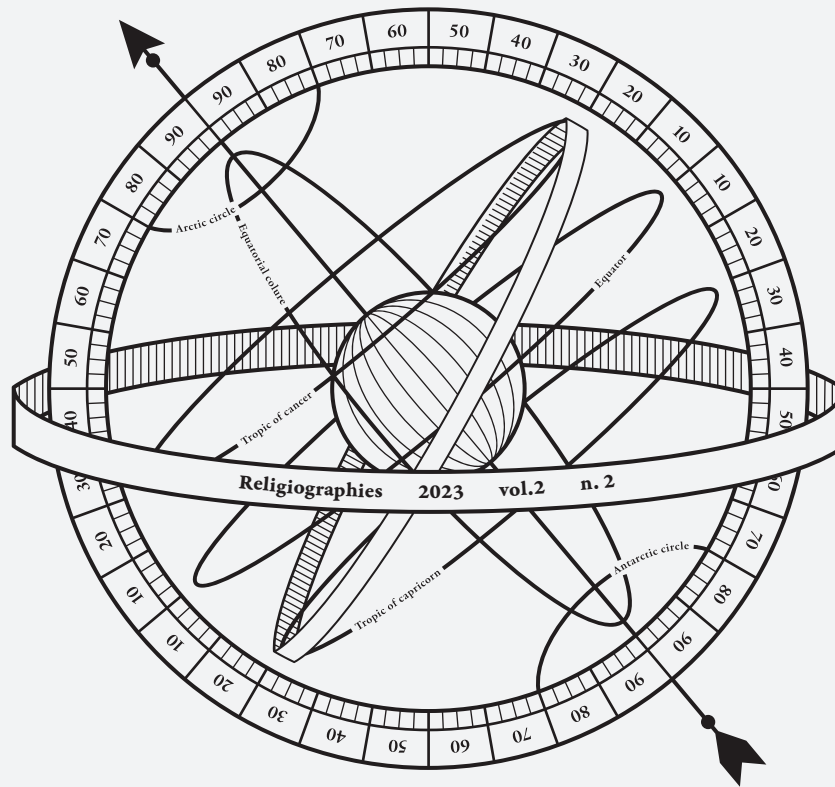


# Religiographies



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Marios Hatzopoulos

*The Nordic Spirit and Race  
Psychology: Racial Conceptions  
of the North in Interwar  
Swedish National Socialism*  
Gustaf Forsell



CENTRO STUDI  
DI CIVILTÀ E SPIRITUALITÀ  
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*Note on the authors:* Uncredited authors and native authors' names are included within square brackets.

1

A fine critical appraisal of this literature is available in Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 107–27; Julian Strube, "Nazism and the Occult," in *The Occult World*, ed. Christopher Partridge (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 336–45.

2

On these phenomena, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, "Die Nazi-Okkult-Welle," in *Hitlers "Religion": Pseudoreligiöse Elemente im nationalsozialistischen Sprachgebrauch*, ed. Manfred Ach and Clemens Pentrop (Munich: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Religions- und Weltanschauungsfragen, 2001), 42–48; Monica Black and Eric Kurlander, eds., *Revisiting the "Nazi Occult": Histories, Realities, Legacies* (Rochester: Camden House, 2015).

3

See, e.g., Joscelyn Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time: Prophecies, Traditions, and Occult Revelations* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2011); Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); Eric Kurlander, "'One Foot in Atlantis, One in Tibet': The Roots and Legacies of Nazi Theories on Atlantis, 1890–1935," *Leidschrift* 32, no. 1 (January 2017): 81–101.

