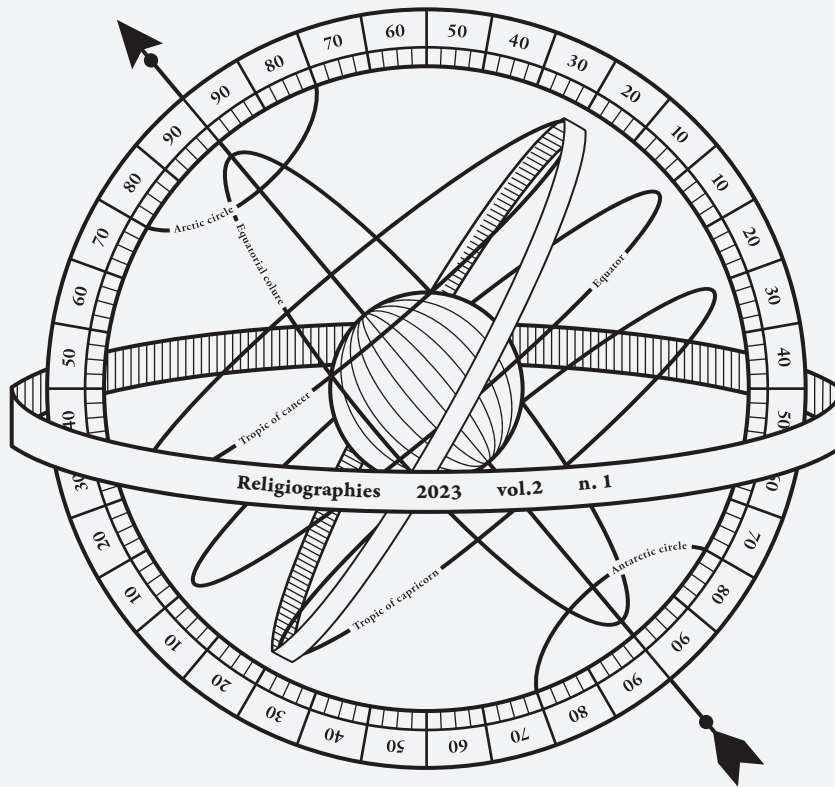


Religiographies



Special Issue
“Hans Thomas Hakl and His Library”
edited by
Marco Pasi

Introduction:

Hans Thomas Hakl: Reminiscences and Reflections on the Challenges of Studying Esotericism in Problematic Contexts
Marco Pasi



CENTRO STUDI
DI CIVILTÀ E SPIRITUALITÀ
COMPARATE

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I would like to thank Francesco Piraino, Francesco Baroni, Wouter Hanegraaff, and Bernd-Christian Otto for reading a first draft of this introduction and giving me useful suggestions for improvement. Obviously, all remaining errors are mine.

This special issue of *Religiographies* is devoted to the scholar of esotericism and book collector Hans Thomas Hakl.¹ The original idea for this issue came from a conversation I had a couple of years ago with one of the editors of this journal, Francesco Piraino, who is also the director of the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities at the Giorgio Cini Foundation. Francesco and I were discussing the donation, which we had proposed and facilitated, of Hakl's library, also known as the Octagon Library, to the Cini Foundation. For quite some time Hakl had been looking for a research institution or a public library that could ensure the preservation and accessibility of his vast collection, counting over 50,000 printed items, mostly books and journals, and a large amount of archival material related to the history of Eranos and of twentieth-century esoteric movements. Being a personal friend of Hakl's, I had been following his unsuccessful attempts at finding a convenient place for such an extraordinary cultural treasure. When I first met Francesco at the ESSWE conference in Erfurt in 2017, we started talking about his activities and plans at the Cini Foundation, and the idea came naturally to inquire whether he would be interested in proposing Hakl's collection to the Foundation. This collection would fit perfectly with the interests and purposes of the Centre directed by Francesco, and would join other collections (such as Alain Daniélou's) in what was already a marvellous library for the study of spirituality and comparative religions. It was definitely a long shot, but in the end it hit the target. Our conversation was the beginning of the process that led, a few years later, to the actual donation of Hakl's collection to the Cini Foundation. While the deed has already been signed and is therefore effective, the collection will materially remain with Hakl until the end of his life and will then be transferred to the Foundation.



