and the blog of Operation Werewolf are still available, and through them, one can glimpse into the reality of groups such as the Wolves of Vinland and their ideological foundations. Waggener has described Operation Werewolf as a sort of starter kit for people who want to build a group as tightly knit as the Wolves of Vinland are.

Its activities have been promoted mainly through several underground zines and its official website; despite being a physical membership organisation most of its

material is accessible and has been spread thanks to social media platforms and their captivating format.

“Mixing together equal parts fight club, strength regimen, motorcycle club and esoteric order, Operation Werewolf is more than the sum of its parts. It is not an organization, but an organism – living and breathing by its tenets and watchwords, ‘Iron and Blood.’ It is an affiliation of strength” (Waggener 2016, *Zines*) reads the mission statement of Operation Werewolf, in which the adherents are described as “Wolves among men,” implying their superiority in comparison with regular men. Furthermore, it closes with:

Operation Werewolf is a lifestyle, one of constant self-overcoming and hardship. You operatives know that today’s effort is tomorrow’s reward, and that one must always strive to outdo themselves- each day must be lived as though it is Ragnarok, each hour the last one of our lives. So make of your bodies a temple, of your will a weapon, of your mind a smokeless fire that reduces this world’s lies into ashes (Waggener 2016, *Zines*).

The group can be positioned into the broader Asatrú or Germanic and Norse Neo-pagan branch of the ‘cultic milieu,’ it rejects firmly any political affiliation but has sympathisers in the Alt-Right scene, takes inspiration openly from the *völkisch* milieu, and follows teachings heavily influenced by Julius Evola’s Traditionalism.

### **3.1. Germanic Neo-paganism**



Germanic Neo-paganism is an umbrella term that identifies the fragment of the cultic milieu which has pre-Christian Germanic religions as a reference and inspiration. Some currents try to reconstruct the religious practice of pre-Christian central and northern Europe by means of textual and archaeological sources, and others adapt New Age and Wiccan practices to Germanic deities.

Heathenry [...] is essentially a polytheist paganism for today, drawing on two main strands: the presentations of cosmology, deity and mythology, and cultural practices within mediaeval writings of northern Europe, together with archaeological interpretations of northern European 'pasts'; and personal experience based in part on these understandings (Blain and Wallis 2009: 414).

Asatrú and Asatrúer, Heathenry and heathen, and Norse-paganism and Norse-pagan are the most widespread terms used by adherents of the aforementioned religion current(s) to describe themselves as well as in academic publications. Asatrú is a modern term derived from Icelandic and refers to the belief in and worship of the Norse gods called Æsir. Heathenry is a term akin to 'paganism' in meaning: it has come to indicate specifically the forms of Neo-paganism taking inspiration from Germanic religions. As the expression Germanic Neo-paganism is not semantically associated with any specific group or current of thought, it will be the one more often used in this work; Norse Neo-paganism will be explicitly mentioned when the deities and rituals that are taken as reference are the ones mentioned in the Eddas.

There is no universally accepted Germanic Neo-pagan theology, and the number of practitioners of Germanic Neo-paganism worldwide is not easy to estimate. According to von Schnurbein, there are no more than approximately 20,000 individuals practising Germanic Neo-paganism, be it individually, in officially

organised and formally recognised groups or in more loosely organised circles (von Schnurbein 2016: 88).

The segment of this milieu politically aligned with radical Right ideas has been very receptive to Evola's ideology, which is why a summary of the history of the various forms of Germanic Neo-paganism is necessary for the purpose of this work in order to provide appropriate context.

### **3.1.1. Origins**

The origins of modern Germanic Neo-paganism are composite; however, they ultimately lie in nineteenth-century German Romanticism and the *völkisch* movement. A time when an already existing interest in a past beyond classical antiquity developed and "Renaissance and Enlightenment antiquarian approaches to the antique ethnographic and medieval mythological sources thus established Nordic or Germanic myth as an integral part of various patriotic endeavors" (von Schnurbein 2016: 21).

The work of philosophers and intellectuals such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), and Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859) is of paramount importance for the likes of the *völkisch* movement and anything that came afterwards as they "were the first to systematize ideas about a holistic unity of natural environment, language and history located in a deep past and in rural populations. This unity and its expression in an indigenous mythological heritage were perceived as the necessary foundation for a proper nation or Volk" (von Schnurbein 2016: 88). They established a bias, the perspective from which we still look at categories

such as ethnicity, language, and nation nowadays—and how we define them—derives directly from the Romantic movement and Romantic concepts; today, we still tend to project such categories on the past—the ancient, medieval, pre-modern past in general as well.

Given the lack of coherent coeval information regarding Germanic religious forms and mythology beyond Tacitus, most scholars drew heavily on Scandinavian sources such as the *Snorra Edda*,<sup>16</sup> even though also this collection of poems cannot be considered a faithful representation of pre-Christian Scandinavia:

No-one knows what sources Snorri might have used for some of these details [...] or indeed if he simply invented some of them. And finally, we have no real idea of the original dates of the various mythological elements he used. The poems themselves are usually believed to date from some time between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries AD, but even if we allow the earliest of these dates, there's no knowing how ancient the traditions are on which the poems are based. Mythology [...] has come down to us in literary form: we may be a long way removed from 'actual' myth (whatever that might be). Two relatively fixed points are worth remembering. Firstly, the latest thinking on *Völuspá* dates it to the years just before the conversion of Iceland to Christianity – seeing it as a pagan response to Christian theology. As such, it would be not only an affirmation of the complex, weighty, time-honoured truths of the old religion, but also a claim for neck-and-neck rivalry—and crucially, comparable sophistication—with the new Christianity, especially in its exposition of creation and apocalypse. Secondly, Snorri Sturluson, as we know, was a thirteenth

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<sup>16</sup> Snorra Edda or Prose Edda is an old Norse collection of myths written in Iceland during the thirteenth century by the scholar and politician Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241). It seems like the function of the Prose Edda would have been that of a textbook, explaining rules and expressions of traditional skaldic poetry for both Icelandic poets and scholars alike. This collection is the most detailed source for Norse mythology discovered to this day and it served as a reference for comparison and for filling the gaps in the attempt to reconstruct the pre-Christian mythologies of peoples speaking other Germanic languages.

century Christian, and although it seems that unlike his European contemporaries he was happy, indeed proud, to represent the pagan mythology of his ancestors without undue moralizing, mockery or allegorical interpretations, nonetheless it is inevitable that he would have understood some of the events and concepts through the lens of his own beliefs, giving them what we might now call a Christian spin. We have no evidence that is certainly pre-Christian about any of these creation myths (O'Donoghue 2007: 16).

Even Jacob Grimm (1785–1863), who rejected Scandinavian sources “as insufficiently cognate with the German ones” and “looked for mythological remnants in various contexts: in rural folk beliefs and customs, fairy tales, place names, language etc., postulating a continuity of folk beliefs, especially in an idealized countryside from pre-Christian times up until his time of writing,” could not achieve his goals without comparing his finds to the aforementioned Scandinavian sources. Meaning that

in order to make sense of what he thought to have identified as those remnants, he drew on Scandinavian sources to anchor his finds in a coherent mythology. By way of creating a unity of Germanic sources, he established the image of a coherent Germanic culture in the service of German nation building. Moreover, he contributed significantly to the appropriation of Scandinavian material for not only a German, but by way of the reception of his work, for also English and Scandinavian national ideologies (von Schnurbein 2016: 23).

The interest for the past was not exclusively academic but political as well, during the nineteenth century, especially the concept of nation-state has been defined in ethnic, linguistic, racial, and religious terms. The interest of scholarship, the arts and the popular media of the time synergically turned to a common mythological past, trying to reconstruct it. In the English-speaking world: “Vikings came to be figured as bold conquerors, intrepid explorers, pioneers, innovators, all-round

fitting antecedents for Victorian imperialists and industrialists” (O’Donoghue 2007: 129). Whereas in the German-speaking world,

together with another highly significant medium of popularization, Richard Wagner’s aesthetic stage imaginations of Norse gods and heroes, these scholars firmly established an idealized image of a mythic national past, rooted in landscape, folk literature and customs, which was formative for the later religious reception of a discourse of Germanic myth. More importantly though, Herder, Grimm, Mannhardt and others set the standard for modern methodologies in the emerging academic disciplines of philology and folklore, as well as studies of religion (von Schnurbein 2016: 24).

Most of the nationalistic theories of these scholars have been proved wrong eventually but had a long-lasting impact that cannot be underestimated—both at home and abroad. Phenomena such as Anglo-Saxonism in England and North America and the interest in folklore that spurred all over Europe are directly linked with German Romanticism and German scholarship of the time.

Actual attempts at reconstructing a pre-Christian religion of Germanic people belong to a later time, though, the interest of Romanticism in a national past served aesthetic purposes and the creation and strengthening of national identity.

Around the end of the nineteenth century, the attempts to provide a unified national identity for Germany went forward and took a religious aspect beyond the merely political. Some intellectuals like Paul de Lagarde (1827–1891) and Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927) considered Christianity too much influenced by Judaism and Jewish elements and proposed a Germanisation of the Christian religion, purging it from elements that were deemed too Semitic.

Elements such as anti-Semitism, antiquarian interests, and a quest for a unified national identity even stronger than during the Romantic Era conflated into the

*völkisch* milieu: Hermann von Pfister-Schwaighusen (1863–1916) is credited with the introduction of the term *völkisch* in 1875,

derived from the noun *Volk* (nation or people) as a German substitute for the Latin-rooted word *national*. The term came into widespread usage in the 1890s, a decade in which numerous nationalist and nativist organisations were formed to promote supposedly authentic German culture and racial awareness as a way of generating popular support for right-wing policies (Levy 2005: 743).

The *völkisch* movement never was a unified movement, though: it can be more accurately described as a network, or a constellation of groups and organisations of varying degrees of formal recognition sharing a general worldview, worldview characterised by the idea of a world population divided into different—and incompatible to each other—human races, in a hierarchy with the German race sitting on the top. The preoccupation against degeneration of the race was transversally important through the *völkisch* milieu, and most groups suggested or practised one form or the other of eugenics, as well as a pedagogy aiming at the strengthening of the race. Even though most of the individuals and groups involved in *völkisch* culture were Christian, a minority embarked on searching for ‘pure’ German spirituality.

“The older, more archaic the *Volk*, the more plausible is the claim that God has given them a certain land. The more one can trace back the myths and legends of the prehistory of the *Volk* to the beginning of history, to the creation of the world, the more natural the existence all along of one’s own people appears.” As a result, not just continuity, but homogeneity is also projected. It is intended to strengthen the connection and unity between *Volk* or race and Nation and religion, it is also intended to exclude the Jews as members of a foreign *Volk*/race and to discredit the different Christian denominations as an unnatural foreign

influence. Germanic native and German-Faith religion was meant both to create unity and aim at overcoming the denominational division (Meyers 2012: 186).<sup>17</sup>

The rejection of Christianity and Christian values favouring heathen ones can only be a bonus in a climate that already is heavily anti-Semitic. It provides a ‘local’ religious alternative and, at the same time, voids both Christian ethical issues arising with anti-Semitism and the related need to justify the belief in an Abrahamic religion sharing a place of origin and a sacred book with Judaism.

The ancient Germanic tribes and their religion seemed powerful enough—albeit through the Roman filter of Tacitus—to provide the sense of authority and of homogeneity that was lacking in multi-confessional Germany. “Roman historians such as Tacitus characterized the Germanic tribes as physically distinct from themselves—as tall, blonde and blue-eyed, in fact—and extolled these features” (O’Donoghue 2007: 130).

[...] The traits that the Roman ethnographer Tacitus (informed by Aristotelian climate theory and contemporary stereotypes of the ethnic other) had perceived as typical for northern barbarian primitives, now appeared to the German patriots of humanism as timeless, positive national characteristics of a warrior people that:

- is hardened by a harsh climate
- is impressive in its simplicity and authenticity
- possesses a fierce sense of freedom and independence

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<sup>17</sup> “‘Je älter, archaischer das Volk ist, desto plausibler erscheint der Anspruch, dass ihm von Gott ein bestimmtes Land gegeben ist. Je mehr die Mythen und Sagen der Urgeschichte des Volkes die Konstitution der Volkseinheit bis an den Anfang der Geschichte, der Schöpfung der Welt, zurückverfolgen lassen, desto natürlicher erscheint das Immer-schon-Gegebensein des eigenen Volkes.’ Dadurch wird neben der Kontinuität auch eine Homogenität projiziert. Sie soll die Verbindung und Einheit zwischen Volk bzw. Rasse, Nation und Religion stärken, die Juden als Angehörige eines fremden Volkes /einer fremden Rasse ausgrenzen und die christlichen Konfessionen als widernatürlichen Fremdeinfluss diskreditieren. Arteigene und deutschgläubige Religion wollte Einheit stiften und zielte auch auf die Überwindung der konfessionellen Spaltung” (Meyers 2012: 186) [Translation from German by the author].

- is faithful
- is pure
- worships nature
- venerates its women and priestesses
- is prone to excessive drinking (von Schnurbein 2016: 18).

This stereotyped and idealised portrait of the ancient Germanic tribes sketched by Tacitus in his *Germania* is not exclusive to nineteenth-century nationalistic Romanticism.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, it represents an ideal alive to this day both in popular culture and in the Germanic Neo-pagan milieu. It is important to note that Tacitus never travelled himself to any of the territories he described in his book and that his sources were often outdated and second-hand at least; moreover, the purpose of his writing was not anthropological or purely historical, but political as well, and very much so (Krebs 2011: 29-55).<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, his claims have been taken for valid at face value, without questioning the intentions behind them; they became ‘common knowledge’ and are repeated over and over to this day.

In this period also Scandinavian countries develop a similar interest in their past (with the *Getica* by Jordanes representing a Swedish equivalent of the *Germania*, or the collection and organisation of the *Kalevala* in Finland by Elias Lönnrot), as well as Great Britain, where ‘Gothic’ became a common term denoting both ‘Germanic’ and ‘medieval’ (von Schnurbein 2016: 20).

The creation of identity is an endeavor both of inclusion and exclusion:

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<sup>18</sup> The full title of the book, written at the end of the first century C.E., is *De origine et situ Germanorum* (On the Origin and Situation of the Germans), but it is commonly known and referred to as *Germania*.

<sup>19</sup> For a history of the purpose and of the reception of the *Germania*, see Krebs 2011. As Krebs states in the Introduction: “The text that would be called upon to define the German national character was a Roman’s imaginative reflection on human values and a political statement.”



in theories of continuity of a deep past and of pure origins, these exclusions tend to turn against national minorities and often lead to the promotion of ethnic purity. Romantic constructions pitted the ‘Germanic,’ ‘Nordic’ or ‘Indo-Germanic’ against traditional exterior adversaries: France in the case of Germany, Germany itself in the case of Denmark and, to an extent in the case of England, Rome (as the embodiment of the devalued but dominant south), and with it, Catholicism in most national cases. In all cases however, it was a familiar ‘interior enemy’ who was targeted, the Jew. This particular Romantic anti-Semitism derogates Jews because of their alleged lack of exactly the elements that form a proper Volk according to the Romantic logic: rootedness in a homeland, a proper language, literature, and mythology (von Schnurbein 2016: 27).<sup>20</sup>

Anti-Semitism has a long history, dating back way longer than the Romantic era, yet, the surge of anti-Semitism connected with the Romantic nationalism of the nineteenth century is the one which will flow into *völkisch* culture and subsequently influence profoundly and inform the nationalism of the twentieth century. Conspiracy theories at the detriment of the Jewish population led to the publication of texts such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in 1903. Despite having been exposed as a hoax multiple times, this text is still considered reliable in some anti-Semitic circles to this day, even though *The Protocols* are a product of the nationalistic cultural and political climate of the nineteenth century.

The traits assigned by Tacitus to the ancient Germanic people are the ones exalted by a number of movements that were very active in the broader alternative milieu in the Germany of the beginning of the twentieth century, creating a fertile ground for Germanic Neo-pagan religious groups (O’Donoghue 2007: 124-125); “The most important of these were the densely interwoven youth movement, life reform

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<sup>20</sup> The Romani and Sinti people were also victims of this *völkisch* logic.

movement, contemporary occultism, and völkisch movement” (von Schnurbein 2016: 31-32).

*Wandervogel* (Wandering Bird) is one of the most famous examples of organisations composing the German youth movement: founded in 1901, inspired by medieval *clerici vagantes*,<sup>21</sup> consisted of hiking groups of mostly high school students, for them “‘youth’ represented a more authentic state of being, which was set against the stifled, materialistic bourgeois culture of their fathers, and could be accessed through outdoor activities and allegedly authentic, natural cultural activities such as folksong and dance” (von Schnurbein 2016: 32). The *Wandervogel* did not constitute a political movement but originated from popular völkisch culture and were soon influenced by its political components as well.

The *Lebensreform* (Life Reform) movement promoted a back to nature lifestyle sharing some similarities with the Transcendentalism of American writer Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862); both the youth movement and the *Lebensreform* movement emphasised ideals of ‘health,’ ‘naturalness,’ ‘purity,’ ‘beauty,’ and ‘authenticity’ and shared “a bourgeois anti-capitalism critical of blind industrial progress and urbanization gone awry” (von Schnurbein 2016: 32); in a fashion typical of most of the movements examined in this work, also characteristic of the broader völkisch milieu of the time as a whole, “the life reform movement presented as a heterogeneous network of more or less loosely structured associations, circles, journals, businesses, publishers and individuals. Fears of degeneration were countered with an array of reform efforts regarding body and soul, concepts of nature, and various life practices” (von Schnurbein 2016: 32).

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<sup>21</sup> The *clerici vagantes* or *goliardi* were wandering scholars, nominally members of the clergy, practically less so. They are popularly associated with the *Carmina Burana* (“Songs from Benediktbeuern” in Bavaria), a manuscript collecting a few hundred satirical and goliardic poems.