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Cf. Eric Kurlander's erroneous statement that "[t]here

### Abstract

This article aims to analyse how national socialists in interwar Sweden construed and utilised ideas of a "Nordic spirit" and "race psychology" in relation to their racial conceptions of the north. After briefly depicting the emergence of various race theories with a particular emphasis on Nordicism, I highlight how the Manhem Society (*Samfundet Manhem*) construed ideas of a Nordic spirit, and then display how the National Socialist Workers' Party (*National-socialistiska Arbetarepartiet*) elaborated on issues relating to race psychology. I argue that racial conceptions of the north were part of how interwar Swedish national socialists navigated the contested terrain of what was then modern race thinking in order to determine the alleged racial foundations of a Nordic sense of being. The Manhem Society's racial conceptions of the north were largely based on ideas of a Nordic spirit comprising an alternative trinitarian belief that was considered hidden but present in the Swedish people's blood and soil, whereas the NSAP elaborated on how the internal (soul) related to the external (body). I conclude that a premise for studying relations between esoteric ideas and fascist/national socialist thought in an interwar Scandinavian context is to focus on careful historical contextualisation and avoid popular oversimplification.

### Introduction

Fascism and its era continue to attract unrestrained speculation about the alleged esoteric underpinnings of national socialism and perhaps especially the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP).<sup>1</sup> A possible venue to avoid potential pitfalls, such as exaggerating the popularised post-war image of the "Nazi Occult"<sup>2</sup> and over-emphasising the impact of "border science" (e.g. parapsychology, cosmobiology, and World Ice Theory) on a national socialist worldview,<sup>3</sup> is to nuance historical confluences of esotericism and politics; for instance, to acknowledge that both the far-right and the far-left have engaged with esoteric beliefs and practices.<sup>4</sup> This approach also includes late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discussions on race, a necessary component to consider. As outlined by Peter Staudenmaier, the primary reasons for doing so are that "occult racial doctrines are best viewed neither as precursors to Nazism nor as innocuous expressions of spiritual harmony but as efforts to stake out a specifically esoteric position within the contested terrain of modern race thinking."<sup>5</sup>

The contested terrain of what was then modern race thinking that Staudenmaier is referring to also played a part in the emergence of national socialism outside Germany. Interwar national socialists in Nordic countries generally believed that a revolutionary racial regeneration would give rise to a racially homogeneous society. Heléne Lööw and Nathaniël Kunkeler argue in separate studies that the National Socialist Workers' Party (*Nationalsocialistiska Arbetarepartiet*, NSAP), Sweden's largest national socialist party in the interwar period, sought to establish a "new elitist society" founded on biological principles of race and subscribed wholeheartedly to the notion that "race was the basis of social progress."<sup>6</sup> Terje Emberland claims that the driving force of the Norwegian pagan national

socialists was an idealised pan-Germanic utopia comprising every people of the Nordic-Germanic race.<sup>7</sup> Oula Silvennoinen, in turn, states that the Finnish Patriotic People's Movement (*Isänmaallinen Kansanliike*), established in 1932, and concerning foreign affairs, called for the creation of a Greater Finland in which all "Finnic nationalities" would be united by a common bond of blood, destiny, and culture.<sup>8</sup>

Even though scholars of national socialism in the Nordic countries have made crucial findings on parallels and variations in how interwar Nordic national socialists sought to consummate a utopic and racially pure society, there is still a clear study deficit on how these ideas were construed. Research is also lacking on whether—and if so, how—national socialists in this region have engaged with esoteric thought when pursuing such aspirations.<sup>9</sup> Focusing on interwar Swedish national socialism, as I will be doing in this article, is therefore of historical importance for two reasons: first, to contribute to previous research on how Nordic national socialists have perceived this racialised imagery of "the north"; and, second, to display potential confluences of esoteric and radical nationalist thought in the Nordic countries in the interwar period. Analysing these notions is also of contemporary relevance given that national socialists throughout the world have, according to Benjamin Teitelbaum, showcased imagery of "the North" and praised people of Nordic race as "the whitest of all whites."<sup>10</sup>

My aim in this article is to analyse how national socialists in interwar Sweden construed and utilised ideas of a "Nordic spirit" and "race psychology" in relation to their racial conceptions of the north. With this aim, I intend to display how interwar Swedish national socialists drew on ideas from the contested terrain of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century race thinking. To achieve this aim, I divide the study into three parts. The first is a background section briefly depicting the emergence of different race theories with an emphasis on Nordicism, to which interwar Swedish national socialists generally adhered. The following two are my analytical sections. The first highlights how the Manhem Society (*Samfundet Manhem*), established in 1934 with several national socialist members, construed ideas of a Nordic spirit. The second part of my analysis displays how the NSAP, established in 1933, elaborated on issues relating to race psychology.