H. T. Hakl and W. N. "Nick" Schors, Dutch bookseller specialising in occult books, Amsterdam, September 1994. Photograph © Hans Thomas Hakl.

I have visited Hakl's library many times at its present location in Graz and I have a clear sense of its exceptional scope and value. When it finally becomes publicly available to scholars, it will turn the Giorgio Cini Foundation and the city of Venice into one of the most important research hubs for the study of alternative spirituality and esoteric currents in the world. Consequently, Francesco and I thought it would be a good idea to devote an issue of this journal to the library's creator, partly as a gesture of appreciation but also, more

importantly with the idea of putting together useful historical and contextual documentation for those who will one day be using the library and might take an interest in its history. We invited a number of scholars—all of whom have met H. T. Hakl personally at some point or another—to write about him and about different aspects of his work.

I met Thomas Hakl for the first time in January 1997. I was then a PhD student at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris, with Antoine Faivre as supervisor. Some time before Christmas, knowing I would spend the holidays with my family in Italy, Faivre mentioned to me that a group of friends and colleagues were going to gather for a few days in Villa Saraceno, a historic house close to Vicenza, in the Veneto region, and he invited me to join the party. Joscelyn Godwin, also the author of a personal memoir for this special issue and a good friend of Hakl's, had organised the get-together. Everyone there shared an interest in the study of esotericism and alternative spirituality. I was the youngest in the lot and, while I had already met a few of them, such as Wouter Hanegraaff, Christopher McIntosh, and Deborah Belle Forman, most of the others I knew only by name.



Joscelyn Godwin, H. T. Hakl, and Wouter J. Hanegraaff at Villa Saraceno, January 1997. Photograph © Hans Thomas Hakl.

The idea was simply to spend some quiet, relaxed time together at Villa Saraceno, talking informally about our respective research interests. The event was so pleasant and successful that it was decided to repeat it. Because Villa Saraceno had been designed by the famous Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio, one of the participants later referred to the gathering half-jokingly as a “Palladian Academy” in a report of the event, and the name was then adopted by the group. Over the following years, the Palladian Academy reconvened several times at different places. Some people who had been invited to Villa Saraceno but could not make it, such as Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, joined the group as well. The second meeting was organised by Hakl himself in Austria, not far from his hometown of Graz. From the third meeting on, the location became Rosalie Basten's residence in the south of France, which she generously put at our disposal. At some point in the mid-2000s, the enthusiasm slowly waned and the meetings came to an end.

These were still pioneering times for the scholarly study of esotericism.

The seminal meeting for the foundation of the Society also took place at Rosalie Basten's residence and several of the attending scholars had also been previously involved in the Palladian Academy.

A description of the journal, together with the tables of contents of the whole series, can be found on the website of the publisher, AAGW: accessed May 20, 2023, <https://www.aagw-gnostika.de/gnostika-zeitschrift/>.

There was no professional association to organise large conferences, no journals or book series hosted by internationally renowned academic publishers, and no broad, international community of scholars such as it exists today. When these meetings started, there was just one place in the world where esotericism could be studied as a recognised scholarly subject on its own, and that was the EPHE in Paris, where Faivre had his chair. The meetings of the Palladian Academy, in which Hakl was involved so actively, functioned therefore as a breeding ground for the emerging field of esotericism, in which ideas were exchanged and projects were discussed by people who wanted to elaborate a vision for the future of this new area of research. It is from those meetings, for instance, that the idea of a scholarly association for the study of esotericism was conceived, which would eventually lead to the foundation of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE) in 2005.²