Many of the life practices promoted by the movement have been very influential and were to be ‘rediscovered’ in the New Age milieu: in the spiritual practices of the counterculture and of the Neo-pagan movements of the second half of the century, and include the likes of “the protection of nature and landscape; garden settlements; the renewal of architecture and crafts; alternative agriculture; naturopathy and alternative medicine; reform of education, art, music, dance, clothing and nutrition; anti-alcoholism; nudism; social and racial hygiene; and sexual reform” (von Schnurbein 2016: 33).

Arthur Bonus (1864–1941) is another cardinal figure for the development of Germanic Neo-paganism. On the one hand, his efforts for the “Germanization of Christianity” and the “heroization of Christ” (von Schnurbein 2016: 30) popularised the idea of a Christianity ‘cleansed’ of Semitic influence, on the other, his contribution to the *Sammlung Thule* (Collection Thule), a project of translation of the medieval sagas of the Icelanders, made the saga literature accessible to a wide audience and provided sources for the groups interested in going beyond Christianity and in reconstructing a Germanic pre-Christian religion. Scandinavian saga literature constituted the basis of these attempts at reconstructing a Germanic pre-Christian religion, but both in English- and German-speaking countries there were not many elements to justify this choice, even of important deities such as Odin, there was often not more than vague mentions. As Heather O’Donoghue points out, with English-speaking countries as an example:

Anglo-Saxon kings traced their genealogies back to Woden, whose name identifies him as the Anglo-Saxon counterpart of Odin, and both the middle day of the week—Wednesday—and a considerable number of English place names are named after him: he must have been as important to the Anglo-Saxons as

Odin was to the Norse. But how similar was this divinity to the figure we know so well from Norse traditions? (O'Donoghue 2007: 89)

In such fertile ground, there was space for Theosophical teachings and the theories of Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), too, which are key components at the basis of the New Age movement as a whole.

As a whole, theosophy, as well as the manifold secret orders and lodges by which it was inspired and which it in turn inspired, oscillated between two poles: a liberal faction, which emphasized the unity of mankind and the hope for a New Age in which love and beauty would rule; and a racist, nationalist faction that gained more and more influence throughout the early 20th century, and held strong connections with the European anti-Semitic movement (von Schnurbein 2016: 34).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Germanic Neo-paganism will begin to have a place in public discourse, even if a limited one. The group which will become the *Germanische Glaubensgemeinschaft* (German Faith Community) in 1913 under Ludwig Fahrenkrog (1867–1952), a painter, sculptor and writer, had been constituted a year prior with the name *Germanisch-Deutsche Religions-Gemeinschaft* (Germanic-German Religious Community), “[...] and consecrated the outdoor altar at Hermannstein, near Rattlar, Hessen, as a place of worship. The community aimed at ‘leading the German to himself,’ and hoped to offer a religious alternative on an explicitly racial basis to those who felt alienated from the Christian churches” (von Schnurbein 2016: 39). Fahrenkrog’s can be considered the first practical attempt to direct more people towards a pre-Christian faith and unify the small number of existing groups and practitioners.

Ariosophy played a role in the development of Germanic Neo-paganism as well: Viennese Guido von List's (1848–1919) mystical interpretation of the runes is among the most striking examples of this.

“After a temporary loss of vision in 1902, List claimed to have had visions of earlier incarnations, purported to have access to what he called the ancestral memory (Erberinnerung) of the ‘Ario-Germans,’ and began to ‘reveal’ the mystic origins of the runes and language in general” (von Schnurbein 2016: 41); In 1911, he founded the *Hoher Armanen Orden* (Higher Armanen Order, *HAO*), in which only his inner circle was admitted. He was active in the *völkisch* milieu, and his immediate following was limited to a relatively restricted number of individuals; nevertheless, his ideas regarding secret societies and the mystical meaning of runic inscription had quite some traction and have had a noticeable impact. Modern rune divination practices and their correspondence systems mainly originate from List's work (Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 85-86; 136-137; Strube 2018: 6-10). Current research tells us though that runes were widely used way beyond the religious sphere:

There is no runic language: runic inscriptions are found in various early Germanic languages, including Anglo-Saxon, but especially in the early Scandinavian used all over mainland Scandinavia before the settlement of Iceland. Christian gravestones with pious runic inscriptions are also quite common; it has sometimes been claimed that runes were somehow magical, or even divinatory (as in the modern journalistic cliché ‘reading the runes’ to mean making an educated guess about the political or financial future). But although, as we shall see, runes play a fascinating role in Old Norse mythology, in historical reality they were used for all sorts of purposes, even everyday ones, as a recent find of runic messages on scraps of wood and bark in Norway makes clear: we have here shopping lists, grocery prices – even a demand from a

disgruntled housewife that her husband come back from the pub (O'Donoghue 2007: 11-12).

The scene in which all these actors operated was split into many factions perpetually disagreeing over matters of formality, or lack thereof, of theology, of acceptable sources. In 1933, in an attempt to unify all non-Christian groups, Indologist Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (1882–1962) founded the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutsche Glaubensbewegung* (Work Fellowship German Faith Movement), likely in the hopes it would eventually become the official religion of the newly instated Third Reich. Despite a certain National Socialist elite (e.g., Heinrich Himmler and the SS) being deeply influenced by 'Aryan occult' ideas, the majority of the population did not even consider leaving the established churches—where Ariosophic and racist rhetoric and narratives were the norm, regardless. Hitler himself was not interested in the religious and metaphysical ideas propagated by such groups:

Norse mythology—not on account of its actual subject matter, but simply as a subject in itself—was (and is) held in high regard by those who want(ed) to claim a Nordic ethnic origin, and this in itself is a racist impulse. But its relationship with Hitler and the Nazis remained more incidental than formative – Hitler himself regarded Wotanists, those who followed what they believed to be a pre-Christian Germanic religion, with complete contempt (O'Donoghue 2007: 146).

An example of racial Germanic Neo-paganism or "Odinism" outside of Germany is the Anglican Church of Odin and the First Church of Odin, founded by the Australian Alexander Rud Mills (1855–1964) in the 1950s. His following was limited among his contemporaries, but his work would inspire later endeavours (Gardell 2003: 157).

It is essential to keep in mind that the number of organised members of these non-Christian, Germanic Neo-pagan groups was always meagre and never surpassed the couple thousands. Among these couple thousands at best, though, were members of the educated middle classes, producing and publishing a noticeable amount of material; artistic material too, which widely influenced the aesthetic imagination to this day, starting with its contemporaries—‘loud minority’ if you will.

### **3.1.2. After the Second World War**

The emergence of phenomena such as Wicca and in general the search for pre-Christian roots perceived as more ‘authentic,’ popular with the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s assisted the popularisation of a Germanic or Nordic form of Neo-paganism:

this apparently spontaneous emergence of Asatru in different countries was fed by two currents related to shifts within Germanic Neopaganism as well as mainstream discourses. Beginning in the 1970s, older *völkisch* religious groups and ideologies such as German Faith, Ariosophy and Odinism regrouped and once again recruited a younger membership. At the same time, the growing popularity of Wicca, the New Age, and the esoteric movement in the wake of the hippie era awakened the interest of a broader counter-cultural public in non-Christian religious alternatives (von Schnurbein 2016: 54).

Under the National Socialist regime, most *völkisch* religious groups ended up facing persecution or being forcibly disbanded, which is why they could legally reorganise and regroup in the 1950s and 1960s in West Germany. After the war, organisations such as the *Artgemeinschaft*, the *Deutsche Unitarier*

*Religionsgemeinschaft* (German Unitarian Religious Community, *DUR*) and the *Freie Akademie* (Free Academy) were founded by former members and leaders of the *Deutschgläubige Gemeinschaft* and of the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*. These cultural organisations, together with youth organisations of *völkisch* and nationalist inspiration like the *Wiking Jugend* (Viking Youth) and the *Bund Heimattreuer Jugend* (League of Homeland Loyalist Youth, *BHJ*) “played an integral role as communicative centers where organized right-wing extremism was able to re-group” (von Schnurbein 2016: 49). Furthermore, “they provided a forum which not only recruited amongst the younger generation, but where later leaders of the *völkisch* religious scene of the 1970s also gained their first experiences and contacts” (von Schnurbein 2016: 50). The founders of the *Armanen-Orden*—founded in 1976 and clearly inspired by List’s *Hoher Armanen Orden*—were active in the scene mentioned above:

the racial-religious Armanen-Orden is a hierarchical nine-level initiatory order. It promotes a racial mysticism inspired by Guido von List’s and other Ariosophists’ teachings. In the 1980s, it began to include popular Celtic elements, teachings from the emerging goddess movement and feminist spirituality, and elements of a popularized Native American spirituality (von Schnurbein 2016: 55).

Adherents of the *Armanen-Orden* proceeded then to ground the *Heidnische Gemeinschaft* (Heathen Community) in 1985, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft naturreligiöser Stammesverbände Europas* (Working Group of Nature Religious Tribal Associations of Europe, *ANSE*) in 1990, both of them still active, and also to revive Ludwig Fahrenkrog’s *Germanische Glaubensgemeinschaft* (Germanic Faith Community, *GGG*). These religious groups did “aim at reconstructing an allegedly authentic Germanic religion based on Old-Icelandic sources and



relevant research within folklore and archaeology. They also installed statutes requiring their members to distance themselves from fascism and racism, holding fast to a strongly ethnicist line” (von Schnurbein 2016: 57).

The associations mentioned above also began networking with other comparable endeavours in English speaking countries, such as the English Odinic Rite (1979, initially founded in 1973 as Committee for the Restoration of the Odinic Rite).

In the USA, racial mysticism and *völkisch* ideas developed through similar paths as they did in Europe while adapting to the different and more varied ethno-demographic situation. The most prominent organisations engaging in racist discourse and behaviour are Christian, like the Christian Identity movement, an anti-Semitic offshoot of British Israelism.<sup>22</sup> Still, between the 1960s and the 1970s, Neo-pagan groups appeared on the scene as well.

Danish-born National Socialist sympathiser Else Christensen (1913–2005) emigrated to Canada in the 1950s and subsequently to the United States. Once in the USA, she founded the Odinist Fellowship in 1969, primarily as a ministry by mail. “Christensen has dedicated her life to the revival of Norse paganism as a vehicle for racial unification and rejuvenation” (Gardell 2003: 166), through her work, she has been responsible for introducing

many concepts and fields of activities later adopted among Odinists and racially aware Asatrúers. Among these are a Jungian reading of Norse paganism as the racial soul of the Aryan folk, her Jungian view on the heathen gods and goddesses as race-specific and genetically engraved archetypes, her political economical ideal of ‘tribal socialism,’ and her focus on recruitment through prison-outreach ministries (Gardell 2003: 166).

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<sup>22</sup> According to British Israelism, which roots date back to the sixteenth century, the people populating the British Isles are the direct descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

Many Jungian concepts, such as archetypes, or references to the collective unconscious, have been extremely important in the Weltanschauung of many groups and organisations that find a place under the umbrella term New Age. In the case of Germanic Neo-pagan groups inspired by Ariosophy and the *völkisch* milieu, there are also archetypes and a collective unconscious specific to the different races.

Stephen McNallen (b. 1948) founded the Viking Brotherhood roughly around the same time when Christensen created the Odinist Fellowship, transformed in 1976 in the Asatrú Free Assembly and renamed in the 1990s Asatrú Folk Assembly. McNallen espouses a tribalist or ethnonationalist worldview, stressing warrior values, but focused more on the religious aspect than Christensen did.

Christensen offered a more political and racial interpretation with notable national socialist influences, while McNallen espoused a more religious and ‘ethnic’ interpretation, although his vision about a future stateless American confederacy based on decentralized tribal units and ecologically sustainable production was not bereft of political implications (Gardell 2003: 152).

This tribalist position gained significant popularity from the end to the twentieth century and into the twenty-first among Asatrú groups that officially reject political involvement and political affiliation but bear affinities and often overlap with the radical Right scene.

Early attempts at installing Asatru as a religious alternative in the Scandinavian countries differ from this picture. They seem to mainly emerge out of counter-cultural impulses. This is true as well for the most nationally successful and most internationally important newly founded Asatru group of the 1970s, the Icelandic *Ásatrúarfélagið* (the Asatru Association or *Ásatrúarmenn* – ‘Asatru-Men,’ as they were called initially), which was formed around 1972 (von Schnurbein 2016: 59).

At this time especially, the group had also the support of organisations with nationalistic agendas; nonetheless, *Ásatrúarfélagið* was and is a heterogeneous organisation. Its founders were formerly active in the hippie movement and in Theosophy. *Ásatrúarfélagið* has been a recognised religious organisation in Iceland since 1973; for this reason, it is very relevant internationally.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, many Germanic and Norse Neo-pagan groups worldwide started working towards distancing themselves from their *völkisch* and politically cumbersome past in the USA, the ‘satanic panic’ of the 1980s and 1990s, together with the substantial number of Germanic and Norse Neo-pagan groups where the religious aspects had been conflated together with a white supremacist political agenda being a solid motive.<sup>23</sup>

This path towards ‘respectability’ and desire for ‘normalization’ was motivated not least by the increasing negative media attention that the racist elements in Germanic Neopaganism had started to attract by this time. Books investigating the ideological and organizational right-wing connections of Germanic Neopaganism contributed to this attention, as did the more sensationalist press coverage (von Schnurbein 2016: 63).

With the advent of the Internet, the reach of the cultic milieu in general, and consequently of Germanic and Norse Neo-paganism, too, has noticeably expanded. With a broader reach, the international connections between different groups grew as well. Many groups began to spread their material online through mailing lists and forums as soon as these were a thing. Because in the last decades the possibilities of contact grew, the reach and accessibility increased. Blogs, Youtube videos, Podcast episodes, and Social Media posts are a hotspot for ministry and religious and theological discussion.

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<sup>23</sup> For example, White Aryan Resistance, Wotansvolk, and the Asatru Folk Assembly.

### 3.1.3. Biology and Politics

Mattias Gardell and Stefanie von Schnurbein are amongst the scholars that have done some of the most extensive research in the field of Germanic paganism; both divide the scene into three main subgroups:

- 1) Racist or radical racist: in this milieu, there is a tendency to “biologize spirituality” (Gardell 2003: 17), this “racial-religious current [...] bases religion on a biological concept of race and continues to promote a radical völkisch racial ideology along with ideas of racial and religious purity and purification” (von Schnurbein 2016: 6). Many neo-pagans falling in this category are explicitly racist in their political and religious beliefs. They are heavily influenced by Ariosophic thought, espousing a racial mysticism that holds the Aryan race as divine.
- 2) Ethnic or ethnicist: in the context of the North American continent, Gardell reports that  
  
searching for an understanding of Norse paganism that would keep it folkish and ‘ancestral based’ without falling into the trap of negative racism, the cultural underground has evolved a third position between antiracism and militant racism. Attempting to get beyond the race issue, adherents define Asatrú as an ethnic religion, native to northern Europe and therefore natural to Americans of northern European ancestry. The notion of an organic relation between ethnicity and religion obviously implies the assumption that genetics somehow determine mentality, ethos, and ethics (Gardell 2003: 258)

This broad and multifaceted subgroup has been labelled ‘völkisch’ or ‘folkish’ as well because of its evident and profound völkisch influences. Von Schnurbein calls it “ethnicist in order to stress the fact that religion here is based on a traditional, homogenous heritage that is to be preserved or restored. This heritage is not exclusively conceptualized in biological terms, but is seen as rooted in landscape, nature, climate and culture as well” (2016: 6-7). This attitude towards religion seems and to a degree is and can be less radical than a purely biological position, yet often draws heavily from the ‘blood and soil’ ideology widespread in the völkisch milieu from the nineteenth century onwards.

Von Schnurbein ascribes a tendency towards cultural essentialism to the ethnicist subgroup. A tendency that is often to be found in explicitly racist groups as well: “‘culture’ [is considered] as an immutable and ideally homogenous entity rooted in a deep past – an idea which often carries with it a desire to purify and re-homogenize this alleged essential, traditional culture” (2016: 7).

As O’Donoghue aptly summarises:

Some organizations, especially Forn Sed and the various splinter groups with Ásatrú in their name (the Ásatrú Alliance, the Ásatrú Folk assembly, and so on), vehemently reject the accusation that they are racist. The Northvegr Foundation, for example, advertises itself as an educational resource: in the words of its website, it is ‘Dedicated to Bringing Knowledge and Understanding of Northern European pre-Christian History, Culture and Spiritual Values’. Technically speaking, what they all so insistently disavow is white supremacism.

They simply claim the right to cultivate their own, and, as they see it, racially inherent, culture. Their mission statements typically accord other racial groups the right to do as their respective ancestors did – and indeed, encourage it. They may for example support the rights of indigenous North American peoples – particularly in opposition to multinational companies charged with exploiting ‘homeland’ resources. It is easy to see this sort of reversion to racial, or even tribal, structures, as a reaction to what might loosely be called globalization: the assertion of a more sharply defined and therefore more secure identity than the phrase ‘citizen of the world’ might offer (2007: 176).

- 3) Universalist, anti-racist, or a-racist: Unlike the two previously described subgroups, universalist Norse pagans do not believe that biological or cultural background should be discriminatory factors used to exclude anyone from practising Asatrú. Some universalists try to ground their opinions from a historical and mythological perspective, thus attempting to provide a theological foundation to their stance. Asatrúer scholar K. Gundarsson argues that ‘racial purity’ had no meaning to the ancient Norseman and that their god/desses were indifferent to race [...] marrying ‘outsiders’ was common and highly respected during the Viking era, a practice that also was reflected in Norse mythology. Odin, for example, was the son of the god Borr and the giantess Bestla, and thus a ‘halfbreed’. [...] Gundarsson rebuts the conclusion that only those related by blood to ancient followers of the Aesir and Vanir are suited to revert to the old gods. Acknowledging that the ancient Norsemen emphasized the inherited might of the clan, Gundarsson points out that the Norsemen also had several rituals by which that might could be passed on to those who were not related by blood [...] (Gardell 2003: 163).

