

Nordic Ideology between Religion and Scholarship

Uppsala, 23–25 August 2010

Program

Updated: 21 June 2010

Sunday, 22 August: ARRIVAL

Monday, 23 August

09:00-09:30 Opening
09:30-10:00 Introduction
10:00-10:30 Lecture 1
10:30-10:45 Coffee Break
10:45-11:15 Lecture 2
11:15-11:45 Lecture 3
11:45-12:30 Discussion

12:30-14:00 Lunch Break

14:00-14:30 Lecture 4
14:30-15:00 Lecture 5
15:00-15:30 Coffee Break
15:30-16:00 Lecture 6
16:30-17:00 Discussion

Tuesday, 24 August

09:00-09:30 Lecture 7
09:30-10:00 Lecture 8
10:00-10:30 Coffee Break
10:30-11:00 Lecture 9
11:00-11:30 Lecture 10
11:30-12:30 Discussion

12:30-14:00 Lunch Break

13:30-14:00 Lecture 11
14:00-14:30 Lecture 12
14:30-15:00 Coffee Break
15:00-15:30 Lecture 13
15:30-16:30 Discussion

20:00 Dinner

Wednesday, 25 August

09:00-09:30 Lecture 14
09:30-10:00 Lecture 15
10:00-10:30 Coffee Break
10:30-12:30 Final Discussion

12:30-13:30 Lunch

DEPARTURE

- 1 Puschner, Uwe:
The Notions “Völkish” and Nordic: A Conceptual Approximation
- 2 Myrda, Sönke:
‘Nordic’ Men and Women in Public Media and Academia, 1920-1940
- 3 Karcher, Nicola:
Right-Wing Networks between Germany and Norway: Ideology, Political Approach and Working Method
- 4 Dusse, Debora:
The Norse Myth between Scientific and Religious Interpretations
- 5 Mees, Bernard:
Charisma, Authority and Heil: Walter Baetke and the Chasm of 1945
- 6 Alkarp, Magnus:
From Odin’s Banquet to the Conference at Wannsee. Swedish Archaeology and the Nordische Gedanke
- 7 Åkerlund, Andreas:
“Nordic Studies” and “Nordic Ideology” as Career Opportunity for Swedish Academics in National Socialist Germany
- 8 Berggren, Lena:
The Manhem Society: Nordic Ideology and Voelkish Antisemitism in Sweden
- 9 Löw, Luitgard:
The Great God’s Oldest Runes
- 10 Salomaa, Ilona:
Through the Xenophobic Looking Glass? – The Religion and ‘the Other’ in Finnish Comparative Religion of the 1920s and 1930s
- 11 Gerdmar, Anders:
Protestant Root Ideology and the Jews
- 12 Muir, Simo:
The Role of Christian Antisemitism and Nordic Thought in the Rejection of Israel-Jakob Schur’s PhD Thesis
- 13 Werner, Yvonne Maria:
Anti-Catholicism and Nordic Ideology
- 14 Junginger, Horst:
Nordic Ideology in the SS and the SS Ahnenerbe
- 15 Schnurbein, Stefanie v.:
In Search of Authenticity – The History, Ideology, and Context of Contemporary Neogermanic Paganism

Abstracts

Alkarp, Magnus [1]:

From Odin's Banquet to the Conference at Wannsee. Swedish Archaeology and the Nordische Gedanke

According to the early written sources, Viking Age Uppsala – located at Gamla Uppsala, five kilometers north of the modern city of Uppsala – was the judicial, economic, political and religious centre of the Svear kingdom. Extensively settled during the second century AD, Gamla Uppsala soon became embedded in pre-Christian mythology as the site from which the kings traced their ultimate ancestry and where Sweden, in the political sense, was founded. Although the written sources and archaeological facts clearly indicate a place where the Swedes had a direct and decisive influence on various matters of state – war and peace, the election and dismissal of the rulers – Gamla Uppsala oddly enough attracted those who wanted to deny Swedes these rights. This became quite obvious during the 1930s, when antidemocratic conservatives and right-wing extremist began using Gamla Uppsala as backdrop for their increasingly aggressive outdoor meetings. Several mid- and high-ranking German NSDAP-officials visited Gamla Uppsala, but unlike the Swedish right-wing extremists, the Germans soon realized the enormous difficulty of integrating Old Uppsala in the fascist idea of antiquity. Everything here would contradict the “Führerprinzip.” And when it came to the supposedly ancient Germanic legal traditions, both rudder and sail on the “unsinkable Nordic ship,” the German National Socialists soon ran to the lifeboats – after all, Þorgnýr the Lawspeaker from Gamla Uppsala did not have anything in common with Roland Freisler.