### *Notions of race in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries*

Race can be defined, without adhering to the belief that there are existing "races," as the notion of a distinct group of people who is believed to share a particular heritage and/or genealogy and whose biological and/or social realities are seen as shaped by culture and/or environment.<sup>11</sup> By conceptualising race as a notion, and thereby as a "human invention" and a "social construct,"<sup>12</sup> it can be understood as a product of long historical processes preceding race as a biological term.<sup>13</sup> When the notion of race became more biologised over the nineteenth century, it also became, as stressed by Marius Turda and Maria Sophia Quine, intricately entwined with other socio-political notions and phenomena, such as culture, nation, and science.<sup>14</sup>

Outlining the emergence of race theories in the nineteenth century is exceedingly complicated. These theories drew on a centuries-long prehistory and do not necessarily coincide with the term race's linguistic history.<sup>15</sup> The emergence of race theories in the nineteenth century has largely been

was no such relationship between politics and occultism on the left." Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters*, 88. The vast literature on esotericism and/in the left is impossible to cite in its entirety. See, e.g., Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); 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), 59–67; Julian Strube, "Socialist Religion and the Emergence of Occultism: A Genealogical Approach to Socialism and Secularization in 19th-Century France," *Religion* 46, no. 3 (March 2016): 359–88; Per Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

5

Peter Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 11. For similar approaches and reflections, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890–1935* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 202; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, "The Aryan Christ: The Electrochristology of Ariosophy," in *Alternative Christs*, ed. Olav Hammer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 213–24; Julian Strube, "Die Erfindung des esoterischen Nationalsozialismus im Zeichen der Schwarzen Sonne," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 20, no. 2 (November 2012): 223–68.

6

Heléne Lööw, "Hakkorsket och wasakärven: en studie av nationalsocialismen i Sverige 1924–1950," (PhD diss., Gothenburg University, 1990), 250–5; Nathaniel D. B. Kunkeler, *Making Fascism in Sweden and the Netherlands: Myth-Creation and Respectability, 1931–40* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 170.

7

Terje Emberland, *Religion og rase: nybedenskap og nazisme i Norge, 1933–1945* (Oslo: Humanist, 2003), 398.

8

Oula Silvennoinen, "'Home, Religion, Fatherland': Movements of the Radical Right in Finland," *Fascism* 4, no. 2 (November 2015): 151. The *Isänmaallinen Kansanliike* was not a national socialist organisation, but emerged from the Lapua Movement which was more inspired by Italian fascism.

9

Nicola Karcher and Markus Lundström, "The Nature of Nordic Fascism: An Introduction," in *Nordic Fascism: Fragments of an Entangled History*, ed. Nicola Karcher and Markus Lundström (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 2.

10

Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, *Lions of the North: Sounds of the New Nordic Radical Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–2.

11

Gustaf Forsell, "Blood, Cross and Flag: The Influence

of Race on Ku Klux Klan Theology in the 1920s,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 21, no. 3 (August 2020): 271. Cf. Marius Turda and Maria Sophia Quine, *Historicizing Race* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1.

12

Justine M. Bakker, “Hidden Presence: Race and/in the History, Construct, and the Study of Western Esotericism,” *Religion* 50, no. 4 (July 2020): 481.

13

David Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages: The Case of Spain and Its Jews,” in *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religions and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, ed. Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo and Maureen Quilligan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 74–87; Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 148–51; Anya Topolski, “The Race-Religion Constellation: A European Contribution to the Critical Philosophy of Race,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 6, no. 1 (January 2018): 58–81.

14

Turda and Quine, *Historicizing Race*.

15

Aristotle Kallis, *Genocide and Fascism: The Eliminationist Drive in Fascist Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 49–55.

16

Kallis, *Genocide and Fascism*, 56.