Starting from that first meeting in 1997, I saw Hakl on many occasions and spent time with him not only during the successive iterations of the Palladian Academy, but also at a number of scholarly conferences, and since I was regularly in Graz because of family connections, I also visited him there. He had an impressive knowledge of the subjects I was also interested in, and there were always so many fascinating discoveries to make in his library. Over the years, I have come to appreciate all the work he has done for the study of esotericism. He belongs to what is usually referred to as the category of “independent scholars,” that is, scholars who have not had a typical academic career and who are not formally affiliated with a university or a research institute. In most fields independent scholars are a very small, almost invisible minority, and this is perhaps also the case for the study of esotericism today. But in the past independent scholars played an important role in this field, especially before it gained a decent foothold in academia. The field has now grown and become more mature by including a significant number of people who have started a professional career through a regular course of studies, going from dedicated graduate study programs up to tenured positions. Before ESSWE was founded, however, it was quite common to meet people not formally attached to any academic institution but who were interested in the scholarly study of esotericism and were able to produce good, or at least decent, research. Generally, our field has taken an inclusive attitude towards independent scholars, without compromising too much in terms of academic quality, and I think this was—and remains even today—a good thing to do. While the increasing professionalisation of the field has definitely been a progress, and I see no particular need to indulge in nostalgia for pioneering times, I feel we should recognise the efforts of people like Hakl who contributed to the study of esotericism for quite some time out of sheer intellectual passion and using their personal means to pay for their research.

Hakl's contributions to scholarship show the value, and occasionally the weaknesses, of such endeavours. Apart from a large number of essays that he has published in journals and collective volumes, two major achievements should be singled out here. One is the journal *Gnostika*, which was created by Hakl in October 1996 in collaboration with the German publisher AAGW.³ Originally and for many years a quarterly, then a biannual, and since 2020 an annual periodical, over the years it has presented an immense wealth of essays, archival material, and interviews with both prominent scholars and practitioners of esotericism. Each

issue would also include a comprehensive, very useful overview of news about the international world of esoteric studies, usually written by Hakl himself. The other important work is Hakl's monograph on the history of Eranos, originally published in German in 2001, then in a revised, expanded edition in 2015, and finally in a version made available in English by Equinox in 2013.⁴ The book bears witness to Hakl's deep fascination for the long history of these meetings and for the biographical trajectory of the high-profile scholars and intellectuals who participated in them. This fascination is actually mirrored in his library, which seems to have been created precisely with the purpose of covering all the interests, ideas, and preoccupations that were so central in the Eranos project.

Apart from these two achievements, one should of course also mention all the work that Hakl has done on the Italian traditionalist Julius Evola, the author to whom he has devoted most of his attention and efforts. This work is scattered across a number of essays and other occasional publications (such as introductions and forewords to translations of Evola's books, especially in German and English) and has not been presented systematically in a single comprehensive monograph. In terms of dedication and commitment, it is however as important as his work on Eranos. This is the reason why one of the articles in the present issue of *Religio-*

graphies, by Francesco Baroni, focuses specifically on Hakl's work on Evola and other Italian esotericists. Because of his well-known racist and antisemitic ideas, Evola is by far one of the most controversial authors in the history of twentieth-century esotericism. But he is undoubtedly also a complex author, whose growing influence in the context of contemporary esotericism and politics cannot be ignored by scholars.

How to study authors who have such a problematic reputation, whether political or of any other kind, is an issue that has not been fully addressed by scholars of esotericism so far. This inevitably raises larger questions than the figure of Evola himself, questions that have to do with the perceived connection between modern and contemporary esotericism and far-right politics. As I have argued elsewhere, it would be disingenuous to deny that such a connection has existed historically and still exists today.⁵ But that does not mean that all forms of esotericism can be reduced to a particular political colour. On the contrary, many different political trends and orientations can be observed in the authors and movements that are being studied under the general rubric of esotericism.