This paper aims to follow the threads of discussion among Swedish and German archaeologists and historians during the 1930's and 40's, to place ideas pertaining to the site in their historical and intellectual context and to shed some light on how Swedish archaeologists dealt with the Nazi infiltration of Swedish archaeology 1933-1945.

Berggren, Lena [8]:

The Manhem Society: Nordic Ideology and Voelkish Antisemitism in Sweden

The Manhem Society was founded in 1934 and based in Stockholm. The main aim of the society was to promote “the cultivation of the Swedish national heritage on a scientific and ethical basis.” The statutes of the society were signed by 184 individuals, most of whom belonged to the upper-middle and upper classes, including a large number of academics and clergy. Shortly after the society was founded, it embarked on an adult educational campaign that dominated the activities of the society throughout the decade of its existence. During the years 1934-42, an average of two public lectures per week were held, which means that well over 400 lectures were given by more than 100 people.

The most frequent themes of these lectures were variations on the subject of race and antisemitism, often intertwined with strands of cultural history and religion which places the society within a strongly voelkish context. A recurring theme on the society's agenda was the call for a second reformation, leading to the creation of what was usually labeled an “Evangelical Nordic Faith.” This paper will explore how religion, science and race were linked in order to forge what the society itself labeled a “Nordic Ideology.”

Dusse, Debora [4]:

The Norse Myth between Scientific and Religious Interpretations

Several German and Scandinavian scholars as for example Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, Bernhard Kummer, and Åke Ohlmarks, who had been connected to the field of Nordic ideology in the first half of the twentieth century, worked on eddic literature especially after 1945. They wrote

commentaries on and translations of the *Poetic Edda* and the *Snorra Edda*, and adapted features from Norse myths in literary works. This is in contrast with the marginal importance that the eddic tradition had in scientific (in opposition to political) contexts during the previous decades, when the focus concerning the Old Norse tradition was on the Icelandic sagas. The main reason for this was the primacy of the interest in Nordic or Germanic culture, of which religion was only one aspect. The second reason was the existence of different opinions on the character of the eddic texts and their mythological value or value as a source for Old Norse religion. The interpretations ranged from the idea of the Edda as Germanic or Nordic Bible (first of all in voelkish pagan contexts) to the interpretation as a solely literary Icelandic tradition transmitted in Christian times. This paper will focus attention on the forms in which the reception of the Eddas took place among philologists, historians of religion, and in pagan contexts before and after 1945 and show the (sometimes overlapping) dichotomy between the scientific and the religious or spiritual interest in the eddic literature.

Gerdmar, Anders [11]:

Protestant Root Ideology and the Jews

When studying the foreplay to National Socialist exegesis and the holocaust in German Protestant theology, the question arises what is the relationship between Protestant faith and Jews and Judaism. Protestantism being such an important ideological element in German culture, whether there are elements at the roots of Lutheran Protestantism, which opens for a negative stance towards Jews of even antisemitism. The paper discusses the confessional and the Protestant Enlightenment theology, their common roots, and their relationship to Jews and Judaism, and argues that a Protestant fundamental like the Law-Gospel dichotomy favors a dichotomy where the Jews will represent the negative, Law-side, a trace which can be found in both of the otherwise divided lines in German Protestantism.