Even though several Asatrúers claim that “multi-ethnicity is fundamental to the theology of Asatrú” because “Asgård, home of the Gods is multi-ethnic” (Gamlinginn 1993; Gardell 2003: 274), von Schnurbein categorises this subgroup using the term a-racist as it “usually does not go actively against racism, as the term ‘anti-racist’ would suggest” (von Schnurbein 2016: 7). Asatrúers espousing such views also have a different take on the concept of culture compared racist and ethnic ones, generally considering it “as something that is to be created and that is continually transformed through cultural exchange and mixing” (von Schnurbein 2016: 7).

Overlaps and blurred lines between the different subgroups, especially but not exclusively between the racist and ethnicist ones, are not infrequent. The categorisation presented here is a general one; it is intended to be of use in navigating a non-homogenous religious milieu. As with any growing religious movement without a unified theology, inconsistencies and contradictions are substantial and even expected.

#### **3.1.4. Vinland**

Colloquially, one could describe the meaning of ‘Vinland’ as “the name the Vikings gave to a part of North America.” The specific location of Vinland is vague and unclear; still, the idea of a pre-Colombian and possibly even pre-Christian European legacy in North America is important to some Norse Neo-pagans as a validation of their tradition. It also has some political relevance for groups associated with or explicitly holding radical Right-wing ideas.

Such a need for legitimacy has been, for example, highlighted by the twenty-year-long dispute over the remains of the so-called Kennewick Man: the ca. 9000 years old skeleton was found in 1996. It was at first described as “Caucasoid,” accurate enough DNA analysis was not yet available at the time, and both Native American and Asatrú communities claimed the body for burial.

“The Kennewick Man conflict highlights the political dimensions of prehistoric archaeology. The remarkable skeleton was worked into the ethnonationalist ideologies of both the Native American and Asatrú communities. [...] To the latter, it was further evidence of a pre-Christian European legacy in North-America” (Gardell 2003: 150-151), for part of the Asatrú community the issue was one of legitimacy and of validation. Therefore, the Kennewick Man was “used to strengthen the pagan claim that Asatrú is an ‘organic’ religion that is natural, not alien, to white Americans” (Gardell 2003: 151). Further DNA analysis ruled out the ‘Viking’ origin of the Kennewick Man: it confirmed that the skeleton is genetically linked to modern-day Native Americans (Raja 2016).

Many of the toponyms mentioned in the Scandinavian sagas not only designate specific places, they are often still in use and can be easily connected to a geographical location: this rule of thumb does not apply to toponyms such as Vinland, Markland, and Helluland, which describe locations on the North American continent.

Thingvellir, the site of the annual Icelandic parliament and social gathering, very much was and is a specific place. But Vinland as well as Markland and Helluland, respectively the forested and rocky areas also mentioned in medieval sources, would have been relational terms rather than locations with extra geographic coordinates. Vinland, then, was neither Markland nor Helluland, and it was the last and furthest south of the North American places visited by the



Norse. It must also have been far enough south for grapes to have grown there, since the first element in the Norse form of the name seems incontrovertibly to have been *vin* (wine) and not *vin* (meadow), as some critics have argued. [...] The Norse sources offer only tantalising details that do little to narrow down the geographic possibilities (Machan and Helgason 2020: 4).

Archaeological evidence confirms what Icelandic sagas tell us regarding Icelanders landing in Greenland and in the North American continent:<sup>24</sup> settlements established and stable over a few centuries have been found in Greenland,<sup>25</sup> a short-lived one at L'Anse aux Meadows on Newfoundland (Canada). Norse artefacts have been found as far south as Maine, but they are not considered conclusive evidence of settlements or actual on-site presence. Moreover, no evidence points at the possibility of sustained presence on the American continent after the eleventh century C.E. (Machan and Helgason 2020: 5). Still, attempts to locate Vinland and a rising interest in a medieval Norse presence in the Americas would rise from the nineteenth century onwards.

“[...] Whatever Vinland's precise location, it clearly was in North America and it is perhaps the only legitimate physical link between the Americas and medieval Europe” (Machan and Helgason 2020: 12). In *From Iceland to the Americas*, the expression “Vinland fever” describes the particular interest North and South Americans have in anything concerning Norse landings on American shores. The

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<sup>24</sup> “[...] the most familiar and detailed accounts of the Norse in North America – so detailed, in fact, that they have often been accepted as factual, serving as roadmaps for Norse activity – are *The Saga of the Greenlanders* (*Grænlandinga saga*) and *Eirik the Red's Saga* (*Eiríks saga rauða*), both from the thirteenth century. Blending credible historical detail (like skin-boats, or canoes) with phenomena that recall contemporary accounts of the wonders of the East (like unipeds), the sagas in particular would seem to verify a Norse presence. But, again, they do not indicate the exact location of these landings, much less the possibility that Norse settlers, besides those ultimately associated with Leif Eriksson, might have journeyed elsewhere in the area. And the Vinland sagas are not dispassionate historical records but crafted pieces of prose in the tradition of the *Saga of the Icelanders* (*Íslendingasögur*), with all of their events and characters shaped by the works' narrative designs” (Machan and Helgason 2020: 6).

<sup>25</sup> Tenth to fifteenth century C.E.

origins of such a phenomenon can be traced back to the nineteenth century, a century during which several European nation-states were either born or consolidated; part of the process was also cultural and not merely administrative. As mentioned above more extensively, artistic movements such as Neoclassicism and Romanticism were involved in creating national narratives; in the German-speaking world, one can observe the development of the *völkisch* movement, but a rising interest in the local and national medieval and ancient past can be registered all around Europe. Medieval poems got translated into modern languages and popularised for the mainstream public, neo-gothic architecture takes inspiration from the Middle Ages, folklore starts being collected and analysed.

A peculiarly North American version of Vinland fever began to spread with the 1837 publication of the Dane Carl Christian Rafn's *Antiquitates Americanæ*, which claimed to identify Viking artefacts across the eastern seaboard of the United States (an area he had in fact never visited) and introduced the Vinland sagas and other Vinland materials, in Latin translations, to the modern world.

Generally credited with inspiring North America's own traditions of Norse-themed poems novels, and translations – including the first North American English translations of the Vinland sagas in 1841 – *Antiquitates Americanæ* can also be thought to have led, eventually, to films, comic books, and video games (Machan and Helgason 2020: 12).

When it comes to groups like the Wolves of Vinland:

according to historian David Perry, groups like the Wolves 'use the myth of Vinland to position themselves as righteous defenders in the wars of race and religion they believe are coming' (Perry 2017). This allows the group to make two claims at once. First, it is a move to innocence, cleansing them of the taint

of the colonial endeavor, for those acts were perpetrated by settlers who came after the 10th century explorers. Second, because they contend their ancestors were here in the 10th century, they lay claim to a kind of indigeneity. Like the wolf itself, who is native to North America, the group's assertion of Viking rootedness offers a sense of being of the landscape that some whites in North America have long desired, but have been unable to credibly assert. Vinland as a concept – as an organizing identity – sutures this anxious sense of unbelonging (Rutherford 2020: 65).

### **3.2. Militant Strength Culture**

The Wolves of Vinland ('Wolves,' for short) have been founded around 2006 by brothers Paul and Matthias Waggener (respectively known also as Grimnir and Jarn-nefr).<sup>26</sup> They describe themselves as "a tribe of folkish heathens" (Donovan 2014), based on their publicly available material and public statements. The Wolves can be roughly placed in the Ethnic or Ethnicist Germanic and Norse Neo-pagan milieu according to the classification provided by Gardell and von Schnurbein, even though there are significant overlaps with Racist or Radical Racist groups. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) added them to their list of hate groups in 2018, defining them as a "Neo-Völkisch hate group" (Southern Poverty Law Center); the definition of Neo-Völkisch, according to the SPLC, is the following: "Born out of an atavistic defiance of modernity and rationalism, present-day neo-Völkisch, or Folkish, adherents and groups are organized around ethnocentricity and archaic notions of gender" (Southern Poverty Law Center).

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<sup>26</sup> Grimnir is one of the names of the god Odin, meaning "the masked one." Jarnnefr (Iron-Nose) is a troll from the medieval sagas.

### 3.2.1. Neo-Tribes

Jack Donovan is anti-feminist, writer, artist, and member of the Wolves from 2014 to 2018 (Donovan). He has been widely involved with the manosphere, the Alt-Right, and white nationalists (even though he is considered controversial in the scene on account of him being openly homosexual). Despite this, he does not identify as a white nationalist or a white supremacist and, as of 2017, openly repudiates the Alt-Right “and declared that he would no longer allow white nationalists to publish or use his work” (Lyons 2019: 252).<sup>27</sup> Concerning the Wolves and other members of Operation Werewolf, Donovan confirms the lack of an explicit political affiliation and states that “many members of OPWW are also readers of my work, and some of them are great guys who hold a wide range of views. As far as I can tell, most of them just like to lift weights, listen to black metal, punch each other and do pagan rituals in the woods — and that all sounds swell to me” (Donovan).<sup>28</sup>

What the Wolves offer is a kind of anti-nationalism, premised on bioregionally based tribes rather than patriotic attachment to the United States. Like other actors on the far right, the Wolves critique modernity, suggesting that society is domesticated by structures of capitalism, multiculturalism, consumerism and the media (Rutherford 2020: 68),

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<sup>27</sup> “I am sometimes referred to as a White Nationalist. That is slander. I have never considered myself a White Nationalist, and have never publicly claimed to be one [...]” (Donovan). Donovan goes into detail about this in “Why I Am Not a White Nationalist,” *Jack Donovan*, May 31, 2017 (updated August 19, 2017), not present anymore on his website, the original version has been reposted by several platforms. See, for example, <https://attackthesystem.com/2017/06/02/why-i-am-not-a-white-nationalist/> (accessed: March 21, 2021).

<sup>28</sup> Donovan, J. “Positions & FAQ” *Jack Donovan*, <https://www.jack-donovan.com/sowilo/bio/positions/> (accessed: March 21, 2021).

which aligns with the fact that they do openly describe themselves as folkish. The language they use is more often than not the same used by white nationalists and white supremacists, albeit similar at first glance. “Both Donovan and Waggener have much more to say about men than they do about whiteness. However, they do espouse a kind of ethnic tribalism that centers around white identity. Although Paul Waggener avers that his is a pagan first, he does so by saying ‘the heart of paganism is in the land, and blood and soil’” (Rutherford 2020: 66). The blood and soil rhetoric is typical of the *völkisch* milieu and not exclusive to the radical racist or explicitly racist components in it.

“Rather than overthrowing the government and replacing it with an alternative, the Wolves seek to build their own placed-based culture, separate from that which they see as poisonous, emasculating and weakening in our own” (Rutherford 2020: 68); Waggener delves into the topic in “Neo-Tribes,” where he sketches his idea of what a tribal group should look like and how it should work according to him.

It is no longer enough to sloganeer and say things thoughtlessly like ‘smash the state’ or ‘tear it down’, without an alternative to the urbanized, mechanized, socialized lifestyle you are struggling against. [...] The alternative we suggest is a tribal model - a small, self-sustaining, holistic community of equals, all struggling to ensure the good of each individual within that community. This differs from the tired (and often unhealthy or simply non-functional) idea of the ‘commune’ (Waggener 2016, *Transmissions Vol. I*: 33-34).

When writing about Operation Werewolf, Waggener defines it as a culture of strength and tries to place it outside of the political spectrum.

Operation Werewolf is not nationalist, communist, anarchist, or fascist. It is a culture of strength, building tribes that value the honor code established

previously -- there is no hidden agenda, shadowy associations, nor underhanded mission. If we were any of these things, we would proudly and aggressively display it, as we have proudly and aggressively displayed other symbols and concepts that have led to resistance, misunderstanding and occasionally physical confrontation (2018, *Werewolf Manifesto*).

To questions regarding identity and political standing of Operation Werewolf and of the Wolves of Vinland, Waggener answers:

[...] I don't know where we fall. We fall wherever we are. We're tribalists, certainly, and we're absolutely proud of who we are and where we come from, but not to the point where I'm interested in starting some kind of race war or doing something else crazy or wasting all my time talking about how supreme I am [...]. What we do has much less to do with race and 'white identity' and it has more to do with being in the Wolves (Johnson and Waggener 2016).

Meaning that the tribal identity is more important, more meaningful than any other and has absolute priority above everything else in the group ideology.

During a podcast episode from June 2020, Waggener argued that in order to build a tribe (based on male membership, inspired by the idea of an idealised ancient Indo-European *Männerbund*, male alliance), it is necessary to consider everyone who is not a member as a potential enemy:

there are very few things these days that men can involve themselves in that are dangerous and that create an 'us versus them' mentality, which i believe is necessary for true friendship. [...] If you are in the Wolves you are likely to lose your job – if you have a normal job, you are likely to undergo character assassination, you are likely to lose social capital, and it's very easy to maintain this 'us versus them' mentality that's necessary to create a tight-knit culture of males (von Marstall and Waggener 2020).

Tribal identity seems then be defined in relation to what is perceived as being 'other'; anything external to the group is to be considered as a potential threat or

an enemy, and that would be necessary to create a united front against the other, the outside, and keep the group tight and ready to defend itself at all times.

### 3.2.2. Religious Views

The Wolves do practice *blót* and rituals marking solstices and equinoxes like most Norse Neo-pagan groups but are not reconstructionists,

what is this obsession with ‘correctness to the past’ worth, at the end of the day? How many fucks can we give about being ‘authentic to the past,’ if we are caught up in cracking the longbones of today, out time, and sucking out the marrow? And why would we want to? Why should we do other than pay grim homage to the past, acknowledging our ancestors deeds by raising a horn to them, and then out-doing them, to show that we have not let them down, but taken their blood further afield, stretched the legend of their line long, and lived with blood on our teeth and scalps in our hand. [...] I am not a follower of Odhinn – I am Odhinn (Waggener 2016, Transmissions Vol. I: 58).

Such statements resonate with the teachings of radical racist groups like Wotansvolk, which combine Ariosophy with their own personal interpretation of Nietzschean philosophy and Jungian psychology. According to Wotansvolk doctrine, Aryan man and Aryan gods are ontologically indistinguishable,

these archetypes are the gods of the blood, who will exist as long as there are living members of the race. For the individual Aryan, meeting with those archetypical forces recharges divine energy such that man may evolve into the realization of the Nietzschean superman. Odinism equals the rope over the abyss, connecting man the beast with the superman (Gardell 2003: 208).

This attitude towards religion and godheads is widespread in ethnicist Asatrú circles as well. The Wolves do not belong to Germanic Neo-paganism practitioners who consider the gods an expression of Jungian archetypes encoded into the collective unconscious, either. Waggener articulates his position in the following fashion:

My relationship to mythology is a type of this poetic understanding of universal TRUTHS, not FACTS. My perception of ideas like ‘gods’ and ‘creation’ and so forth, the stories of cosmogony and the peopling of the heavens with characters who typify specific ideals and archetypes, is poetic. I do not BELIEVE in the existence of actual intelligent beings who shape my destiny or pay attention to my brief flickering time here in this reality. However, I do believe that these ‘beings’ are small pieces of a greater puzzle, brief glimpses, shattered pieces of the mind of that All-thing which we call the Cosmos.

Thor, Odin, Fenris, Jormungandr. All elements on a periodic table of spirit, not matter. Small and large clues to the fabric of the universe. Some emulatable archetypes, others massive ideas, ‘jotunns’ of primal concept that the human mind has struggled to break into manageable pieces since we crawled out of the blind chaos of the yawning gap.

My utter distaste and disgust for spiritual and religious literalists knows no bounds. Just because your perception of these “godforms” and concepts is childlike, simple, literal, and requires moral black and whites, good and evil, winners and losers, saviors and devils, does not mean that I am bound by similar chains of ignorance.

I ally myself in this age with concepts of ruinous might, chaos and destruction. I do so because the time for ‘gods’ is over/must come again. Those ideas that sweep clean the world, and create space/time in which new/old ideas may once again thrive. I do not cling to concepts of preservation, or protection, because that time/space is not now. But it will be again. This thing must be seen to its



end. It must be ridden down into the depths, from whence it can rise again, after the fire of Surtr has burned all things away.

‘This is the wind age, the wolf age, and doom is never far off. This is the sword age, the axe age, and many have fallen away. Oaths are forgotten with ease and hearts tremble with fear and despair- few are brave and fewer are wise. But we are bound to these Oaths, and strong of heart’ (2017: 26-27).

During an interview with the author of this work, he elaborated on the concept and described his perception of deities as “experiential.” Waggener’s distaste for religious literalists resonate with Evola’s attitude towards dogmatic and devotional forms of religion; their attitudes bear many similarities, both in their perception of what gods or godheads are at an ontological level, as well as in regard of the function of rituals. In *Rivolta*, Evola writes clearly that he regards the modern doctrinal religions and their concept of faith and devotion as expressions of feminisation and decadence, opposite to Traditional forms of religion. On the matter of Traditional religiosity, Evola expresses himself in the following terms:

One would look in vain for ‘religion’ in the original forms of the world of Tradition. [...] What characterizes the primordial times is [...] the idea or perception of pure powers, adequately represented by the Roman view of the *numen*. The *numen*, unlike the notion of *deus* (as it later came to be understood), is not a being or a person, but a sheer power that is capable of producing effects, of acting, and of manifesting itself. The sense of the real presence of such powers, or *numina*, as something simultaneously transcendent and yet immanent, marvelous yet fearful, constituted the substance of the original experience of the ‘sacred’. A well-known saying of Servius emphasizes that in the origins, ‘religion’ consisted in nothing else but *experience*. [...] ‘inner doctrines’ were characterized by the teaching that the personal forms of deities, variously objectified, are only symbols of superrational and superhuman ways of being. As

I have said, the center consisted in the real and living presence of these states within an elite, or in the ideal of their realization through what in Tibet is called the ‘direct path,’ and which generally corresponds to initiation conceived as an ontological change of nature. The saying from the Upaniṣads that best represents the traditional ‘inner doctrine’ is: ‘So whoever worships another divinity than his Self, thinking: ‘He his one and I another,’ he knows not. He is like a sacrificial animal for the gods’ (1995: 42-43).