It is quite obvious that one can study authors without necessarily sympathising with their ideas. But the fact that, especially after the Second World War, a persisting prejudice has tended to see esotericism as inextricably connected to fascism and reactionary politics has also cast a long shadow of suspicion upon scholars working in this field. Some of these scholars, including myself, have had personal experiences of such suspicions, and know that this is not just an imaginary issue. But, while direct experiences of hostile prejudice and stigmatisation can be unpleasant, one should never lose sight of the bigger picture. In fact, it seems to me that scholars of esotericism should probably come to terms with the fact that there is something irritating in esotericism as a subject of study, and that suspicions around it are so deep-rooted that they will probably never entirely go away, no matter how much political correctness is injected into the field.⁶ So, rather than wasting time in fearing overblown suspicions, scholars should look at these forms of prejudice today as objects worthy

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Hans Thomas Hakl, *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos: Unbekannte Begegnungen von Wissenschaft und Esoterik. Eine alternative Geistesgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Bretten: scientia nova, 2001); Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: Nabel der Welt, Glied der goldenen Kette. Die alternative Geistesgeschichte* (Bretten: scientia nova, 2015); Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Sheffield–Bristol: Equinox, 2013).

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See Marco Pasi, "The Modernity of Occultism: Reflections on Some Crucial Aspects," in *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years' Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Joyce Pijnenburg (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 59–74 (esp. 61). See also Julian Strube, "Doesn't occultism lead straight to fascism?," in *Hermes Explains: Thirty Questions about Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Peter J. Forshaw, and Marco Pasi (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 225–31; and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Esotericism and Democracy: Some Clarifications," 7 Oct. 2022, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://wouterjhanegraaff.blogspot.com/2022/10/esotericism-and-democracy-some.html>.

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That this irritating quality has to do with the long history of esotericism as "rejected knowledge," as has been reconstructed by Wouter J. Hanegraaff in his *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), seems evident to me. Whether the idea of "rejected knowledge" can be used as a single, general framework for conceptualising esotericism is surely debatable. But it can still be seen as a sort of red thread in the history of the ideas, beliefs, and practices that scholars today subsume under the rubric of "esotericism."

See Amy Hale, “The Pagan and Occult Fascist Connection and How to Fix It,” 5 Aug. 2019, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://medium.com/@amyhale93/the-pagan-and-occult-fascist-connection-and-how-to-fix-it-d338c32ce4e6>. According to Hale, “entryism occurs when people promoting particular political or cultural values infiltrate an organization with the express objective of spreading that position to other members.” It should be noted that Hale’s article does not focus primarily on the scholarly context, but on the religionist one. Its main purpose in fact is to warn practitioners of “Pagan and occult subcultures” about the dangers of infiltration from the radical right and to help them preventing it. It seems to me, however, that the picture Hale draws could easily be applied to scholarly communities as well. I would also add that her argument about entryism would be stronger if she could refer to actual radical right sources where it is explicitly theorised and encouraged. Without clear evidence the idea of a self-conscious tactic of entryism from the radical right, as distinct from a more general desire for legitimation, remains more suggestive and hypothetical than factual.

See <https://www.fondazionejulius-evola.com/>. The website offers a comprehensive overview of its activities and publications. The Foundation was created soon after Evola’s death in 1974.

I will just mention here the philosophers Franco Volpi (1952–2009) and Massimo Donà, and the political scientist Giorgio Galli (1928–2020), all of whom have contributed essays and introductions for the series of Evola’s complete works supervised by the Evola Foundation and published by the Edizioni Mediterranee. Other forms of conversation could be mentioned, even outside the direct context of the Evola Foundation, such as the interesting interview given by Francesco Germinario for the anthology edited by Marco Iacona, *Il maestro della tradizione. Dialoghi su Julius Evola* (Napoli: Controcorrente, 2008), 407–15, significantly titled “Visto da sinistra” (“Seen from the Left”). Germinario is one of the best specialists of far-right culture and antisemitism in Italy today. He has written a critical study of Evola’s racist and antisemitic ideas (*Razza del sangue, razza dello spirito. Julius Evola, l’antisemitismo e il nazional-socialismo* [Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001]). Quite a few other examples could be given.

of study in themselves. Forms of prejudice, by the way, which often speak more about the social and historical contexts in which they emerge than about esotericism itself.