Junginger, Horst [14]:

Nordic Ideology in the SS and the SS Ahnenerbe

While the general trend towards a non-Christian worldview of the North is a conspicuous feature of the SS from the beginning, we have little knowledge to what extent the estrangement from Christianity and the interest in founding a new religion really went. None of the various pagan groups in Germany succeeded to impart its religious agenda to the SS or gained any significant influence in the “Third Reich.” Quite the reverse, their proverbial and well-kept sectarianism constituted a key obstacle to the forming of a new Nordic religion. No wonder, therefore, that almost all branches of organized paganism fell under the surveillance of the SD being considered a serious menace to the unification of the German people. Though NS politicians frequently used the anti-Christian impetus of the voelkish religious movement to put pressure on the churches, pagans miserably failed to shift National Socialism into the direction of a Nordic, Germanic, or Indo-Germanic religion. This notwithstanding, a significant part of the SS leadership and a number of SS intellectuals particularly affiliated with the SS Ahnenerbe were in search for a new Nordic worldview with elements of a pagan religion. If this kind of religious seekership would have led to church like structures, the establishment of a pagan priesthood and the “invention” of novel gods and dogmas appears to be quite unlikely and makes little sense outside of the argumentative framework of the so-called historiography of the church struggle. Treating the SS Ahnenerbe in terms of a conventional think tank and not as spearhead of a new pagan religion, I will concentrate in my paper on the distinction between supernatural religions and intramundane worldviews with an interesting “contact zone” of a religious world view in between.

Karcher, Nicola [3]:

Right-Wing Networks between Germany and Norway: Ideology, Political Approach and Working Method

Several right-wing groups were trying to establish a broader Norwegian-German collaboration, based on the Nordic and National Socialist ideology, in the interwar period. Organizations such as the Nordische Ring and the Nordische Gesellschaft understood themselves as meeting points and platforms for leading scholars on race research and as umbrella organizations of the Nordic movement and of what Hans F. K. Günther has defined as “Nordischer Gedanke.” Already before the Nordische Gesellschaft formulated more or less the same program after 1933, the Nordische Ring, which defined itself as a kind of chief organization of the Nordic movement, had in the 1920s declared as its main goals: to unite all supporters of the “Nordische Gedanke” and to create what it called a “Rassenkern.” Since it was stressing that the “Nordische Gedanke” has to be imported to every Germanic country, building up networks in the Nordic countries was seen as an important part of the Ring’s work. After its “Gleichschaltung” in 1933/1934, the Nordische Gesellschaft was taking over the leadership of the Nordic movement and was trying to work on the same contacts for winning the Nordic countries for the National Socialist ideology.

In my paper I will show how these organizations, but also smaller groups such as the Norske Nasjonalsocialister i Tyskland, were establishing their German-Norwegian networks, what kind of specific ideology they based their work on and how their specific political goals looked like in a longer perspective.

Löw, Luitgard [9]:

The Great God’s Oldest Runes

In January 1939, Herman Wirth wrote to the Riksantikvar (State Archaeologist) Sigurd Curman (1879-1966) about his latest treatise on the Great God’s Oldest Runes (*Des großen Gottes älteste Runen*):

“The rock art sites in Scandinavia are the codified cultic-symbols of the Indogermanic primeval religion, which have been preserved in a written form in the older and oldest Vedic texts. I am presenting you the selected texts which I have compared for the first time with the rock-art. (...) These ideograms on the rock art sites are the primeval types of the old European alphabet: The Germanic runic script can be traced back in a direct line to the primeval runic symbols of the rock art in Scandinavia.”

My paper will present this treatise, a small handwritten book, well preserved between other papers of Curman in the National Board of Antiquities in Stockholm. The scholar Herman Wirth (1885-1981), whose life and work circuits around the interfaces of prehistory, ethnology and history, remains largely unknown. Wirth, whose intellectual position is located in the intersection of life reform and the voelkish belief system, regarded himself as the founder of a new science called “Geistesurgeschichte” (history of primeval thought). He occupied himself with all kinds of cultic symbols, writing systems, and other iconographic remnants, and viewed them comparatively without consideration of geography or dating. Because the symbols were also found in Paleolithic cave paintings he considered them as “primeval scripts.” On the basis of wide spread symbol studies, language, myths and narratives he constructed a primeval religion, which had its foundations in a Paleolithic primeval culture originating in the Arctic. Wirth could impress Heinrich Himmler and succeeded in founding the “Studiengesellschaft für Geistes-Urgeschichte, Deutsches Ahnenerbe” under his protection, followed by two research trips to Sweden to make casts of some rock carvings. Wirth’s career in the Ahnenerbe ended in December 1938. After his dismissal he tried to start a new career in Sweden and contacted Curman. His treatise should show that he was the right scholar for further studies in Swedish rock carvings. It is also an example for the pseudoscientific research within archaeology, religion and ethnology during the Weimar Republic continuing in Himmler’s Ahnenerbe.