“Cattle” in the language used by the members of Operation Werewolf. This last passage bears striking similarities to Waggener’s “This sort of religious devotion to a concept bigger than ourselves is something all of us had in common. The desire, or rather, the need, to demand excellence of ourselves and those around us to make ourselves something that others can believe in, and that their belief in us is the Truth” (Waggener 2017: 164). Evola continues elaborating on why orthopraxy is more important to him than orthodoxy and explains what place rituals had in Traditional forms of religion and their importance on a ‘technical’ level: “With regard to the rite there was nothing ‘religious’ about it and little or no devout pathos in those who performed it. The rite was rather a “divine technique,” a determining action upon invisible forces and inner states similar in spirit to what today is obtained through physical forces and states of matter” (1995: 43). An orthopractic approach to religion is relatively widespread in the cultic milieu as well; such a focus on a “divine technique” as a form of *Ars Regia* or spiritual alchemy is at the base of the programme of Operation Werewolf as well as of Waggener’s personal practice.

The practices of meditation, magic and *galdr*,<sup>29</sup> the way Waggener intends and prescribes it, is also very close to what Evola meant when he talked about magical techniques:

When I say ‘magical,’ I do not mean what today the majority of people think when they hear the term ‘magic,’ which is almost always discredited by prejudices and counterfeits. Nor do I refer to the meaning the term acquires when referred to the *sui generis* empirical science typical of antiquity, which was rather limited in its scope and effects. Magic in this context designates a special attitude toward spiritual reality itself, an attitude of centrality that is closely related to regal tradition and initiation (Evola 1995: 46).

Waggener offers a summary of the various techniques he recommends in *Vakandibók. A Tauf of Awakening* (2016); in the Introduction to his work, he clarifies that:

the focus and the techniques found herein are not unique, per se – they are known and practiced in some form or another in many various areas of spiritual study and stem from a thousand traditions. The difference is that here, the practices are applied directly to the ongoing Work within the framework of the Germanic magical art and are organized and laid out in such a fashion as to promote the full understanding and constant strengthening and harmony of the Soul Complex in all its wondrous and inseparable parts (9).

The various techniques proposed by Waggener are generally not original and are typical of the religious or spiritual practice of many movements belonging under the New Age umbrella definition; what is most striking (and relatively original) is the development of a series of techniques typical of Tantric currents under names translated or composed in Old Norse.

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<sup>29</sup> “The word *galdr* comes from a root word meaning ‘to sing or to chant,’ but is in the Old Norse almost always used in context referring to a charm or spell, and became synonymous later on with anything related to the esoteric” (Waggener 2016, *Zines*). See also Lindow 2002: 132-133.

Prāṇāyāma,<sup>30</sup> or breathing techniques are described and explained as “Valknutr Breathing” for example, whereas a number of yogic techniques are collected under the name *Staðagaldr* and the practice of repeating mantras is considered equivalent to *galdr*.<sup>31</sup>

Those individuals who reject *staðagaldr* as being a foreign influence on the Northern tradition or Indo-European practice in general need look no further than the Rig Veda, the oldest written work in any I.E. language, or do some cursory studies on the Indus Valley civilization from which the text originated. There can be little doubt that what is today known as ‘yoga’ (from the Sanskrit word meaning ‘to bind together,’ or ‘to yoke’) was practiced in many forms throughout the ancient Indo-European world, and beyond. To think that advanced breathing, mental, spiritual and physical exercises are solely the province of the Asian culture is not only insulting, but ignorant and those heathens and vitkar of Indo-European stock would do well to take more time to explore their own history outside of Northern Germany and Scandinavia - although even there, the remnants of the tradition can be found in such artifacts as the Gallehus horn [see Figure 3] (Waggener 2016, *Zines*).

Waggener, like Evola, recognises the different Indo-European traditions (cultures, mythologies, religions) as part of a broader Indo-European one, and as connected and related to one another, as an expression of a perennial Tradition.

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<sup>30</sup> Prāṇāyāma, “Name of the three ‘breath-exercises’ performed during Saṃdhyā” in the Monier Williams Dictionary.

<sup>31</sup> The connection between yoga and runes has precedents in phenomena such as *Runengymnastik* and *Runenraunen*: “Occult theories about runes, always tangential to actual Nazi politics, continued a life of their own outside the doctrines of racial purity and antisemitism. Friedrich Bernhard Marby developed Gorsleben’s theory of runes as conduits of divine energy into the cult of *Runengymnastik* – rune gymnastics, which involved participants holding yoga-like poses in the shape of runic letters, in order to attract to themselves this energy, which took the form of cosmic waves or rays. Different runic characters could attract and transmit different kinds of powers and qualities. Siegfried Kummer added to this a practice called rune-yodelling (*Runenraunen*), in which various kinds of humming, supplemented by mystic paraphernalia such as magic circles, and the performance of runic exercises, could draw down these mysterious forces” (O’Donoghue 2007: 154).

A sense of impending doom permeates all of the material produced by Operation Werewolf, which references Evola's critique of modernity regularly, the millenarian conviction of living in the Kali Yuga, that the Ragnarök is approaching is the starting point from which ultimately all of the philosophy of Operation Werewolf originates, a philosophy and related techniques designed as a new *summa* of a perennial Indo-European (one could also explicitly say Aryan) Tradition.

### **3.2.3. Structure**

The Wolves of Vinland are organised in several Chapters, with a structure modelled on outlaw biker clubs. The biker-inspired structure does not come as a surprise, considering the fact that most members are indeed bikers, and is not an isolated case in the panorama of ethnicist and racist Asatrú in the United States: Valgard Murray's (b. 1950) Asatrú Alliance (AA) "differentiates its affiliates according to recognized rank into full (official), prospective (formational), and 'hangaround'" (Gardell 2003: 262).

The Wolves have a stringent membership process, which might be the reason the group claims to have only between 50 and 100 members of what looks to be mostly white men, although this is also difficult to say. As Paul Waggener elaborates, 'an aspiring Wolf' moves through the channels of being an 'associate' to a 'prospect' of the group. To become a 'full-patch member', prospects must show 'their commitment to physical fitness, MMA-style fight training (the Wolves hold daily bouts of sparring in which all male members are expected to participate), and the study of runes and hexology,' which provide the

central practices that inform the group's attachment to their ideas of 'strength, courage, mastery and honor' (Rutherford 2020: 64).

As Waggener clarified when interviewed by the author of this work, the whole process is strictly invitational: one is invited to spend time with the Wolves of Vinland, and after about one year of acquaintanceship the tribe votes to decide if an individual is allowed to prospect for them. Prospecting is a highly time demanding phase that lasts another year, and all decisions regarding possible new members must be unanimous. The stress on elitism by means of perceived superiority (physical, intellectual, and spiritual at the same time) resonates with the opus of Julius Evola.

As mentioned above, "Wolves" is one of the projects of the photographer Peter Beste: the people portrayed in Beste's pictures fit the Biker stereotype: almost all the men wear cut-off vests decorated with the so-called 'colours,' that is, patches with regional (e.g., Appalachia, Cascadia) or status (e.g., Prospect) identification. They are for the most part heavily tattooed, and there are visible recurring themes and subjects in the choice of tattoo: Fraktur calligraphy, Futhark runes, Icelandic magical staves (like the Aegishjálmur or the Vegvísir)<sup>32</sup> are very common; symbols such as the Wolfsangel, the Black Sun, and the Solar Cross are also very popular amongst them. This organisational structure resembling outlaw biker gangs is not an entirely original feature, as it can be found in Valgard Murray and Robert N. Taylor's Asatrú Alliance, founded in 1988, too.

"The Wolves wouldn't want me to trivialize my experience by comparing it to something as bougie as a television show, but I have to admit that my time at Ulfheim felt like a cross between Sons of Anarchy and the Vikings," writes Jack

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<sup>32</sup> Aegishjálmur, "Helm of Awe" (see Figure 4), and Vegvísir, "Wayfinder" (see Figure 5), Icelandic magical staves.

Donovan, author of *The Way of Men* (2012) and *Becoming a Barbarian* (2016), in a blog post from 2014 (Donovan 2014). Ulfheim (wolf home) is the community operated by the Wolves in Virginia, where they built a Viking Longhouse and where the most important rituals and gatherings take place; Jack Donovan—founder of the Pacific Northwest branch of the Wolves—created another similar space, Waldgang (forest passage), “an experimental ritual space for men located in the Pacific Northwest.” Waldgang “was conceived initially as a tribal space — an escape for spiritual ‘outlaws’” (Donovan, “Waldgang”), the name is inspired by Ernst Jünger’s (1895–1998) book *Der Waldgang* (The Forest Passage).

Jünger, whose “importance lies in the evolution from young radical to an acute observer of Germany’s cataclysmic rise and fall under National Socialism, and then his role in the Federal Republic of Germany as a sophisticated voice of classical European conservatism, a sage, and critic of technological modernity” (Neaman 2019: 22) published the book in 1951—that is, after the end of the Second World War and the subsequent division of Germany in West and East blocs. *Der Waldgang*

amounts to instruction for passive resistance to the modern condition. The individual walks in a metaphorical forest, taking her own path, to escape domination by the forces of technology, the omnipresent Leviathan state, and the banality of modern culture. Religion, counter-Enlightenment thought, and myth are all put in the service of subverting the corrosive effects of instrumental rationality, which, he claims, undergirds all modern totalitarian forms of government (Neaman 2019: 31),

all themes recurrent both in Operation Werewolf material, both online and in print, and in the production of Julius Evola, especially post-war.

For this reason, motorcycles and infinite Highways are not the backdrops of Beste's visual documentation of the Wolves activities: on the background there are forests and wilderness instead, as the moots and rituals of the group usually take place in the open, the main set is Ulfheim. Amongst the documented rituals, there is also animal sacrifice. Many of the members of the Wolves keep animals and hunt, and as of 2021 it is still practised, in private and usually before the official start of their gatherings, but the lack of external public does not take away from its metaphysical and functional purposes, which include community building. Animal sacrifice is identified with the term *blót*; both in the pictures by Beste and in their captions, one can recognise names and terms stemming from Germanic mythologies.

The identification of the group members as wolves has to do with their Norse inspiration too; “[...] each day must be lived as though it is Ragnarok, each hour the last one of our lives” (Waggener 2018, *Werewolf Manifesto*) state the last paragraphs of their Manifesto, even the term “wolf-time” references the Ragnarök, “Judgement-of-the-powers”, the end of the world (See Lindow 2002: 254-258), as described in the stanzas 44-45 of the *Völuspá*,<sup>33</sup> the famous “Prophecy of the Seeress” from the *Poetic Edda* (Lindow 2002: 317-319). Besides the biker club structure of the Wolves of Vinland, Operation Werewolf had an additional hierarchy structure:

- Ally: a sympathiser “one who is supporting the Operation from the outside, someone who agrees with what the Operation stands for, but has

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<sup>33</sup> “44. Now Garm howls loud | before Gniphahellir,/The fetters will burst, | and the wolf run free;/Much do I know, | and more can see/Of the fate of the gods, | the mighty in fight./45. Brothers shall fight | and fell each other,/And sisters' sons | shall kinship stain;/Hard is it on earth, | with mighty whoredom;/Axe-time, sword-time, | shields are sundered,/Wind-time, wolf-time, | ere the world falls;/Nor ever shall men | each other spare.” *Völuspá.org*, <http://www.voluspa.org/voluspa41-45.htm> (accessed: August 19, 2020).



no interest in further association, formation, participation etc.” (Waggener 2016, *Zines*).

- Operative: an active member of Operation Werewolf

is one who either adopted or found himself already in agreement with the philosophies of OPWW in his daily life, and is living in accordance with the ideal of physical, mental and spiritual strength [...]. An Operative is one who is directly participating in the Operation from within, representing it through the backpatch or other war-gear, attending national and regional events, seeking or attaining membership in a Division” (Waggener 2016, *Zines*).

- Kommandant: has a leadership position,

has successfully formed his own Division and is maintaining its upkeep through regular meet-up and event planning. This is an elected position within the Division, and is subject to change at the decision of the majority of Operatives. The Kommandant is the main point of contact for the Division and is expected to represent it at regional and national events, as well as to make himself available for communication with Werewolf Command (Waggener 2016, *Zines*).

- Iron Fist: “an elite unit within the greater framework of the Operation. He is one who has exemplified the tenets and principles of OPWW, a specimen both mentally and physically. A member of I.F. adheres to a higher standard of discipline, training and schedule than either the Operative or Kommandant [...]” (Waggener 2016, *Zines*).

- Werewolf Command: “the classification of the founding individual behind Operation Werewolf” (Waggener 2016, *Zines*).

- Division: “A Division is formed based around the following parameters: there are 3 or more individuals in one region desirous of forming a

Division. Those individuals have decided who will be the Kommandant of their Division. A Division name has been chosen, and all this information submitted to Werewolf Command” (Waggener 2016, *Zines*).

Each Division is encouraged to develop its own internal culture, symbols, rituals and style, but to represent Operation Werewolf is to understand that this is not a platform for a Division’s personal politics, and that to exist within the framework of Operation Werewolf is to eschew or abandon the modern sickness of belief in a political solution at all (Waggener 2018, *Werewolf Manifesto*).

### **3.3. Symbols and Sources of Inspiration**

Greg Johnson: [...] So can you explain why you chose ‘wolves’ and also the concept of the werewolf, why did those names? Why... why did those figure in your name?

Paul Waggener: I mean... you have to think too... a lot of the stuff maybe... maybe I wouldn't have done the same way, but - you know - I always tell people: this is a project I started when I was - you know - twenty. I was really young and my primary aesthetic at the time was like... black metal. You know, I came out of punk rock and black metal and so - you know - the Operation Werewolf stuff... you know - everybody raised an eyebrow like: “This probably isn't the best stuff to name anything if you want it to have legs” because of its connotation with - you know - World War II imagery and all the rest of that stuff but... you know - in black metal, in the aesthetic that I grew up with these extreme sort of connections, and really extreme imagery was what I gravitated toward and I always thought it was better to try to hit somebody with a hammer rather than - you know - politely ask for their attention...

G.J.: Right...

P.W.: ... and it worked for me very well. And - you know - the way that Operation Werewolf looked and the symbolism and the ideas that... sort of... were tied to it definitely got a lot of attention for better or for worse and I've told people - you know - in a lot of ways those things were what I call 'armor against the insincere' if someone is that bothered by those terminologies or... or they're so short-sighted in their understanding of History and historical use of symbols, then they are generally speaking not going to be the kind of people I want to associate with; and also, if they're that sensitive.

G.J.: Yeah, yeah...

P.W.: But a lot of other things as well, so you know the short answer on 'why wolves' is because, I mean... [laughs] I wish I could say more...

G.J.: Tribal animals...

P.W.: Yeah, they're tribal pack animals and they have ferocity and they're respected, and with Operation Werewolf the idea was that... you know it was a transformative process, it was an operation. And I shut the Operation Werewolf stuff down officially at the end of December [2020] but it was a transformative process; both for me I think and for a lot of people who were involved with it.

G.J.: Yeah, I mean... Operation Werewolf is like the Transmutation of Men into Wolves... (Johnson and Waggener 2021)

Therefore, the idea behind Operation Werewolf is that of an alchemical process of transmutation: a transmutation from a state of mere humanity to a superior one, a parallel with the alchemical transmutation of base metals into gold. Spiritual alchemy has a significant role in the ideology of Operation Werewolf. The stress on it being a form of "self-dictatorship" which is directed inward and "does not seek to subjugate others, as this is below the higher ideal of the Operation" but instead "seeks to conquer and subjugate the SELF to our True Will, and create a consonance and totality of being that will create a whole person out of the rubble

and detritus that we began with” (Waggener 2017: 63), resonates with Evola’s work and his views on Alchemy.

The sources of inspiration for the symbols and ideals expressed by Operation Werewolf do not come solely from esotericism, the cultic milieu and Evola’s philosophy; Waggener draws heavily from popular culture and from his experience in fitness and bodybuilding, amongst other things, presenting inspirations and influences ranging from black metal, biker culture, fantasy novels and imagery (e.g., quotes and references to R. E. Howard’s Conan and Frank Frazetta’s illustrations are very prevalent), Norse mythology, history, and a scholarly inspired perennialism deeply influenced work of scholars such as Mircea Eliade.

### **3.3.1. Wolves**

In Norse mythology, Ragnarök is also described as the ‘Wolf Age,’ a definition widespread in popular culture nowadays and referenced multiple times in the material of Operation Werewolf; another mythological reference is that to the wolf Fenrir—son of the god Loki and the giantess Angrboda—(Lindow 2002: 59; 111; 216-220) who is a harbinger of Ragnarök. The Wolf Age, Ragnarök, or Kali Yuga, is a central theme in the ideology behind Operation Werewolf, and men adhering to its ideology are therefore called to be “Wolves of the Kali Yuga” (Waggener 2017: 137-139).

The image of the wolf saturates the discourse and practice of this group, inextricably tied to the performance of a kind of hypermasculinity, where men become Wolves through highly ritualized and stylized acts of violence. This is

clearest in the writings of Jack Donovan; at the root of his articulation of masculinity is violence.

Indeed, one of Donovan's most (in)famous essays is titled 'Violence is Golden.' In it, he claims: 'Violence isn't the only answer, but it is the final answer,' one that establishes order and dominance they ascribe to wolves. But for Donovan, this violence isn't criminal or anarchic; it's tribal and in service of your human pack (Rutherford 2020: 67).