17

See John Jackson and Nadine Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Marius Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

18

Kallis, *Genocide*, 48–49. It is important to note that Social Darwinism was a pejorative term and that a “social Darwinist” could “just as well be a defender of laissez-faire as a defender of state socialism, just as much an imperialist as a domestic eugenicist.” Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan, “Social Darwinism,” in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 490.

19

James P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology and Myth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989).

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Stefan Arvidsson, *Ariska idoler: den indoeuropeiska mytologin som ideologi och vetenskap* (Stockholm: Symposium, 2000), 55–65.

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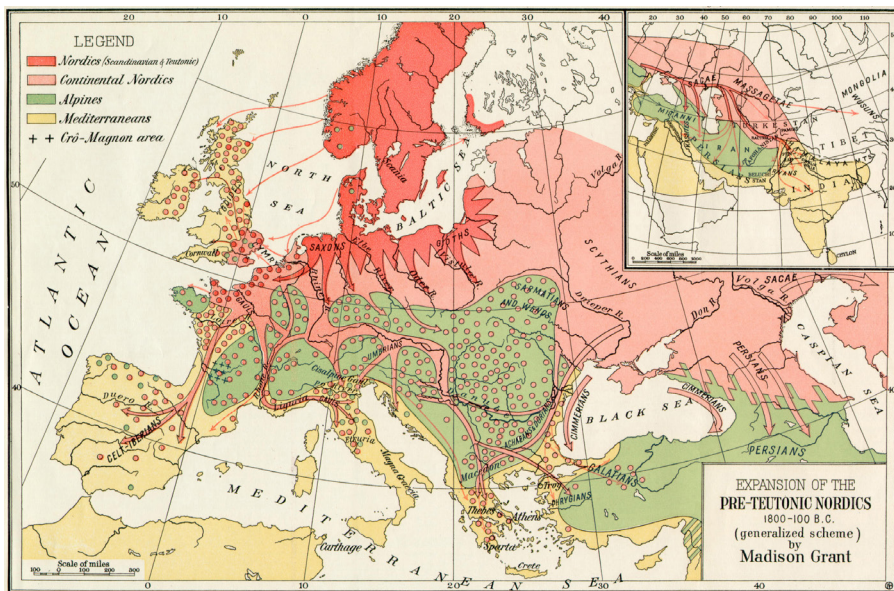
Mattias Gardell, “Att sortera människor: rasklassificeringens historia,” in *Att mäta rasism*, ed. Edda Manga et al. (Norsborg: Mångkulturellt centrum, 2022), 42–47.

understood in light of the advance of modernity, which “opened up new areas of enquiry to science and empowered empirical research to seek wider, more ‘total’ explanations of human problems.”<sup>16</sup> Scholars from numerous and often novel disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, and sociology, elaborated on the notion of race and were, at least in part, fuelled by rival nationalist narratives and state competition for hegemony.<sup>17</sup>

Constructions of race theories were often entangled with a growing interest in Asian religious traditions due in large part to the colonisation of the corresponding regions by Western European nations and the influence of the emerging Social Darwinism approach on how to distinguish “stronger” and “weaker” races.<sup>18</sup> Ancient Vedic scriptures were translated into English, German, and French, and research institutes dedicated to the emerging field of Indo-European studies were established across Western Europe. Scholars of Indo-European studies, formed as a field of linguistics, were (and still are) predominantly concerned with identifying linguistic and cultural traces of how the Indo-European language family originated and spread.<sup>19</sup> Whereas most philologists continued to maintain the non-racial idea of an Indo-European language family, scholars focusing on the notion of race began classifying the Indo-Europeans as a demarcated group of people—the Aryan race—with specific physical characteristics: blonde, blue-eyed, and a sturdy and dolichocephalic physique.<sup>20</sup>