At the same time, scholars should be aware that far-right milieus very often do show a deep interest in esotericism, not only in terms of practices or beliefs but also as a subject of scholarly research, and are more than willing to open up conversations with the academic scholars who study it. For these milieus, whether academic scholars support their ideas or not is often secondary, because for them it is the conversation in itself that has value. This can be seen as being part of a strategy of legitimation, used to evade marginal political contexts and expand the limited outreach afforded by them. In fact, some observers have even suggested that in some cases the radical right may even engage in a self-conscious tactic of “entryism.”⁷ This is why scholars of esotericism are more than justified in being wary of the contexts in which they operate. But this is of course much easier said than done. Scholars may not always be so sure whether a particular context is appropriate for a conversation and they may sometimes also incur errors of judgment. This, by itself, cannot justify stigmatisation and vilification. One can find oneself in such contexts for a variety of reasons, not necessarily because of sympathy with the ideas that are expressed there by others. It is certainly wise for academic scholars to avoid contexts that have an extreme political orientation, and there are issues, such as racism and antisemitism, on which no ambiguity is tolerable. But, apart from cases where racism, antisemitism, and other forms of discrimination are openly defended and promoted, which would make any form of conversation impossible, where is the exact line between objectionable extremism and acceptable political positions, whether on the right or on the left? And who draws the line? Quite clearly, these are questions to which people may give very different answers, depending on their own political perspective and, consequently, their own biases. Political activists of various kinds may have strong opinions about such issues, and can understandably be quite vocal about them, but that does not give them any special authority to draw that line.

No matter how deeply one can disagree with the problematic ideas expressed in milieus that are, in one way or another, directly connected to the subject of one’s own scholarly research, it is often difficult to avoid contact with such milieus. This can be for very practical reasons, such as having access to relevant literature, archives and documentation. But, in some cases, even an open, public conversation with these milieus can be useful, especially when they produce research of their own that has some scholarly merit. The value of this research cannot always be reduced to simple apologetic intents and ideological biases. An interesting example of this may be the “Fondazione Julius Evola” (Julius Evola Foundation), which was created to study Evola’s work and preserve his intellectual and material legacy.⁸ I am personally very critical about the political value of this legacy, and one should also be wary of the apologetic aspects unavoidable in the care-taking mission of such institutions, but there is much more to study in Evola than his political ideas alone, and it would be quite difficult to do so today without taking into account the large amount of research produced by the Fondazione. Research, by the way, that has been often carried out with the collaboration of professional academic scholars, some of whom do not have a right-wing political background at all.⁹

What should really count in the end is the critical attitude with which

the material produced by such milieus is studied and analysed, even if this involves some form of conversation. Is this enough to offset the risks of legitimising odious ideologies? It is hard to give a definite answer to this question, but I still remain convinced that, if there is one idea we can still retain from the legacy of the Enlightenment today, is that critical scholarly research remains the best tool we have to oppose and dissolve the false pretences of ideologies.

The reason for these reflections will appear immediately evident to the reader. They lead us to discuss what many would consider a controversial aspect of Hakl's public persona. It is no secret that he has been accused of being involved in far-right networks and of professing far-right ideas himself. He discusses this issue extensively in an interview originally published in *Gnostika* and now also available on the AAGW – Gnostika website.¹⁰ Perhaps the most significant example of such accusations can be found in an essay by the German scholar of religion Horst Junginger, published in a book devoted to the study of religion under the impact of fascism, also edited by him.¹¹ As the reader will see, the matter is discussed in the contributions to this special issue, although it is not a special focus of any of them. But I believe this introduction would not be complete if I did not offer my personal views on it. I actually think that this special issue of *Religiographica* gives us a very useful opportunity to reflect on these problems, both from a very general point of view, as I have just done, and more particularly with respect to Hakl's individual case.