The wolf is perceived as a predator, caring toward the members of its pack and secluded and aggressive to strangers. According to Stephanie Rutherford, the "symbolic pliability" (2020: 72) of the figure of the wolf is what makes it appealing and of service in the creation of an identity for groups such as the Wolves of Vinland, from which Operation Werewolf took off.

[...] 'The wolf today is for many a potent symbol of the wild, the free, the uncommodifiable'. This is certainly the case for [...] the Wolves, whose narrative of identity hinges on their expression of a particular freedom from mainstream society. However, there is something more here at work than a veneration of wildness, [...] there is also a repurposing of the wolf's negative connotations as assets. If, as Bokowick (2004) attests, the most commonly understood meaning of a wolf symbol is as a vicious bringer of death, then the Wolves and *La Meute*<sup>34</sup> embrace this representation rather than seeking to unsettle it. But unlike Bokowick, I suggest that it is the ambivalence of the wolf symbol that matters. Because it can be a simultaneous symbol of persecution, brutality and raw wildness, the wolf can shapeshift to meet a variety of needs. For both groups, it matters that the wolf is a figure that is simultaneously bestial and authentic, both an outcast and a symbol of freedom. In each of these iterations, the wolf stands as a bulwark against demographic, cultural and political change, conceived as the loss of white identity, traditional masculinity, western values or the character of Québec. The wolf, then, is timeless; its nature offers a stronghold against

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<sup>34</sup> *La Meute* [the Pack] is a Québécois Far-Right identitarian movement.

modernity. It can be hailed both as a maverick and defender of the status quo.

(Rutherford 2020: 72).

To the wolf have been attached ambivalent qualities, and it is precisely in this ambivalence that lies the importance of the wolf both for the Wolves of Vinland and for Operation Werewolf: “the wolf is outside settled life. He represents savagery and viciousness. But wolves also work together” (Waggener 2019, “The Wolf God and the Ecstatic Host”). This idealised picture of the wolf appeals to both the Wolves of Vinland and the adherents of Operation Werewolf, in the words of Paul Waggener

The training of our bodies and minds, the rejection of the values embraced by the current popular agendas of the day, the clanning together in small intentional communities in order to foster pressure and support one another’s endeavors- all of these things exist on the fringe, somewhere out on the perimeter of accepted behavior by today’s power structure and social narratives.

Anyone living by the tenets of Operation Werewolf, truly embracing the simple philosophy put forth in the Manifesto and elsewhere, is someone who is “not of this world,” or a voluntary outlaw from polite society and the current virtue signaling police state (Waggener 2019, “Of Wolf Heads and Black Banners”).

Wolves are associated with being an outlaw, which in turn “is about a wholehearted rejection of what this world has to offer- their comfortable goals and vain virtues, their pre-packaged dinners and dreams” (Waggener 2019, “Of Wolf Heads and Black Banners”). It is a rejection of a capitalistic, consumerist society deemed unnatural and as repressing human beings (especially men) into being weak in favour of a lifestyle that is perceived as being closer to nature and giving the possibility to thrive to the physically, mentally, and spiritually strong.

Wolves are idealised in their being predators, fear-inducing villains of fairy tales, a characteristic or association which is also embraced by the members of the

Wolves of Vinland and of Operation Werewolf, summarised by the slogan “we are the villains,” to be found in zines and on merchandise. References to human beings being divided into metaphorical categories such as wolves and cattle are also present throughout the material of Operation Werewolf and the work of Paul Waggener beyond that (Johnson and Waggener 2021).<sup>35</sup>

Rutherford also suggests that “the flexibility of the metaphor of the wolf points to the fact that it is unmoored from actually existing wolves” (2020: 72), and that is because for the members of the Wolves of Vinland and of Operation Werewolf the connection to the metaphor of the wolf or werewolf is manifold and connected to various mythological, literary and historical elements, it is an archetype with a long history and not necessarily a zoologically accurate one; the connection to the wolf is mainly a connection with an archetype.

### **3.3.2. Werewolves, Warwolves, and the Wolfsangel**

“The wolf-rune, wolf-hook, Wolfsangel, Wolfsanker, Wolfsjagd. The symbol has a long and storied history, reaching back more than a thousand years, and if one considers its obvious connection with the :EIHWAZ:<sup>36</sup> rune, its age can be determined as at least 2,000 years old” (Waggener 2017: 61). The reference to wolves and werewolves is multifaceted, and its origins do not lie solely in Norse mythology— as previously discussed. Beyond the resemblance to the rune eihwaz, this symbol has several levels of meaning that make it of interest for Operation Werewolf. Nowadays, the Wolfsangel is known primarily as a heraldic

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<sup>35</sup> For example, “[...] the great industrial farm of this planet Earth, a farm in which you are the cattle” (Waggener, 2017: 18).

<sup>36</sup> ↓

symbol, and though its historical origins lie in the shape of the hooks of actual wolf traps (see Figure 6), Waggener reports that “it became a symbol of freedom from oppression when adopted by the peasant revolt in 15th century Germany, as they made war against the princes and their armies, outgunned and finding themselves in need of a sign to rally under” (2017: 62). In the twentieth century, the symbol will become widely popular thanks to Hermann Löns’s (1866–1914) historical novel *Der Wehrwolf* (The Warwolf), published in 1910. The novel is set in Germany during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648): Harm Wulf—the protagonist—is a farmer who loses his family during the conflict and becomes a resistance fighter, recruiting other farmers and peasants to defend their land from marauders and enemies. Harm Wulf “adopts the symbol as his personal badge while fighting against vastly superior foes, the wolf-hook representing the style of guerilla war he and his men waged” (Waggener 2017: 62). Löns’s portrayal of the moral crisis and of the brutal transformation that man undergoes in such dramatic circumstances was to inspire more than one group in national socialist Germany, so much that several SS divisions adopted the symbol.

The stylised white Wolfsangel with crossbars on a black background is the version of the symbol which the members and sympathisers of Operation Werewolf adopt more often, and it is virtually indistinguishable from the national socialist version of it (see Figure 7). Not only the Wolfsangel but the name Operation Werewolf itself also references both Löns’s novel as well as the homonymous guerrilla movement(s) active around the end of the Second World War:

There were basically two German werewolf movements that the Allied forces confronted. The first were special guerrilla units that had been set up within Himmler’s SS from the fall of 1944. Several thousand die-hard Nazis were trained in paramilitary camps [...]. The other ‘werewolves’ challenging the



Allied troops were unorganized individuals who were drawn in by Joseph Goebbels' last big propaganda campaign. In March 1945, Goebbels had managed to swipe the werewolf concept from Himmler's SS and obtained Hitler's consent for a radio offensive. On April 1, he launched a powerful transmitter named Werwolf. Targeting "the political minority of the tenacious and steadfast" (*Unentwegten und Beharrlichen*) among the civilian population, he tried to instill 'revolutionary spirit' in 'freedom fighters' (*Freiheitskämpfer*) for the National Socialist cause. They were to attack the enemy by every possible means, to engage in sabotage and assassination [...] often labeled Werwolf activity, and Werwolf cliques of local youngsters carried out largely symbolic acts of resistance when they clipped wires and smeared walls with the *Wolfsangel* (a symbol particular to the werewolf movement, resembling a 'Z' lying on its side). [...] While the werewolves did not constitute much of a real threat, their psychological impact was enormous. [...] The propaganda image of the werewolf also succeeded in terrifying the German population. As an undercover CIA agent reported from the region of Reutlingen on April 28, the campaign managed to arouse fear in German civilians. They reportedly associated the werewolf threat with Germanic legends of man-eating wolves and Hermann Loens' widely read best seller *Der Wehrwolf* which glorified lynching and bloody revenge: 'No one in the towns dares to befriend the soldiers for fear of being killed by the members of the Wehrwolf . . . What previously was the Gestapo is now the Wehrwolf' (von Hodenberg 2008: 75-76).

It is apparent that the *Wolfsangel* has been associated with guerrilla tactics and with the fight for freedom against the ruling classes throughout an extended portion of the History of Germany. The connection of the *Wolfsangel* to violence and the forest landscape—that is, to wildness—is what makes it appealing for Operation Werewolf, an appeal somewhat enhanced by the more recent controversial association with National Socialism. If the members of Operation Werewolf are to identify as "the villains," it only makes sense that they would

reclaim a symbol tightly linked with historical villains; moreover, its function is also of the kind that Waggener defines as one of “armor against the insincere”—as quoted above—which is why the reference is a deliberate one. As articulated in “The Wolf-Rune”:

Like many other powerful symbols, it was briefly adopted by the Nazi party after having been in use for nearly 2,000 years, and because of this, it is still used by modern day so-called “Neo-Nazis,” who seek to continue its association with their simple and misguided goals.

The name Operation Werewolf and the Wolfsangel were chosen to represent this ongoing Work as part of a paradigm shift- the idea of taking something that is already in use, and changing its aims, methods and meanings to suit a radically different goal, that still connects to the original in some fundamental way – we will not apologize or shy away from its use, nor deny its origin.

This is a guerilla operation. It exists behind enemy lines, just as the original concept intended” (2017: 62-63).

This contempt of Neo-Nazis and the description of their agenda as being banal, simplistic, and misguided on the one hand, while showing appreciation for a National Socialist guerrilla movement and its symbols on the other can be compared with Evola’s attitude towards the nationalist regimes of his time. He was critical of biological racism—and vocally looked down on Alfred Rosenberg and other biological racists of the Third Reich—as well as of the populist stance of both the regimes of Italy and Germany. At the same time, Evola showed appreciation for the symbols used by both regimes and seeing a group such as the SS in a very positive light, as a representation of an idealised chivalric order and as a warrior elite (Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 65-66): a point of view that partially overlaps with Waggener’s opinion on symbols widely used by the Third Reich

and now associated with it. As Waggener further elaborated when interviewed by the author of this work:

[...] these Germanic symbols were used by a political party for what... what... if you have a longer view of time, what can be considered to be a drop in the bucket, a few years. [...] I don't think that the Nazis having used these symbols took away any power from them, I think, if anything, the reaction and the visceral reaction that the people have toward them has increased. And so... that, these symbols were not used incorrectly, I don't think, they were used as symbols of victory, of war, of power, and of all these things, it's just that the people who were using them were fucked up, but that's not the fault of anyone else who uses them (See Research Interview with Paul Waggener).

### **3.3.3. Totenwolf**

“Operation Werewolf marches under the sign of the black banner which bears emblazoned on it a wolf skull and crossed bones, surrounded by a serpent, ouroboros, the entirety of which we call the ‘Totenwolf,’ or ‘death-wolf’” (Waggener 2018, *Inner Circle*: 83). The so-called Totenwolf, the logo of Operation Werewolf, consists of a wolf's skull with crossbones circled by an ouroboros—a snake biting its tail, forming a closed circle. “Its symbolism is three-fold: Death, the Wolf, and the Serpent, who we call ‘the Spawn of the Ironwood.’ We use these ancient archetypes for their symbolic value in the current age, as well as the internal work we undergo. In order to create ourselves anew, we must destroy that which came before” (Waggener 2016, *Zines*). The skin shedding characteristic of snakes is seen as an ability to renew itself and is associated with the necessity of undergoing a path of death and rebirth; moreover,

Jörmungandr, the Midgard (or World) Serpent of Norse mythology (Lindow 2002: 229-230), is commonly represented under the guise of an ouroboros and plays a key role at the beginning of the end of the world, Ragnarök, when it lets go of its tail. The choice of the ouroboros as a logo is also connected with the idea of time being a cyclical process (instead of linear), a view shared by most operatives and an axiom at the basis of Evola's perennial philosophy.

### **3.3.4. Black Sun**

The Waggener brothers, like many other members of Operation Werewolf, sport a tattoo of a Black Sun closely resembling the shape originating from the mosaic ornament on the floor of Castle Wewelsburg (see Figure 8) both as a symbol of 'Indo-Germanic' religion and culture (Strube 2012: 263) and as a representation of the alchemical *Sol Niger*, connected with the alchemical phase of *nigredo* (Waggener 2018, "Barbaric Rites"), Waggener specifies also that, in his tattoo, the rays of the Black Sun point in a different direction and the centerpiece is not the same as the Wewelsburg mosaic. The connection between the alchemical Black Sun and radical Right politics originates with a fantasy trilogy of Ariosophical inspiration by Wilhelm Landig (1909–1997), former SS and member of the Wiener Zirkel, a Viennese group whose members were interested and deeply invested in their own occult interpretation of National Socialist doctrines.

[...] It was Wilhelm Landig's own novels that ensured the revival of occult-nationalist themes among a younger generation of neo-Nazis in the 1990s. The ideas and interests discussed by the Landig group in the 1950s found permanent expression in Landig's trilogy of Thule novels. The first of these,

*Götzen gegen Thule* (1971), was begun in the late 1950s and incorporated the thought of Julius Evola and Herman Wirth. Theories of Aryan polar origins and Atlantis are mixed with powerful new nationalist myths of “the last battalion,” secret German UFO bases in the Arctic, alchemy, Grail myths and Cathar heresies, and a Nazi-Tibetan connection involving Himalayan masters and an underground kingdom in Mongolia. In this novel and especially in its successor, *Wolfszeit um Thule* (1980), a global Jewish conspiracy always lurks in the shadows, seeking to foil the revival of Nordic German rule, but its Judeo-Christian idols are powerless against the resurgence of the Black Sun. The last novel of the series, *Rebellen für Thule* (1991), is a wishful fantasy of right-wing radicalism among German youth (Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 137).

Landig paved the way for a number of novels inspired by Ariosophical ideas mixed with conspiracy theories and material borrowed from the (in)famous *Les Matin des Magiciens* (The Morning of the Magicians; 1960) by journalists Louis Pauwels (1920–1997) and Jacques Bergier (1912–1978) but did not explicitly refer to the solar wheel from Castle Wewelsburg as the Black Sun of his novels; “the first writer to identify the Wewelsburg sun wheel with the Black Sun myth, thereby indicating the esoteric influence of Wiligut and the SS heritage of Aryan-theosophical lore at the heart of Himmler’s imaginative world” (Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 148) will be Russell McCloud<sup>37</sup> in *Die schwarze Sonne von Tashi Lhunpo* (The Black Sun of Tashi Lhunpo; 1991). This identification of the Black Sun with the dark green mosaic from Castle Wewelsburg has been particularly successful in the radical Right milieu and part of the black metal scene. According to Waggener, the interest in the Black Sun is mainly of an alchemical nature: in a series of—now-deleted—blog posts during spring 2018,

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<sup>37</sup> Possibly a pseudonym of an author originally from Austria. See Strube 2013 (149-156).

Waggener had explicitly addressed the theme of spiritual alchemy.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, even though the Black Sun is a recurring symbol in the publications of Operation Werewolf, during an interview with Greg Johnson from Counter-Currents Publishing,<sup>39</sup> Waggener distanced himself from National Socialist ideology. The relevance of the tribal lifestyle and the reconstruction of the rituals suggests an influence of the ideas of authors such as Else Christensen, Jost Turner, Ron McVan (Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 257-258), even though Waggener avoids using terms like ‘Aryan’ and ‘white’ and consistently uses ‘Caucasian’ and ‘Caucasian heritage’ instead.

### **3.4. Total Life Reform: A Lifestyle for the Kali Yuga**

Let it be made crystal clear as an azure sky on a summer’s day:

*This was never about acceptance.* Operation Werewolf is not a catch-all for misfits and freaks unable to function in this temporal world, but for those looking to master it. It is not a support group for weak people, but a pressure chamber for those willing to accept the challenge to become strong in all ways, and on all playing fields (Waggener 2019, *Transmissions Vol. III*: 144).

This mission statement summarises the tone used in the material of Operation Werewolf and briefly but poignantly describes the primary goal of the Operation. The goals and ideals of Operation Werewolf resonate with Evola’s ideal of virility and manliness, exemplified by the concept of an “absolute individual”; a complete man, possessing the essential manly strengths and qualities but also adapted to

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<sup>38</sup> Waggener, P., “Calcination,” “Dissolution,” and “Separation.” *Operation Werewolf - War Journal*, 18, 24 April, 2 May 2018, <http://operationwerewolf.com/search/alchemy> (accessed: August 20, 2020).

<sup>39</sup> “[...] not some sort of group of ignoramus, fucking shaven-headed morons who are screaming Nazi slogans or whatever while marching [...]” (Johnson and Waggener 2016).

survive—and even thrive—on the mundane and temporal level in what he considered an age of decadence, the Kali Yuga.

Operation Werewolf began as an expansion project to a little movement called the Centurion Method,<sup>40</sup> a primal workout system and philosophy that I had become involved with during its developmental stages a few years back. [...] Even during that early phase, Operation Werewolf had its own identity, and its own function. [...] The process of creating new heroes in an age devoid of myth. At its core, this is what Operation Werewolf truly means. To make war on weakness and complacency, first through the act of physical overcoming and the obtaining of strength on a visible, outward level - so that the would-be hero can pass through those Gates of Iron and apply their principles to every area of his being, in a legendary act of Alchemical transformation. We call this process Operation Werewolf (Waggener 2016, *Zines*).

The act of changing oneself and the circumstances and reality around oneself is central to the philosophy and practices of the Wolves and of Operation Werewolf: it is expressed in a language typical of Evola's works, where the themes of heroism, masculinity, and elitism are prevalent. The stress on a mythopoetic approach to life, seen as alchemical work, resonates with Evola's thought, too; its combination with social Darwinism has precedents in the broader cultural milieu of the radical Right in phenomena such as Creativity and Cosmotheism.<sup>41</sup> For Cosmotheism, "Man is part of nature and subject to nature's law, principal of

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<sup>40</sup> "The Centurion Method is a program of primitive and hyper-aggressive fitness aimed at turning the sedentary western human into a weapon of pure ferocity and power. In the short time CM was active as an online sub-culture it produced 4 books [...]. The goal is the creation of the Superman, as it should be the only goal of all mankind, to be overcome, to be surpassed, to be mocked as a thing of inability that must be adapted and altered to be of use to the one who dares to look his descendants or his ancestors in the face without flinching. [...] Powerlifter, strongman, boxer, wrestler, soldier, partisan, bodybuilder, everyone needs increased mobility, to be faster, fitter, harder and meaner. Centurion Method gives us all of those options as well as the opportunity to continue doing what we're doing" (Fraser 2021).