Mees, Bernard [5]:

Charisma, Authority and Heil: Walter Baetke and the Chasm of 1945

Professor of religious history at the University of Leipzig from 1936-45, Walter Baetke (1884-1978) is perhaps best known for his 1942 study *Das Heilige im Germanischen*. After the war, Baetke turned more surely to Old Norse mythology, where he continued to develop his pre-war reputation as a critic of romantic excess. Criticized (in turn) recently by Olof Sundqvist for his “radical source criticism,” however, Baetke seems to have adopted a quite transformed attitude to his studies of Old Germanic Heil after 1945. Yet what does this skepticism that Sundqvist dismisses mean for modern-day understandings of Heil in Old Norse and Germanic studies? Did Baetke become a hypercritic after 1945 or was his work from the Nazi period itself tainted by the obvious association of Königsheil with the Führer cult? This paper explores the context of Baetke’s understanding of Heil in light of recent studies of Germanic antiquity, post-war academic apologetics and the influential discourses of Aryanism, leadership and charisma which prevailed in the years of the Nazi dictatorship.

Muir, Simo [12]:

*The Role of Christian Antisemitism and Nordic Thought
in the Rejection of Israel-Jakob Schur’s PhD Thesis*

The aim of the paper is to present how Nordic thought and Christian antisemitism affected the debate on Israel-Jakob Schur’s (1879–1949) PhD thesis which eventually led to its rejection. Schur’s thesis belonged to the field of science of religion and dealt with Jewish circumcision in the light of rabbinic literature. The paper will first present the contour of the events at the University of Helsinki in 1937 and Åbo Akademi University (Turku) in 1938. The core part of the paper will focus on the ideological motives behind the rejection.

In Helsinki Schur’s dissertation was officially rejected due to mistakes in the German language and in Turku the reason was more related to shortcomings in methodology. In the protocols of both cases we find, however, a deeper ideological argumentation. Besides, in Helsinki as well as in Turku, there was a clear division in the ideological and political leaning of the opponents and defenders of the dissertation, the opponents representing conservative values and the right-wing, the proponents being liberal, left-wing and anti-clerical. In both cases it seemed in the beginning that Schur would pass without difficulties but due to intervention of theologians, who entered the scene from outside, the course of happenings changed drastically. The critique of the theologians, i.e. Professor Antti Filemon Puukko and Professor Rafael Gyllenberg, was directed at the wide use of rabbinic literature and treating it as equal with the Bible. Religion critical Schur was accused in Helsinki of blasphemy and in Turku of blind belief in rabbinical Judaism. The low prestige of post-exilic Judaism becomes evident also in other professor’s statements. It is noteworthy that Puukko as well as Gyllenberg held close ties with Professor Gerhard Kittel, known for his antisemitic writings. Both of the Finnish theologians also came to have an eminent role in the official relations between the Church of Finland and Nazi Germany.

The non-national character of Schur’s dissertation played also an important role both in Helsinki and in Turku. Attitude towards science that was not practiced in a national spirit was negative. In Helsinki Schur’s dissertation was seen to have been written solely for Jewish scholars and was consequently seen worthless for Finnish science. Besides, the dissertation was criticized from the perspective of research in Fenno-Ugric ethnology. In Turku the discussion included also other tones. Some of the opponents, who belonged to the Finnish-Swedish far right and were upholders of racial science, considered that Schur’s dissertation could not be accepted because Schur did not belong to the “Finland-Swedish element.” The focus was directed to Schur’s ethnic origin (Schur was Swedish-speaking). This is in accordance with the Swedish form of Nordic Thought (*nordiska tanken*) to hold Swedes responsible for their ethnic Nordic brethren – Jews were an alien element in the Nordic family circle. Also in the field of racial science we see contacts to leading German scholars, e.g. Schur’s opponent, Professor Johannes Sundwall, repeatedly tried to invite Professor Hans Günther to come to Åbo Akademi University as a guest lecturer.