First of all, I think it is important to look at the facts of the matter. If we get to the bottom of Junginger's statements we find that the only reason for associating Hakl with far-right milieus, apart from the very subject of his researches, is the unquestionable fact that he has published some of his works on Evola with publishers that have such a political reputation.¹² In the interview I have already referred to, Hakl explains that the reasons for which he found himself in such a position were purely instrumental.¹³ They had to do with the fact that nobody else at the time was interested in publishing translations of Evola's works in Germany. According to Hakl, his involvement in such publishing ventures had the sole purpose of presenting Evola's works with sufficient scholarly accuracy, avoiding misunderstandings and errors of translation.¹⁴ Readers may reach their own conclusions about these explanations, but I certainly invite them to read Hakl's interview integrally. His whole discussion of the matter looks reasonable to me. He had to make a choice between publishing the results of his research in problematic contexts or not publishing at all. Not being a professional scholar, he decided that publishing in those contexts was an acceptable compromise, as long as no other option was available to him. I personally do not think that such a compromise was a very wise choice, but I also do not believe that this justifies the prejudice and the harsh treatment to which Hakl is subjected in Junginger's essay.

The main problem with the kind of suspicions and accusations of which Hakl has been the target is that they are usually based not on an author's explicit expression of ideas, but on something much more impalpable and elusive: their hidden intentions. However, the way we perceive the intentions or the supposed "hidden agenda" of an author often depends more on our pre-conceptions than on demonstrable facts.¹⁵ This is why the distinction introduced by Hanegraaff in his contribution between a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of generosity can be useful here. A hermeneutic of suspicion can have very valuable heuristic power

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See "Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl," accessed May 20, 2023, <https://www.hthakl-octagon.com/interview/interview-english/> for the English version.

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Horst Junginger, "From Buddha to Adolf Hitler: Walther Wüst and the Aryan Tradition," in *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, ed. Horst Junginger (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2008), 107–78 (see esp. 167–69).

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More particularly, Junginger mentions the long introduction that Hakl published under his nom-de-plume "H. T. Hansen" in the German translation of Evola's book *Gli uomini e le rovine*. "Evola's politisches Wirken," in Julius Evola, *Menschen inmitten von Ruinen* (Tübingen: Hohenrain, 1991), 7–132. According to Junginger, "the Hohenrain publishing house that printed the book belongs to the Tübingen Grabert-Verlag, a leading right wing publisher in Germany particularly proficient in Holocaust denial." (Junginger, "From Buddha to Adolf Hitler," 167–68). Hakl's introduction is certainly one of the most important essays he has written on Evola and is almost like a monograph in itself. An English version was later published in the American edition of Evola's book: H. T. Hansen, "Julius Evola's Political Endeavors," in Julius Evola, *Men among the Ruins. Postwar Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2002), 1–104.

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"Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl."

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"Of course I was aware that I was risking my reputation by entering into cooperation with a publishing house well known for its right-wing political stance. But what other publisher would have dared to bring out *Men Among the Ruins*? . . . It's always easy to be wise after the event, but this was a fortunate decision, as it enabled me to correct numerous translation errors." "Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl."

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The scholarly value of Hakl's interpretation of Evola is of course open to discussion and could be the object of a specific analysis, which might reveal weaknesses and flaws. Junginger, however, does not engage in such an analysis and simply seems to take such weaknesses and flaws for granted.

See Hans Thomas Hakl, "Die Integrale Tradition," *Sezession* 11 (2005): 20–26, 26. Also available online: accessed May 20, 2023, https://sezession.de/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/Hakl_Die-Integrale-Tradition.pdf. It should be noted that *Sezession* is published by the "Institut für Staatspolitik," which is a New Right think-tank in the German-speaking area. See Felix Schilk, "'Heroismus als Weg zur Transzendenz.' Metadiskursive Religionsbezüge und apokalyptische Diskurspraxis der Neuen Rechten," *Zeitschrift für Religion, Gesellschaft und Politik* 5 (2021): 445–69, 456. Schilk also refers to Hakl's article (458), but in my view gives the erroneous impression that in it Hakl is discussing "Integral Tradition" from the normative point of view of a practitioner, whereas what he is actually doing is offering a description of the concept of Integral Tradition from the perspective of an external observer. His critical comments about the political application of Traditional ideas should make this clear enough.