<sup>41</sup> Creativity and Cosmotheism date back to the 1970s. Both had "an anti-Christian, nontheistic tendency to focus on the Aryan "race" with religious devotion" (Gardell 2003: 129).

which is the law of inequality and survival of the fittest. Evolving through a succession of states, the purpose of man is to ascend into godhood” (Gardell 2003: 135), and reaching deification is the ultimate goal both in Evola’s doctrine and for the Wolves.

The social darwinistic outlook of Operation Werewolf is very transparent; slogans and catchphrases like “Might is Right” constellate all of Operation Werewolf zines (Waggener 2016, *Zines*);<sup>42</sup> what can be described as deification or a process of transcendence to a higher level is also very present in the narrative of Operation Werewolf, both discursively and under the guise of slogans such as “Become an Archetype. Live Forever” and “Transform from a man into an arsenal of mythic action” (Waggener 2017: 168; 2018, *Werewolf Manifesto*).

Waggener and the other authors contributing to “War Journal” (the blog of Operation Werewolf) do not openly mention their influences and inspiration very often. The ideal man they sketch, though, presents all the characteristics that Evola’s ideal warrior needs to possess.

Men who do not want to be corrupted by the decadence of the Kali Yuga should go through a process of “Total Life Reform,” that is, physical, spiritual, and mental destruction and regeneration.

Through a devotion to physical strength and training, we engage with the rebuilding and purification of ourselves on a material level, which is the first stage, and the easiest to see and understand. As we see our physical forms change, and become lean and strong, muscular and powerful, as the chariot and temple should be, our minds begin to grasp that this process exists in the mental

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<sup>42</sup> *Might is Right* is an anti-Christian Social Darwinist book published in 1896 by an unknown author under the pseudonym Ragnar Redbeard (which is inspired by the Icelandic Sagas). Anton LaVey (1930–1997) plagiarised several passages from it. As Gardell has it (2003: 289): “The 1996 reissuing of *Might is Right* provided an instance of resonance between racism, Odinism, Creativity, and Satanism. Sold by Metzger’s White Aryan Resistance, [...] had a foreword by LaVey,” and was edited by prominent figure in racist Nordic neo-paganism Katja Lane (Wotansvolk).



realms as well. Through feeding it that which is needful, that which is healthy and whole, and by exercising the mental faculties in the same Spartan and energetic way we treat the body, our minds become sharp, effective, swift, and capable of force and intention (Waggener 2019, *Transmissions Vol. III*: 60).

The two aspects: physical and mental, are inextricably intertwined with one another, an idea that can be associated with the most famous of analogy from the Kybalion (“As above, so below; as within, so without; as the spirit, so the body”), since the Kali Yuga causes a spiritual decadence, modern man should rise from the lower physical level to the higher spiritual one. This process of transformation—Transmutation in alchemical terms—represents the very core of Operation Werewolf.

The references to the “Spartan Way” and to a battle that must be won both in the outer and the inner worlds are a frequent reference to Evola’s work, for example, a whole chapter of *Gli Uomini e le Rovine* revolves around this theme (Evola 2002: 193-203).

As a matter of fact, the Mission Statement of Operation Werewolf itself directly references *Gli Uomini e le Rovine* and *Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno*, two of Evola’s most popular books; referring to the operatives and sympathisers of Operation Werewolf:

Some are solitary practitioners, performing the rituals of life and death amongst the ruins of modern civilization, [...] waiting for the fall. Others have made it their mission to seek each other out, forming militaristic divisions, chapters led by their strongest member, creating a war-band that seeks to carve its own myth, to create its own saga of power and might (Waggener 2016, *Zines*).

Operation Werewolf and Julius Evola can be linked together not only because of the direct references to the titles of his books though, but also thanks to the

description of men searching for so-called *Männerbunde*, which hold high values such as honour, courage, and loyalty, and Waggener does often describe the Wolves of Vinland (his group) as a *Männerbund* in his interviews.

The important thing is that we embrace the possibilities still open to us in an essentially fallen world: this is what Julius Evola would call ‘riding the tiger.’ Very often this will involve a renewed emphasis on a conscious physicality. What the Kali Yuga dictates is that transcendence can no longer be consigned to the ethereal realms of pure intellect. The weapons of spiritual transformation must now resemble the weapons of war,

claims Joshua Buckley (b. 1974) in the article “Jiu Jitsu for the Kali Yuga” (2016). Buckley is a member of the Wolves of Vinland and guest author for the War Journal of Operation Werewolf; he is also editor of the Radical Traditionalist magazine “Tyr: Myth – Culture – Tradition,” together with Michael J. Moynihan (b. 1969).<sup>43</sup> It is noteworthy that Moynihan has edited the English translations of Evola’s *Gli Uomini e le Rovine* and *Introduzione alla Magia come scienza dell’Io*. *Apoliteia* is another Evolian concept essential both to the Wolves of Vinland and Operation Werewolf, of which they have their own interpretation (or better, interpretations): despite being active and having achieved a degree of success in the libertarian and radical Right scene, they mostly steer away from openly racist language, and they are critical of the American system, prominent (at the time) members such as Jack Donovan did not approve of the results of the presidential election in 2016, disapproval which he expressed in a (now deleted) article titled “No one will ever make America great again,” referred to in 2019 as “my 2016 prophecy” (Donovan 2019).

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<sup>43</sup> Moynihan is mostly known for his industrial/apocalyptic folk band Blood Axis and for co-authoring *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (1991), a book about the early Norwegian black metal scene.

The term *apoliteia* has nothing to do with apathy nor indecisiveness, both for Evola and the members of Operation Werewolf: deeds and taking action are core concepts. When Buckley called to abstention from voting during the American presidential election of 2016 in the article “Fuck the Vote” (2016), he offered several alternatives, one being for example “voting with your dollar:” one can choose what to buy and from who, deciding which companies to support is considered a powerful form of voting in the modern materialistic world. Ideally, a community, an elite, composed of members with “tradeable skills” could create a barter market and be self-sufficient instead of using money.

Both for Julius Evola and Operation Werewolf, deeds and action are on the one hand a distinctive trait of uranic masculinity, on the other a form of religious offering:

The earthly way, inspired by utilitarianism or by greed (*sakāma-karma*), was contrasted with the heavenly way of the one who acts without concern for the consequences and for the sake of the action itself (*niṣkāma-karma*), and who transforms every action into a rite and into an ‘offering.’ Such was the path of *bhakti*, a term that in this context corresponds more to the virile sense of medieval *fides* than to the pietistic sense that has prevailed in the theistic idea of ‘devotion.’ An action performed according to this type of *bhakti* was compared to a fire that generates light and in which the matter of the act itself is consumed and purified. The degree to which the act was freed from matter, detached from greed and passion, and made self-sufficient (a ‘pure act,’ to employ analogically an Aristotelian expression) defined the hierarchy of activities [...] (Evola 1995: 94-95).

This understanding of the concept of *bhakti*<sup>44</sup> has an important place in the philosophy brought forth in Operation Werewolf as well. It is best exemplified in Waggener’s own words: “It is my belief that one can attain this devotion, this consonant self-creation only by continuous, ritualized action, and that that action must exist within, and be visualized through, a mythopoetic worldview that I feel most modern human beings have lost or become separated from” (Waggener 2017: 165). One of the ways the founding members of Operation Werewolf put this into practice is through martial arts, specifically Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu: the name of their club aptly is “Devotion Jiu Jitsu,” and much of the gym’s merchandise is emblazoned with a black metal inspired graphic rendition of the Sanskrit word *bhakti*.<sup>45</sup>

This idea of devotion and spiritual Alchemy to me is very important because the things that we devote ourselves to—I believe—on a daily level, can have a religiosity to them, and I approach... I approach grappling this way, but I also approach my friendships this way, you know I approach all of these things with the idea of... of being a servant to them, to be devoted to them, to express love to them in a pure way that doesn’t demand reciprocity (See Research Interview with Paul Waggener).

#### **4. Conclusion**

The members of Operation Werewolf (and of the Wolves of Vinland) practice religious rituals inspired by Germanic mythologies; these constitute the bedrock of their aesthetic and their references, which they consider as belonging to their

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<sup>44</sup> *Bhakti*, Sanskrit, “attachment, devotion, fondness for, devotion to, trust, homage, worship, piety, faith or love or devotion (as a religious principle or means of salvation, together with karman, ‘works’, and jñāna, ‘spiritual knowledge’” in the Monier Williams Dictionary.

<sup>45</sup> See: <https://www.devotionjiujitsu.com/>.

cultural heritage. Being the focus mainly on cultural heritage and not race per se, they can be placed in the ethnic or ethnicist branch of the Germanic Neo-pagan milieu; nevertheless, the ideological framework and the world view of the movement are strongly influenced and informed by Traditionalism as well, specifically the Traditionalism of Julius Evola. History is seen as a process of involution and decadence, part of a cyclical process of degradation from an idyllic, pure, masculine, uranic, natural Golden Age to a progressively more nightmarish, spoiled, feminine, chthonic, artificial Iron Age, and regeneration after the inevitable destruction, restarting the cycle. Such a concept is comparable to the Norse one of *Ragnarök*, but the terminology used in Operation Werewolf material is mainly the one of Traditionalism. A quick keyword search on the website of Operation Werewolf shows more results for the term *Kali Yuga* than it does for *Ragnarök*. Elitist slogans such as “Only the Inferior Strive For Equality” (Waggener 2019, *Transmissions Vol. III*: 31), the importance of warrior values and the striving to create an elite of spiritually and physically superior men, the stress on an ideal *Männerbund*, the influence of Tantra show a strong influence deriving from Julius Evola’s work and his interpretation of Tradition and Traditionalism, masculinity and religion—be it directly or indirectly, both in the theory and practice of the movement.

Although Evola’s life and worldview are deeply intertwined with Italian history, his work has become more and more popular internationally during the second half of the twentieth century, and many of his books have been translated into several languages; for example, Arktos publishing, active since 2010, is one of the leading publishers of the New Right in Europe and as of now has published a

dozen of Evola's books in English translation, the sign of a rising interest in his work and of the newfound relevance of Traditional thought.

Indo-European myths and societal constructions are seen not only as a description of the past, but also as an instruction for the future organization of small tribal communities and male warrior fraternities, the *Männerbunde*. The radical Right thus weaves its own tale of Europe's pagan past, in which it construes itself as herald of a new age, unfettered by Christianity and its 'children,' egalitarianism, individualism, and liberal capitalism (Senholt 2014: 264).

In such a scenario, and in a world that, much like the USA—where Operation Werewolf has seen the light and from where it took off—is becoming more and more ethnically heterogeneous, in a world where it is close to impossible to trace back someone's genetic roots to a single clearly defined location, where the traditional gender roles are being questioned, criticised (and some fear they might get subverted, even), where trust in politics and state structures is diminishing, in this postmodern world spiritual racism and a perennial Tradition promoting spiritual virility, strength and warrior values, spiritual racism, and a metaphysical framework free of religious dogmas may seem very attractive both to the radical Right and to men (and to a degree, women as well) searching somewhere to belong to, a role to fulfil, a mythopoetic identity with a solid metaphysical foundation.

## **Research Interview with Paul Waggener**

Paul Waggener is a busy man; besides that, he is known for not commenting on what he writes, nor what he does, most certainly not to third parties (he takes the view that one should embody one's own philosophy without having to explain it too much), as well as for not talking to journalists. The sole exception is represented by a few personalities (e.g., Greg Johnson) gravitating around Traditionalism and the Right milieu; despite this, Waggener does not declare himself (nor his group) to be Right-wing.

The author's—not quite academic—background in grappling and experience in the metal scene might have helped facilitate the interview, in that practising the same sport and having attended similar concerts as the interviewee allowed for some ease in the conversation. Simply stated, the interviewee did not have the perception that he needed to constantly explain himself extensively thanks to a pre-existing clarity of language and shared semantics that did not need excessive work (on both sides) to be established.

The first two attempts fell through, but as the saying goes, 'third time's the charm,' and he eventually agreed to a phone conversation on May 5, 2021.

Author: Did your experience with the Wolves of Vinland inspire Operation Werewolf? If yes: how much?

Paul Waggener: Yeah, definitely. I mean, I think that at this point my experience with the Wolves pretty much influences everything that I do. I've been... I started this organization with my brother and a couple of other guys when I was 20 – 21. So... I'm 37 now, so it's been a long time with the same group, and so, there's

kind of... it's not like a... it's not a 'hallucinate [sic.] once a month' kind of thing. It's... You know, I live with a lot of these people, and we share property, we work together, and many of the guys hire one another and everything like that, so it's an all-through-meeting thing. And after we had kind of gotten things down and things had gone for a number of years, I wanted to share the idea of this kind of lifestyle and this kind of living with as many other people as I could, and so Operation Werewolf was started more as like a starter group, you know, and sort of a template of how people could do this no matter... like, no matter what their politics were. No matter what color they were, or no matter where they lived in the world. My... my goal was to show people that whatever they wanted to do, you know, they could do it, and... and that they could create a lot more leverage for themselves in the world by, sort of, creating an honor culture and an honor group amongst themselves. Hm, and especially they drew on their own culture or their own backgrounds. And so, yeah, it was very, very influencing of that.

A.: OK, so could one say—let me see if I understand—that Operation Werewolf is kind of like a manual on how to start the same thing going on?

P.W.: Yes.

A.: Thank you. So, I know that you mentioned, for example on Greg Johnson's podcast, that you used to be more influenced by Julius Evola in the past than nowadays. Still, how, and when, did you get exposed to Julius Evola, and what did you keep with you of his philosophy?

P.W.: So, that honest answer for that was young, and I mean very young, like 15?... I started reading and sort of exploring a lot of different stuff that I had been influenced, or exposed to I guess, by older people that I knew who were more politically minded and... a lot of this stuff was things that got me out of, sort of



that whole thing... So, when I was a kid... hmm... you know, I was... I can openly and honestly say it, and I said it elsewhere as well, you know, I was like a skinhead when I was young, when I was a teenager. And so... But I was generally kind of disgusted and turned off by, I would say the entire culture. And I would say that I was turned off not only by sort of the blind... hmm... like the blind, very senseless, and very... what I saw is this incredibly ignorant violence, and... hmm... and sort of everything that comes along with the scene, and so I was looking for something that was positive, and maybe something that appealed a bit more to me intellectually, I suppose? And a little bit more to my character.

You know when I was a kid... getting into skinhead stuff for me was basically like...

because of my environment, and because where I grew up, in the Midwest of the United States, like, if you were involved in, like, thug lifestyle when you were young, and you were white, that was pretty much what your option was. There wasn't a lot of other options, you know, and I wasn't old enough to be in a motorcycle club at the time...

And so anyway, I was exposed to some of this stuff by guys that were sort of on the edges of that... and, Evola... I liked some of what he wrote but I didn't like much that he wrote politically, but I thought some of his writing was very poetic and very beautiful, and very inspiring. Hmm... But even then, I was not interested in Fascism, beyond, like, a cursory understanding of power and leverage, but... You know, so I think the older I got, and the more I, like, distanced myself mentally from Fascism, and from, like, any sort of totalitarian anything. I'm not interested in living under a totalitarian government, and so, that means I can't really be interested in that as a political theory. I think what inspired me was his

idea of, sort of groups of men looking for this mythical Empirium, you know what I mean? And I thought that it was something poetic and beautiful, and something that you could kind of keep in your heart, but also understand that it was essentially metaphorical. And I think that probably, like, Jünger wound up influencing me a lot more than Evola did in my later years.

A.: I mean they are thematically connected... So, it's more the idea of the Männerbund, and his metaphysical concepts more than the political ones?

P.W.: Yes, exactly. And I found his writing on metaphysical stuff to be a lot more interesting than his political writing, for example, like, *The Yoga of Power*, *The Metaphysics of War*, and not his complete works, but certainly pieces of them, as well as his work with the Ur Group, more of his esoteric stuff... I found a little more useful and a little more interesting than sort of like, this endless, like, aristocratic political standpoint. But I also think that it is probably important to know that you can't... I don't believe you should judge an individual by, like, the rules of your time, you know? Evola grew up in a specific time, in a specific era, and of course he was an aristocrat so all of his shit's going to be slanted towards... that, to benefit those people, to benefit what he is. And so, if you go in understanding that, I think you have a lot less, like, I don't know, angst toward someone.

A.: Very interesting. So, I guess we covered the concepts and books that were most interesting for you. What about the term *Kali Yuga*. In the material of Operation Werewolf one sees *Kali Yuga* mentioned a lot, instead of, let's say, *Ragnarök*.

P.W.: Yeah, and I think that... I don't know who... you know, I won't have like a cock-measuring contest with who did what, or when, but I know that... My

organization, when we started, there was a lot of things that were not popular in black metal, and they were not popular sort of in that world, that became popular as things went on. And I mean, there's like no black metal band that I don't, no touring black metal band that I probably haven't been backstage or on the bus with, at this point. Like, a lot of these guys know who we are, and a lot of these guys have written songs, like, inspired by our group and stuff like that. And so, I think there's this thing that happens, that kind of like, as people see things that that culture begins to, like, blend, then people start to use the same terms, and for us, when we started, with the Wolves, you know we were very young, and we were, like, more extreme, I think, in a lot of ways because that was the way we saw the world. And we were certainly, like, an angrier group, a more violent group and everything, at the beginning, simply because that is what we knew and that's how we've grown up, but, you know, as I started reading other things and studying other things I stopped thinking about... I think I stopped thinking about the world in terms of borders, I stopped thinking about the world in terms of who was here, or what peoples were here at this time, and started having a very much longer timeline, and then it became less important to me. For example, you know, people have accused us of being, like, white nationalists, which couldn't be further from the truth because we're not nationalists, for one, and, like, we're American and so it's very difficult, I think, for an American to be a nationalist, and not be very... like, have a lot of cognitive dissonance, simply because of what America is, and what it's like.