Myrda, Sönke [2]:

'Nordic' Men and Women in Public Media and Academia, 1920-1940

Nordic-looking men and women seem to be ubiquitous in European interwar culture, most notably in Germany. Idealized images of Nordic purity, youth, and “sober” beauty, (re-)constructions of ancient noble peasants, heroic warriors and idealized mother figures appear in a vast variety of scholarly texts, novels, pamphlets, dramas, as well as in visualizations such as illustrations, images, photography, film, exhibitions etc. The presentation of what characterizes a Nordic personality can be, implicitly or explicitly, based on a “reconstruction” of an historic past or as expression of an eternal racial and/or spiritual attribute of the Nordic-Germanic Man.

I will argue that those mental images and (“re-“)presentations of Nordic men and women formed a discourse *Nordic Man*, not (“simply”) bound to certain institutions (scholarship vs. lay public, academia vs. politics), or defined by people and their intentions. Rather, I shall look at media and genre specific and discursive conditions of this Nordic imagery, to find out more about how this type of “knowledge” is constructed, perceived, and produced – integrating both academic and popular, religious and cultural contexts. The “knowledge” about Nordic men and women always circulates between different spheres: 1) “Nordic” can be a geographical term, a racial character, a religiously charged attribution, or an identity designation, 2) the “Nordic” attribute is closely tied to “Germanic” and “German,” “naturalness” and “purity,” 3) the approach to the “Nordic” can be determined by essentialist, ahistoric, and gender-based patterns, 4) “Nordic” discourse takes up specific encodings of contemporary “scientific” fields, e.g. biological (racial hygiene), medical (health/disease), or psychological (“Rassenseelenkunde”), and 5) the presentations of “Nordic” men and women are closely linked to media traditions and esthetics.

My talk will focus on a set of disparate examples typically assigned to separate spheres such as popular culture, public education, popular science, non-fiction youth literature, and scholarly writing: Fritz Lang’s film *Die Nibelungen* (1924), the *Great Exhibition GeSoLei* (“Große Ausstellung für Gesundheitspflege, soziale Fürsorge und Leibesübungen”) in Düsseldorf in 1926, Erwin Baur and Hans F. K. Günther’s “picture-book” *Deutsche Köpfe nordischer Rasse* (1927), Kurt Pastenaci’s non-fiction youth book *Das Licht aus dem Norden. Eine kurzgefaßte Darstellung der frühesten Kulturschöpfungen des nordischen Menschen* (1935), and Gustav Neckel’s article “Sprache, Wirtschaft, Familie und Gesellschaft der Germanen” to Hans F. Blunck’s anthology *Die Nordische Welt. Geschichte, Wesen und Bedeutung der nordischen Völker* (1937).

Puschner, Uwe [1]:

The Notions “Völkisch” and Nordic: A Conceptual Approximation

With the intrusion of the voelkish ideology into the public discourse at the end of the 19th century, a discussion of its historical premises and linguistic derivations went along. It soon developed into a debate on the ideological implications and political repercussions of the voelkish vocabulary. The well-known impossibility to translate the German word “völkisch” into other languages is caused by the iridescent character of the voelkish ideology itself. Until today scholars are bothered with this definitional problem attempting to determine the specific nature of the voelkish concept properly. In accordance with the topic of the conference I will focus in my paper on the intricacy of appropriate generalizations in the context of voelkish and Nordic worldviews. To specify the role of the German paradigm may help us to attain a better understanding of the ideological content and political function of voelkish Nordicism in Europe.

Salomaa, Ilona [10]:

*Through the Xenophobic Looking Glass? – The Religion and ‘the Other’
in Finnish Comparative Religion of the 1920s and 1930s*

This paper discusses and provides an overview of Finnish comparative religion in the 1920s and the 1930s, i.e. it endeavours to an understanding of Finnish ‘religion’ of this period. The paper begins with the emergence of Finnish comparative religion within theology, the so-called Westermarckian school, folklore research, and the orientalist tradition.

Using the experience of co-editing a recent book on the topic of *Israel-Jakob Schur*, this paper examines the analysis of ‘religion’ and the attitudes towards ‘religion’ in the 1930s’ Finnish (and Nordic) framework. The historical analysis has shown that the early Finnish comparative religion was theoretically, methodologically and ideologically heterogeneous. In the varied theoretical and ideological atmospheres/backgrounds, the analysis of ‘religion’ was not only attached to the origin of religion, but also to the theme of understanding ‘the savage and his religion within’. In the 1930s these issues, in many occasions, correlated with eugenics, xenophobia, elitism, racism, anti-Judaism (religious), and antisemitism, so that e.g. an anti-Judaism was further shaped by racial theories. The Finnish theologians, active within comparative religion, studied under Christian theologians in Germany in the 1930s. Their anti-Judaism, Christian hostility to the Jews, was not a completely separated from German anti-Semitism. Furthermore, the Westermarckian scholars of religion discussed with the German anthropologists and with the Swedish ethnologists (Hedin, von Rosen) who were related to the Germans. Evidently, the Finnish folklorists also inherited much from German.