"Interview with Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl."

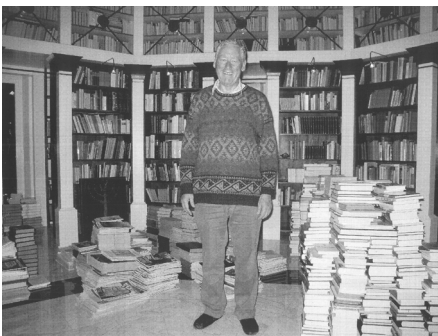
and there are contexts where it can play an important role for research. But whenever the evidence cannot go beyond the simplistic logic of "guilt by association" and there is a real danger of unjustified stigmatisation, it is in my view a hermeneutic of generosity that should prevail. This is obviously not just a scholarly issue, but also an ethical one.

Things would be different of course had Hakl expressed ideas that would characterise him as a far-right author, but that is precisely what, to my knowledge, he has never done. More than that, I have not encountered even one single sentence in Hakl's publications that could suggest sympathy with or support for fascist or racist politics, nor have I ever heard him make any such statement or allusion in the many conversations we had over a period of twenty-six years. By contrast, he has occasionally expressed his conviction (in writing, but in conversation as well) that any attempt to turn Traditionalist beliefs into political practice is "dangerous" because it will lead not to some ideal utopia of social harmony but to a "nasty totalitarianism."¹⁶ He has also expressed a clear opinion about Evola's political ideas:

"I too find much to reject in Evola. I could mention his numerous unambiguously racist outpourings, especially in the newspaper *La Vita Italiana*, which are clearly unacceptable. But there is also his distinctly Manichean way of thinking, which is what lies behind his sharp separation of tradition and modernity, north and south, man and woman, Ario-Roman and Semitic. Then there are his conspiracy theories and his anti-emotionalism. His occult view of world history, which he took partly from Theosophy and which he develops in the second part of *Revolt against the Modern World*, does not appeal to me any more than the similar cosmologies of Helena Blavatsky or Rudolf Steiner."¹⁷

Whatever one chooses to think about the points raised above, we should not forget that Hakl has published most of his scholarly essays in peer-reviewed journals, such as *Aries* and *Correspondences*, and in edited books with respected academic publishers such as Oxford University Press and Brill. Moreover, most of these essays were presented originally as papers at scholarly conferences, such as those of ESSWE, that apply a strict selection policy. These essays and papers could find their place in those contexts for the simple reason that their scholarly merit was evident enough to those who were evaluating them. They have in fact brought an important contribution to the scholarly discussion not only of Evola, but also of other subjects such as modern esotericism in Italy and in the German-speaking countries, sexuality and esotericism, and the history of Eranos. It is certainly fair to criticise Hakl's works for any flaws or faults they may have, but that is of course true for any other scholarly work and has nothing to do with the search for dangerous hidden agendas. Based on my personal acquaintance with Hakl, I have no doubt that he would welcome any such criticism as a compliment to his work and as an opportunity for learning and improvement. Even as an independent scholar, and like most of his peers, he knows that this is how the scholarly game works.

In conclusion, we may return to where we started. The fact that Hakl's Octagon Library has finally found its future home is wonderful news for the future development of research in religious studies, spirituality, esotericism, and related subjects. It will be an extraordinary resource for the whole international community of scholars working in these fields, and the



H. T. Hakl in his Octagon Library in Graz. Photograph © Hans Thomas Hakl.

beautiful premises of the Cini Foundation on the San Giorgio island, right in front of San Marco square, will offer the perfect location for enjoying endless hours of fruitful research. This is undoubtedly the most important, long-lasting contribution to scholarship that Thomas Hakl could ever make and for which he will be remembered in the years to come.