And so, to answer the question closer, I think that this led me into studying much older stuff, and I got into a lot of Vedic writings, and stuff from India, and began reading Rigveda, and Bhagavad and the Upanishads, and all this kind of stuff, and

I found a lot there that was... that was very beautiful also, and very inspiring. But I think, at the time, maybe I wasn't ready for some of it, and it wasn't until... but I liked the terminologies and I liked the understanding of time cycles as much longer, you know, and the idea of how the Kali Yuga matches with some of Nietzsche's ideas of being preparatory men, the idea that even if that time is already here, but it will stretch, like, an unfathomable amount of time into the future, that the idea is that you prepare yourself, regardless. And you be someone who is effective and who is powerful, no matter what age you live in, I found that an inspiring idea, you know.

And so, I think that it wasn't until I reached my thirties, and probably even as recently as the last few years, that some of the teachings from that stuff has led me to, like, I would say a much more calm and a much more open place, than I was before; but the terminology stuck with me from when I was young.

A.: Yes, I have a background in Indology and Indo-European languages, so to speak, in general, and I noticed this from the get go... I know many black metal guys, so Operation Werewolf stuff used to pop on my feed all the time, like, back in the day.

P.W.: Most definitely, I mean, from Marduk to the Destroyer, to... a lot of these guys they were, they were always pretty interested in stuff like that, and I think a lot of ideas got shared. Especially, you know, ten years ago, eight years ago, not so much anymore. I think largely because of... hmm [laughs] maybe some of our group disinterest in a lot of what's happening there? But I think, also, I think a lot these guys, they like to flirt with the idea of ideas that are unpopular, but once they understand the repercussion, it becomes more difficult. Hmm... I used to be a touring musician as well, I can't tour anymore, you know [laughs]. I can't play

music live anymore, simply because of, a google search is usually enough to get you removed from the bill these days. And so, as that thing sort of shifted and changed worldwide, and then it sort of crept into America a little slower but now is very extreme here as well, you know, is very difficult even for a band like... you know, I mean, like, everybody gets protested: from Horna to Marduk, to... even very safe, sort of, bands, you know.

A.: I... I've seen some of that, in Austria as well.

P.W.: I remember... I remember, what's his name... Fuck, I've never met the guy, but we have mutual friends, the guy from Bölzer, who's half black [Okoi Jones], who had a lot of issues with the Swastika tattoo on his arm, and he was like 'Man I really didn't wanna have to do this, but this is a picture of me as a baby with my father.' And his father is like... Black. [laughs] You know what I mean? And it's just that he is... People say 'well, it doesn't matter, because you're like, white passing' and this has gotten very extreme for me, and this is hard to understand...

A.: Speaking of Swastika, in the material of Operation Werewolf there's a lot of controversial symbols—in the last seventy-ish years at least, like the Wolfsangel, the Black Sun, which looks very similar and has an immediate association with the symbol from Wewelsburg. And for example, your Instagram account was taken down, because of the symbols. What do these symbols mean to you, to your group? How do you understand them?

P.W.: Sure, I think that a good example of the changing of symbols is that the Internet, and as far as social media goes, they consider our center patch of the Wolves, which is a very simple white silhouette, that's considered to be a hate symbol or a group that is associated with a criminal organization...

A.: So, just the wolf-silhouette, or the Totenwolf?

P.W.: The actual wolf one, not the Operation Werewolf one. But I think probably that too, but anyways... The idea being that, as soon as people decide to take a negative approach to a symbol, any symbol can become whatever they say, based on recent history. And so, when it comes to the Wolfsangel, or when it comes to the Swastika, or... or, you know, the *Schwarze Sonne*, is like, I have a Black Sun on my chest, but it's certainly not the same one from Wewelsburg. Mine is like... People will say that this is... like, 'it doesn't matter because this is just a small thing,' but it's... it's not the same: like, the rays go in a different direction, and... you know, it doesn't have the same centerpiece as the Wewelsburg one, because, it's a, you know, it's an old symbol; and people say that you can't reclaim these symbols, but I think that there's nothing to reclaim it from. The idea that... you know, a Cross has been a symbol for, since time immemorial. Certainly it has been used by Christians for a very very long time, but then, these Germanic symbols were used by a political party for what... what... if you have a longer view of time, what can be considered to be a drop in the bucket, a few years. And, because this association of a couple of years... these symbols now, simple, primordial symbols that have had a meaning for many many people for a very very long time are completely unusable, according to these people, which I think is ludicrous. The idea that a Swastika is unusable, but it's been a symbol that's been holy to all different ethnic types of people, all over the world; and the same with the Bronze Age style Black Sun, and so on and so forth, these are all solar symbols, and I believe they're symbols that speak to people. And I don't just mean white people, I mean they're symbol that speak to *people*, because they... they hold these primordial ideas, and they're a very very simple, direct, and very powerful way for people to communicate with one another, even if you didn't

speak the same language.

And so, I think, to... to throw these symbols out of use because you're afraid of using them, because of what people might think, is a very disingenuous way to live your life. And because I'm... I'm just not interested in... in going through my life constantly wondering 'what can I use now? What do I need to be afraid of using now?', I've never thought that way, and so I use what I use, and... and, again, I said this in a published piece, and, you know, I was in my twenties and certainly a lot more... [laughs] I think, like, extreme, and a little bit more blunt, and probably stupid - was that, I don't think that the Nazis having used these symbols took away any power from them, I think, if anything, the reaction and the visceral reaction that the people have toward them has increased. And so... that, these symbols were not used incorrectly, I don't think, they were used as symbols of victory, of war, of power, and of all these things, it's just that the people who were using them were fucked up, but that's not the fault of anyone else who uses them, and I cannot imagine walking through life that way. Language has been used for a million horrific things - the written language, nobody's stopping writing books anytime soon, I don't think.

A.: So, solar symbols, war and victory symbols... Speaking of war, you talked about the *Männerbund*, as a group of men with sort of a 'us vs them' mentality, would you care to elaborate on that?

P.W.: Yeah, I just think that another strange way to go through your life is... There's a lot of very nice talk, and there's been a lot of very nice things written about the idea of universal love, and all these ideas, but that's just simply not how human beings have ever operated. And I think that if you love everyone, then you love no one, and I think that it's an absurd idea, that if you take a woman and you

say: 'Do you love your children?' and she says 'Yes,' and you say 'Do you love your children more than anyone else's children?' and she says 'Yes,' then you say: 'Why do you hate everyone else's children?' That's not a one-to-one logic, and so I think that to have a group—and I don't mean, again, I don't mean necessarily an ethnic group or anything—but to have a group of people who have come together for a common cause, or under a common understanding, there will be a place where you have to put a border around that to say 'This is for us. It's not for you,' and that 'This is an initiatory experience, and unless you are initiated into this, you are not a part of this.' And especially in a world like what we're dealing with now, where you can say 'the wrong thing,' or associate with 'the wrong people,' and you can lose your job, and you know, all the rest of these things. Or in some cases and some countries catch a felony charge, there has to be this sense of 'us for us, them for them.' And that's the way that human beings have always existed, in a state of some kind of tribalism; and I think that globalism and the erosion of tribalism, and this is a common trope, but I believe that is true, I believe that the future outcome of this modern, like, globalized... sort of hatred, of any sort of special group, but I would say especially groups that are... that have an inordinate amount of Caucasian people in them... I believe are, overall, going to be a negative thing for the world, and for everyone in the world, because I believe that that is absolutely the removal of any sort of cultural diversity at all, because you might be first on the list, but if the goal is to have no borders, and the goal is to have everyone to be exactly the same, and everyone to be completely blended into one thing... I believe that that's a marketing goal. I believe that everybody being the same is very easy to sell to and very easy to control.



And I think that any kind of people, of any ethnicity, of any culture, would do well to embrace their culture, and to embrace their narrative in the... in the overarching idea of history, because it is beautiful, and it is special, and it is the reason that you're here, and I don't believe that it is synonymous with hatred in any way. And I think that the people who get lost in the aspect of 'us vs them' in the most brutal or blunt way are missing a great deal of the point, which is that... Man... It's, it's very hard sometimes to... to exist, you know, in this kind of group in a non... I suppose in a non hyper-aggressive way, in some cases... But I think that that's not the way to live. I think that, that brutality and all that stuff for its own sake, or that saying, 'because I love this, and because I love this group that I've created' it must mean that we are in... in a literal war, or that we are in some kind of, you know, *Jihad*, is wrong.

And I think that ultimately history will pass those kind of people by, but I think that sometimes when you are trying to maintain something, if there is aggression toward you, then you have to stiffen your spine and you have to understand that sometimes things in this life are difficult but worth maintaining.

A.: So this 'us vs them' concept, is not meant necessarily in the very simple, brutal 'punching people in the face' way...?

P.W.: [laughs] I think there's a difference... a difference between having a stronghold and manning that stronghold, and trying to maintain something beautiful, inside strong walls, as opposed to putting an army out on the field and going out to try to fuck shit up. [laughs] In, lile, the dumbest way to say that: I think that preservation and self-preservation is a natural and positive thing, but I think that that can be done possibly without this idea of... 'because I exist, these other things can't exist, or they must be eradicated.'

A.: OK... As in, like, liking the way you already are, without having necessarily to conform to this kind of 'equality of outcome,' the kind of narrative according to which everyone has to reach the same, look the same, do the same?

P.W.: Yes.

A.: OK, I understand. On the Wolves, if you can: there is an initiatory process to get in, and it seems a pretty tough one. Could you share something about how the process works?

P.W.: Sure, you know, it's similar in a lot of ways to other... to other organizations that we spend time around, which for me was, like, a lot of motorcycle clubs, but obviously our aims and our goals are different from them, so our process looks different. But generally speaking, the difficulty with a group like ours is that... you have a... you have with a lot of groups the desire to grow, and they grow at the cost of themselves ultimately, because they wind up... they wind up too large, and then you have the same problems that we were just talking about, which is that you start to erode the center and you start to erode the culture, when there's too many different kinds of minds. And so, for us the idea is that you... you let people spend time, they get an invitation to spend time with us in one way or another, whether that's... maybe they came to train with us, you know, or to do Jiu Jitsu, or... or, whatever, it could be a million different things, but there is nothing on the table, and you just wait and you see, and they spend time and they reveal their character in a number of ways, and sometimes... We engineer these kind of situations to better understand an individual's nature, and the way that he is. And there are a great number of red flags for us, and a kind of people that we don't want to spend time around with... And so, once they go through this phase—usually that can be around a year—they may be asked by somebody, and

this depends on whether our organization has taken a vote: it's a unanimous vote, everything in our organization is done democratically essentially, but democratically in a very small group, and then they get asked to prospect, and a prospecting phase is another year. And... And it's an intense demand and extreme demand on an individual's time, it's an extreme demand on their availability, and it's an extreme demand on lifestyle.

There is a lot of different things that individuals have to do as they prospect for our group: they have to generally live a clean lifestyle, it involves, you know, a lot of training, training on a regular level, that's fitness training but also Jiu Jitsu or Boxing or whatever... Hmm... Hard drugs use in our organization is intensely frowned upon—forbidden—so, you know, there's... there's definitely a lot of things that people might come in and have to change their life around in order to do. And, a lot of it comes around to seeing how an individual operates under pressure, in some cases extreme pressure... Hmm... and that can be, sort of, engineered in a number of different ways, or it will reveal itself through the lifestyle that we live. A lot of people are definitely not cut out for that kind of lifestyle, but... our group has also gone, I think, through evolution, in that in the beginning it was male, completely male dominated, and at this point we have, sort of an inner core, and an outer group which is like... is tribal. We have married couples, there's, you know, married couples having kids and all the rest of this kind of stuff... and so it's become more of a... a family expression, I think, driven at its core by a group of males who have the best interest of the organization in mind.

A.: But women don't really get patched officially, or anything of the sort...  
Correct?

P.W.: They do.

A.: Ok, they do.

P.W.: They have... They have a place here, and, like, our organization is not a female hating organization. We think that that's not... that's not a healthy way to live, and it's not an expression of anything [hating women]. Almost all of our guys are married, or in long-term relationships, many of them have children... Hmm... The women are always present at our events and not as flies on the wall. They provide a great deal to the culture, because one of the things that... that we exist for, is because we believe that beauty has its own kind of truth, and women create a lot of beauty in ways that men do not or cannot, and so, there's a lot of things, I mean... But we also, we're not old-fashioned in a lot of ways either: a lot of the women train Jiu Jitsu, hmm... Not because we want everyone to train to fight, or we think that maybe that's the most feminine things to do, or not. But I think that we live in the now, so women very much have a place in our organization as full members.

A.: Women train if they want, or are they required to train?

P.W.: It's completely if they want to, you know we do have standards... you know, we have physical standards, male and female, but they are not the same. Just simply because we don't... again, is the same idea as what we talked about before: we're not interested in men and women being the same, we are interested in women being treated well, or interested in women being treated with respect as a human being, but we aren't a culture that treats men and women the same. So in other words, is kinda like saying, you know, you don't require the same things, because they can't necessarily do the same things.

Like, to throw a woman in, like, grappling, with a two-hundred pound man and say 'ok go hard,' you know, some of the guys in our crew are monsters, you know what I mean?

A.: I absolutely know what you mean...

P.W.: [laughs] And I'm sure you have experience with that, it's like the worst thing in the world, right? To have that same thing you want a... a certain degree of removal from that male culture while still being allowed and... and encouraged to take part if you would like to, but so, you know, our women have their own stuff that they do. A lot of them train together, and so, a lot of them do lift weights and everything, but generally speaking our group promotes relatively traditional aesthetics, so for example... Hmm... And this nowadays is kind of almost the same as of... as throwing a *Sieg Heil*, or something like that, but we are not... we are not interested in having, like, obese people in our organization. We think that it's an unhealthy way to leave, so if a woman was like... in that... in that arena or in that body type, she would be expected to make that not so, because it would be an outer expression of the lifestyle that she's living now, which is a healthier lifestyle. And no matter what anyone says, 'healthy at any size' is not real, that's... [laughs] that's simply not a reality backed up by, like, science, or health in any way. So they have their own set of requirements and they have their own set of things that they're expected to do: they take care of a lot of different things at events, they take care of food, they make the area beautiful, they garden out of our property, they do a lot of different things and again, it's mostly based on the same thing with our males, which is what interests you the most. There are a group of things that are requirements, but then there are all these other things that you can

choose to do if you like, and we do encourage people to do, but if they would like to.

A.: Ulfheim, your property, is where you also have rituals?

P.W.: Yes.

A.: And you mentioned that your form of religiosity is closer to a form of Ancestor Worship, but you used to practise *blót* and the typical Norse, Asatrú kind of rituals?

P.W.: But very much not so. [laughs] Yeah, I think, like, well you have to have a touchstone, I think. And I think... I think, my first introduction to that stuff—Asatrú, Odinism and stuff like that—was, like, very young. Hmm... even as a child, you know, my mother used to read the Norse and Germanic sagas to us as kids, me and my three older brothers, and so, always, there was that in my mind, you know. And even though my father is a priest, I was very attracted to these ideas of more primordial... primordial understandings of religion with more freedom for personal expression; and I saw the Church as... as, not that, as sort of the antithesis to that. And so, even though I love my father, he and I, we don't agree on... on a lot of that stuff, but... So I started looking for something else and when I was very young, a teenager and maybe into my early twenties, you know, I considered myself... I suppose if someone asked me, I definitely would have said that I was nominally pagan, or whatever. But then my understanding of gods is not literal, I don't take a literal approach to mythology, or to religion in general, I understand it as... and not even as archetypes. But to me, you know... Thor to me is the feeling, hmm... it's like the feeling of pulling five-hundred pounds, or the feeling of sinking a choke, or... or a thunderstorm, or just that huge heartbeat that you have when you're powering through something incredibly difficult, or when

you're in a fight, or something like that, to me that's Thor. And so, it was very easy for me to follow in and experience this stuff, but again it seemed... honestly the whole culture of Asatrú seemed very silly to me, and very literal, and very... weak. Extremely watered down and very flaccid, and like... like Wicca, kind of. And so I wasn't... I wasn't interested in doing it that way, so - you know - as our group grew, over time, we've kept a really really hard focus on remaining organic and remaining open to change and evolution. And so our rituals started to become very very personal and very centered around our group, and what we do, how we do it... The language is not archaic, it's modern and - you know - there's... no there's no fancy dress or anything like that. It's... it is what it is, it's simple, and we get together and we experience what we consider to be simple and beautiful truths and our rituals are based around the ideas of... our organization and, yes, like... and when I say Ancestors I don't mean that sort of, this broad collective, whiteness or whatever the fuck people would imagine. I mean our, directly of the people in our group, and so it's very personal, very organic.

And we do... we still do *blót*, but that's because many of our members keep animals, and so the practice of animal husbandry and hunting to us is still very valid. Hmm... and so when we get together to do this it's not a spectacle, generally speaking is very private, it's often not done with any spectator at all, it's usually done beforehand, and it's done very clean, and very humanly with total respect to the animal that we're going to eat later. And the idea that if you can't kill an animal, and you don't know how to kill an animal cleanly, and raise it with respect, then you shouldn't eat meat.

So, you know, our ritual is very... for us is very centered around our culture and what we do.

A.: I understand. You talk about the concept of *bhakti*, and Evola does too. He talks about it as a devotion in the context of *Ars regia*, spiritual Alchemy, would you describe it as connected to that? Because you talk quite a bit about spiritual Alchemy, and the name Operation Werewolf has connection with Alchemy, too.