This paper focuses on interrelated questions of theoretical and ideological issues of ‘religion’ within the early Finnish comparative religion. The main questions are what was the identity of Finnish comparative religion in the 1930s and how did the ‘religion’ represent itself and ‘the others’ in that context?

Schnurbein, Stefanie v. [15]:

In Search of Authenticity – The History, Ideology, and Context of Contemporary Neogermanic Paganism

The presentation focuses on contemporary groups in Germany, North America and Scandinavia which try to revive an alleged pre-Christian “Nordic” or “Germanic” religion. It traces their origin in pre World War II voelkish ideas of an idealized Germanic past. The aim of the paper is to present neogermanic paganism as an international phenomenon. It will also investigate ideological interdependencies between neogermanic paganism and 19th and 20th century scholarship, new social movements such as the green movement or feminism, as well as ideas about the social significance of art and media. With the help of these discussions I want to defend the thesis that neogermanic pagans, by basing religion, culture and mentality on entities like heritage and nature, blood and soil and by adhering to dated 19th and 20th century theories about the relations between culture, nature, language and ethnicity, often inadvertently transport the nationalist, racist, and antisemitic figurations which the symposium is dealing with into the present.

Werner, Yvonne Maria [13]:

Anti-Catholicism and Nordic Ideology

International research has emphasized the importance of anti-Catholicism for processes of identity formation in Protestant countries in the 19th century. From a Protestant and secular point of view, Catholicism was considered as an outdated form of religion and as a menace to progress and national integrity. In confessionally divided Germany, anti-Catholicism was especially pronounced, and Catholicism was described not only as an un-German religion but also as a threat to the masculine and future oriented character of the German nation. Such rhetoric was used also in the

National Socialist propaganda, and in the eyes of many Protestants, NSDAP appeared as Lutheran party. Also in Sweden the connection between Lutheran culture, anti-Catholicism and national identity remained strong. But the anti-Catholic rhetoric used in the Swedish debates was to a great extent imported from abroad, not least from Germany. In my paper, I will discuss the impact of anti-Catholicism in the German Swedish cultural relations in the inter-war period and its connection to Nordic ideology, thereby focusing on the anti-Catholic organisation “Internationaler Verband zur Verteidigung und Förderung des Protestantismus,” which was founded 1923 in Berlin, and its Swedish counterpart “Evangeliska utskottet.”

Åkerlund, Andreas [7]:

*“Nordic Studies” and “Nordic Ideology” as Career Opportunity
for Swedish Academics in National Socialist Germany*

The Swedish scholar Åke Ohlmarks was one of the active academics founding an institute for comparative religion at the University of Greifswald in 1944. In an article dealing with the establishment of the institute Fritz Heinrich suggested that Ohlmarks took advantage of the “special opportunities” existing for Scandinavian scholars in the Third Reich. Heinrich obviously considered the fact that Ohlmarks was Swedish as well as the fact that his research was located in the field of Old Norse religion as helpful for his career. I later proved Heinrich right as I analyzed the career of Ohlmarks and the political and scientific context he was a part of during the National Socialist dictatorship, hence explaining how his Swedishness and research interests helped him to the post of a director of the short-lived institute in Greifswald.

In this paper I will put the scientific career of Åke Ohlmarks in a broader context and compare his career to those of Alexander Mutén and Stig Wikander, two other Swedish academics active in National Socialist Germany. This comparison has two aims. One is to discuss the scientific and political framework of the ideological conflicts within the National Socialist state and their importance for scientific careers in general and for the three scholars mentioned above in particular. The other is to put their careers in the broader context of the academic study of Scandinavia in Germany. In all three cases we will see that the image of the North and the “Nordic Ideology” played a crucial part for their careers, although in very different ways.