P.W.: Yes, and I think, you know, too... And this is an important facet for me, and it's one of the reasons that... that I closed Operation Werewolf down. It was because I had definitely started to feel, as I went through some personal experience, in my early thirties, that I was no longer connected to a lot of the individuals that associated with it. In fact, I can say that I disliked a great number of what... of the individuals that I saw associated with it, and I disliked a great amount of what I saw people associated with it putting out there, because it's very difficult to create something with one intention, and then seeing it used with another intention. And in a lot of ways it embarrassed me, and in a lot of ways it made me feel very sorrowful to have done a lot of it, in a way. Because I thought the way that it was being used, and I think, also my understanding of this idea of... of *bhakti*, of devotion had changed. And became more about... understanding my life as a spiritual work toward something... and that was trying to... I was trying to make it something that was more about... to sound... not to sound cliché—but I was interested more in an expression of love and self-overcoming in a way that did not involve, I guess, anger, or hatred, or fear, or any of these things; and those are things that I saw as something to be, like, transcended, and come past. And I started to see that it was becoming the focal point: was this.... And probably through complete fault of my own, because of the way that I wrote, and what I put out there, and everything like that, when I was younger and more stupid.



Hmm... But that... yeah, this idea of devotion and spiritual Alchemy to me is very important because the things that we devote ourselves to—I believe—on a daily level, can have a religiosity to them, and I approach... I approach grappling this way, but I also approach my friendships this way, you know I approach all of these things with the idea of... of being a servant to them, to be devoted to them, to express love to them in a pure way that doesn't demand reciprocity, and I think that that's... possibly, what I think the most beautiful thing of my organization is, is that this is definitely something that is felt by a great number of the people within it, and I've never experienced anything like it, and I think that it increases in self-awareness and heightened consciousness each year, because I think it become more strong through true love, than most organizations that I've seen, that think that they're strong through a combative, aggressive, hateful, anger or fear-based understanding of the world around them.

## Pictures



Fig. 1: Julius Evola, early 1940s.

Source: <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Evola.jpg> (accessed: April 22, 2021).



Fig. 2: “Bronze figure of a lictor (magistrate’s attendant) wearing a toga and a wreath on his head. He carries laurel leaves in his right hand and in his left hand he carries the fasces, an axe bound to a bundle of rods.” Approx. 20 BCE–20 CE. Courtesy of the British Museum. Source: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/455806001> (accessed: April 22, 2021).

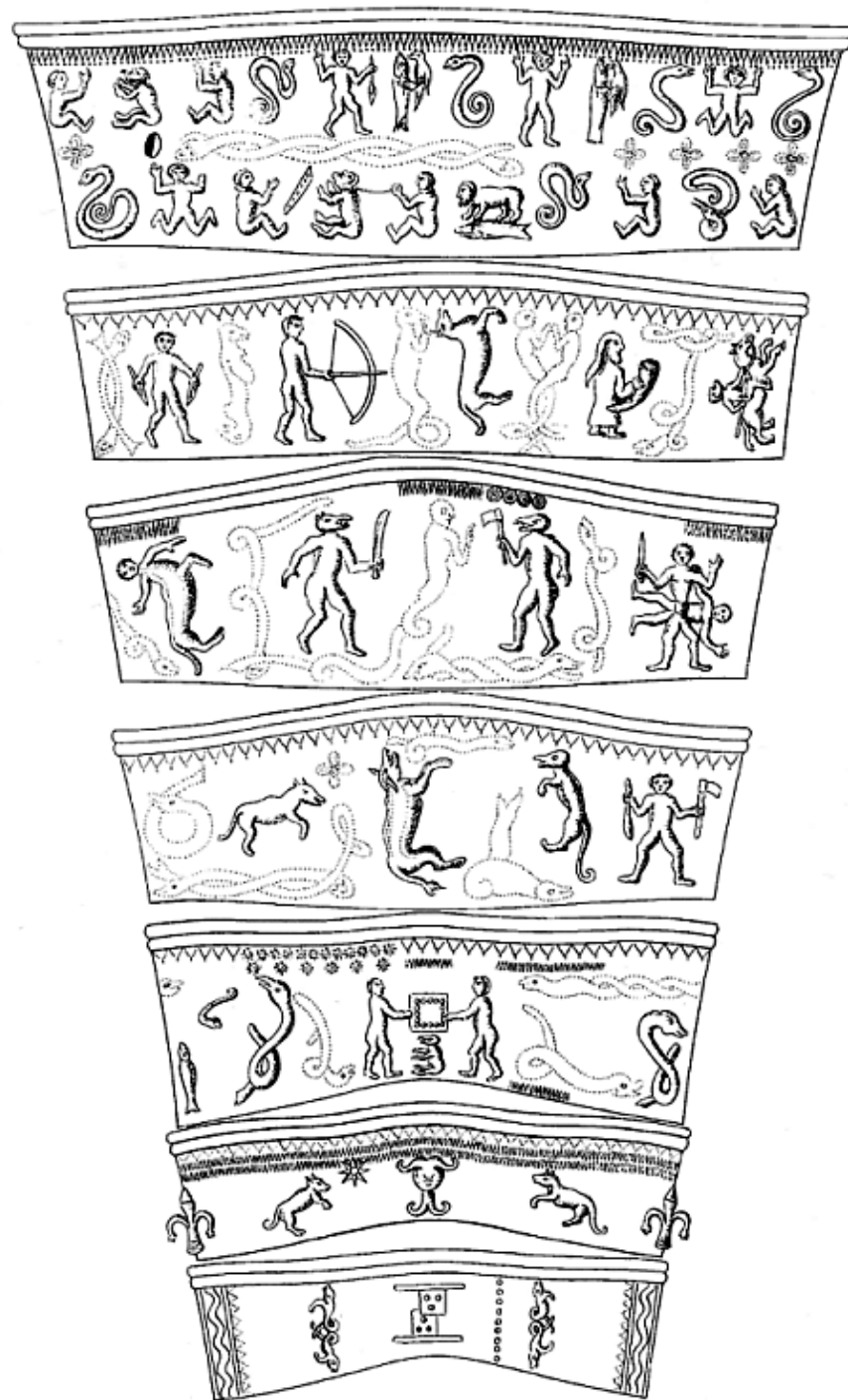


Fig. 3: Drawing of the image panels of the larger of the Gallehus Horns, projected onto a flat surface, by J. R. Paulli (1734).

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Large\\_Gallehus\\_horn\\_images.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Large_Gallehus_horn_images.png)  
(accessed: April 27, 2021).

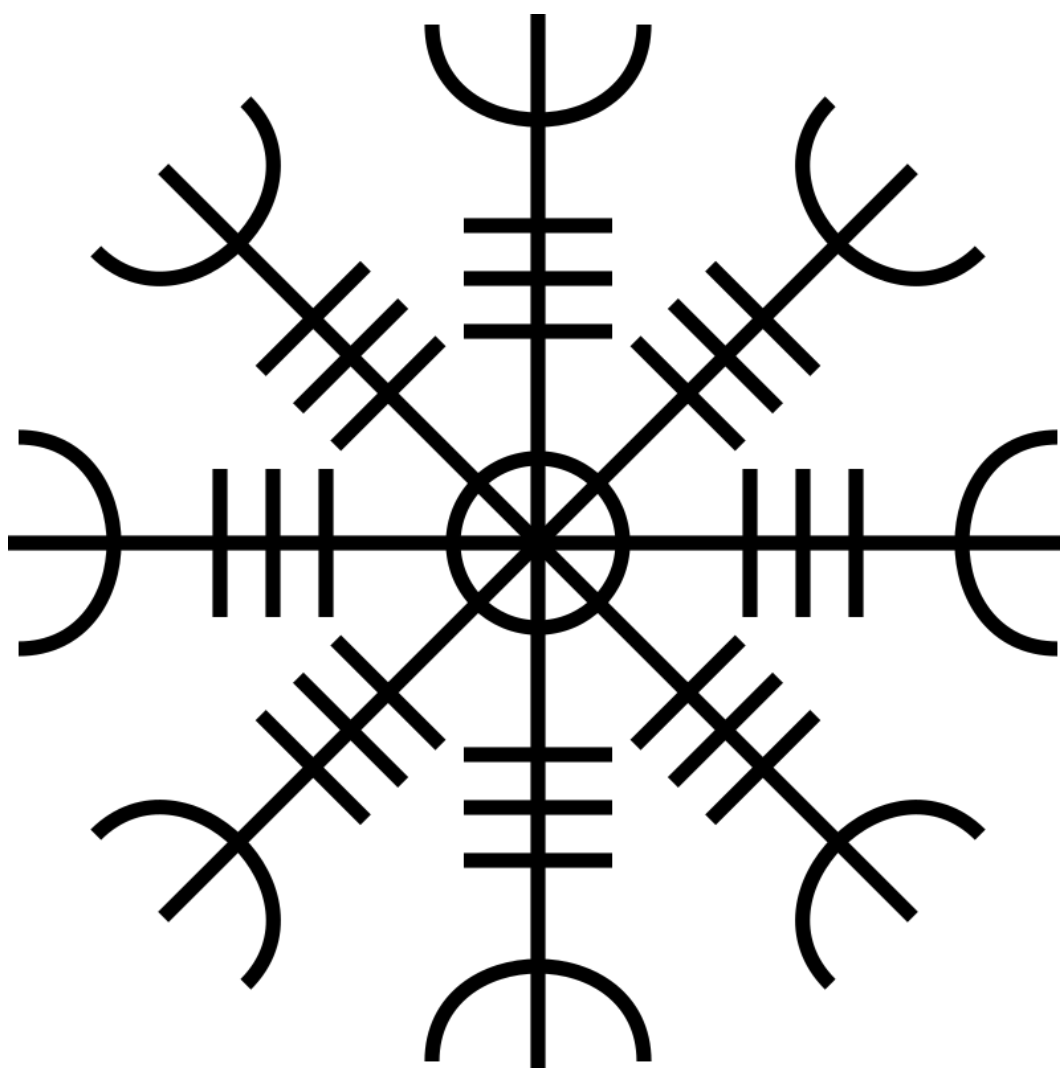


Fig. 4: Aegishjálmur, Icelandic magical stave.

Source:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helm\\_of\\_Awe#/media/File:Aegishjalmr.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helm_of_Awe#/media/File:Aegishjalmr.svg).

(accessed: April 26, 2021).

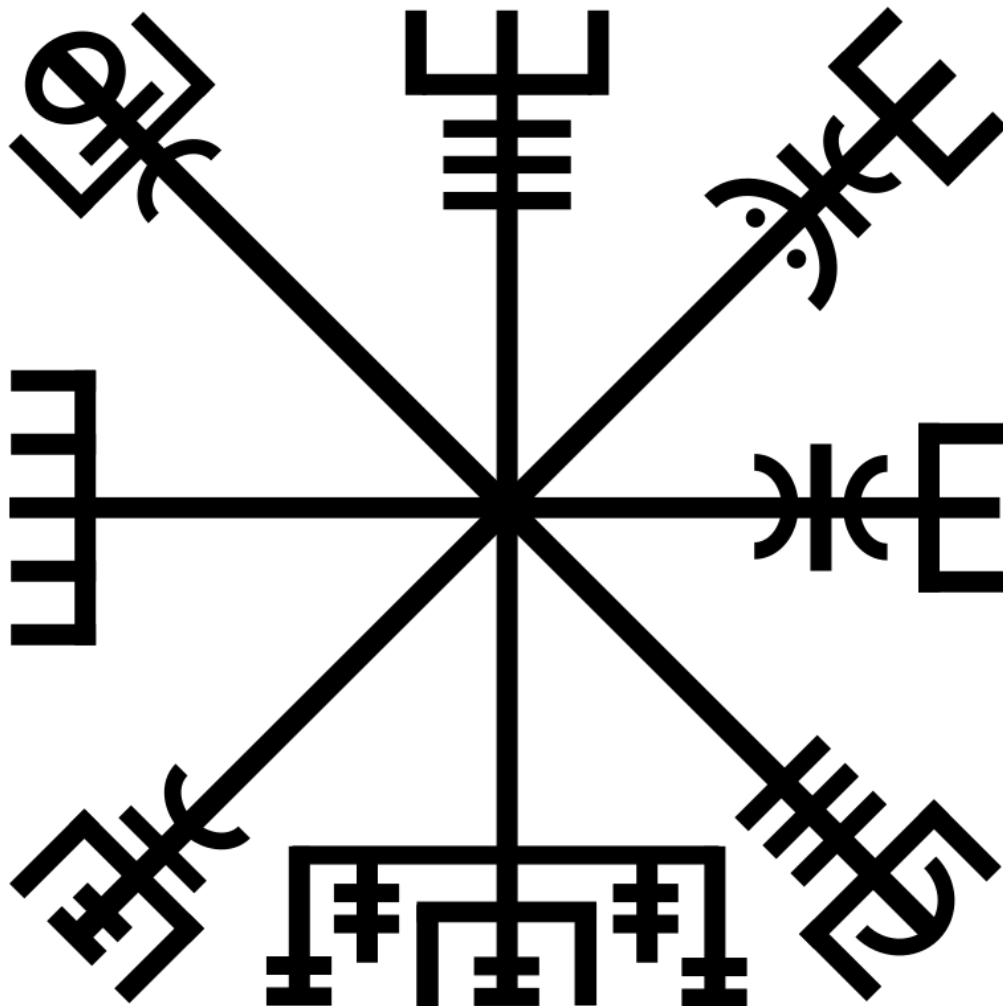


Fig. 5: Vegvísir, Icelandic magical stave.

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vegv%C3%ADsir#/media/File:Vegvisir.svg>  
(accessed: April 26, 2021).



Fig. 6: Wolfsangel.

Source:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfsangel#/media/File:Wolfsangel\\_\(Wolfsjagd\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfsangel#/media/File:Wolfsangel_(Wolfsjagd).jpg)

(accessed: April 26, 2021).

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Fig. 7: Wolfsangel symbol.

Source: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Wolfsangel\\_1.svg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Wolfsangel_1.svg) (accessed: April 26,

2021).

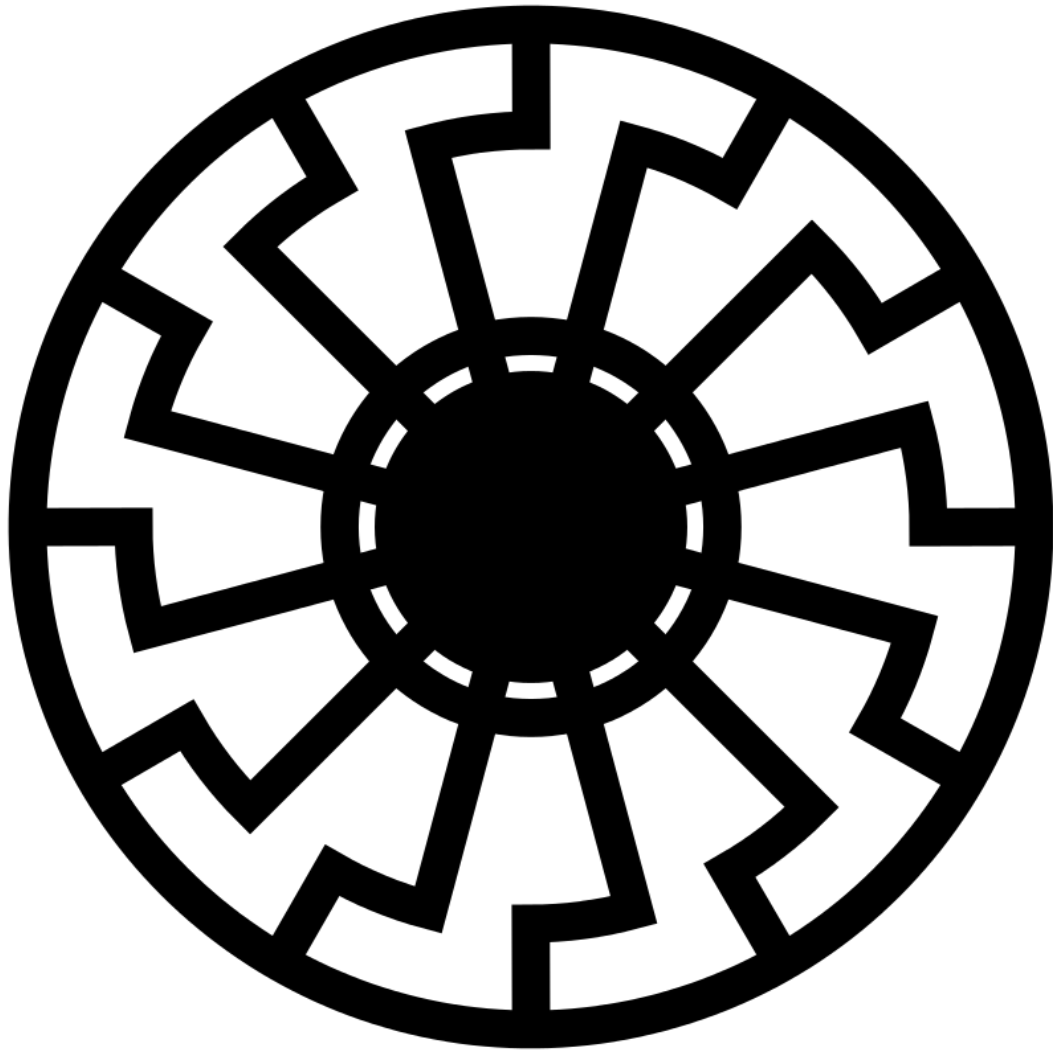


Fig. 8: Reproduction of the Wewelsburg mosaic which will become the “Black Sun” in the 1990s. Source: Wikimedia Commons, <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/ff/BlackSun.svg/800px-BlackSun.svg.png> (accessed: April 19, 2021).



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