Scholars of race generally agreed that the “white” race, however it was defined, was the most supreme human race. A fundamental disagreement was where this race was said to have originated, culminating in mainly three venues for categorising the white race: Aryan, Nordic, and Germanic. National socialists in interwar Sweden later used all categories, sometimes interchangeably, sometimes in combination (e.g., Nordic-Germanic, Aryan-Germanic, or Nordic-Aryan), to demarcate the Swedes’ racial group as imagined. When the categories evolved during the second half of the nineteenth century, however, they often differed in shape and content.<sup>21</sup> The category “Aryan,” etymologically deriving from the Vedic word *ārya* (noble), corresponds to the abovementioned race theory outlining the origin of the Aryan race in prehistorical India. The category “Nordic” generally refers to the idea that the white race originated in northern Europe, wherefrom it was claimed to have migrated southwards, spread across the globe, and established high civilisations in, for instance, ancient Greece, Persia, and India.<sup>22</sup> The category “Germanic,” likely a derivation from the north-central European region Germania during the Roman era, is arguably the most difficult to define since it tended to relate to the two previous categories.<sup>23</sup> Important figures of the Romantic literary movement, such as Friedrich von Schlegel, disseminated the idea that European civilisation was the outcome of the continuous regenerative influence of the allegedly pure Germanic blood. Houston Stewart Chamberlain further developed this idea almost a century later in his *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1899) when he anchored “Aryanism,” “Nordicism,” and “Teutonism” in the ideology of so-called Germanic superiority.<sup>24</sup>

National socialists in interwar Sweden generally considered the Swedish people as part of a Nordic race. This notion connects with Nordicism, a race theory popularised in the late nineteenth century, according to which the Nordic race is a superior but endangered race descending from the far north. Represented in academic circles by scholars such as the anthropologist Karl Penka, the archaeologist Gustav Kossinna, and the biologist Ernst Krause, and, in the early twentieth century, by the zoologist Madison Grant, the main argument was that if the so-called “white race” was



Expansion of the Pre-Teutonic Nordics. Madison Grant, "The Passing of the Great Race," *Geographical Review* 2, no. 5 (November 1916): 354–360. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

considered superior to other races, one should look for its origins where it was believed to have remained most pure. Nordicists varied on where they believed this place was located but generally identified it as northern Europe.<sup>25</sup>

The category of Nordic race was developed based on the theory of Nordicism. In his *Les races et les peuples de la terre* (1900), French naturalist and anthropologist Joseph Deniker identified six primary races—Northern, Eastern, Ibero-Insular, Western/Cenevole, Littoral/Atlanto-Mediterranean, and Adriatic/Dinaric—and four sub-races: sub-Northern, Vistulian, North-Western, and sub-Adriatic.<sup>26</sup> Deniker's race theory influenced Hans F. K. Günther, who in several works published in the 1920s promoted the idea that humanity consists of five races: Nordic, Western, Dinaric, Eastern, and Baltic.<sup>27</sup> In the interim, he was also a vital ideologue in the organisation Nordic Ring (*Nordischer Ring*), which, according to Nicola Karcher, "played a significant role" within the Nordic Movement (*Nordische Bewegung*) "both ideologically and regarding cooperation with like-minded persons in the Nordic countries."<sup>28</sup> The Nordic Movement was largely based on the idea of a Nordic thought (*Nordische Gedanke*), characterised by notions of the superiority of the Nordic race and the need to save it from decline.<sup>29</sup>

The category "Nordic" race became influential amongst scholars of race in Sweden. In 1922, the state-financed State Institute for Racial Biology (*Statens institut för rasbiologi*) opened in Uppsala after an almost unanimous decision in Swedish Parliament.<sup>30</sup> Herman Lundborg, who was both professor and head of the institute until his retirement in 1935, believed that the Nordic race originated in Scandinavia and small parts of northern Germany and the Netherlands, but that it was in decline, in his view primarily due to race mixing, urbanisation, and materialism.<sup>31</sup> This perception reflected views held by Günther, who was a guest researcher at the institute in the early 1920s. Lundborg was also inspired by the Swedish physical anthropologists Anders Retzius and his son Gustaf Retzius, both active in the second half of the nineteenth century. Anders Retzius developed a method of subdividing the European population into different races by categorising individuals into *kortskallar* (short skulls) and

22

See, e.g., Stefan Breuer, *Die Nordische Bewegung in der Weimarer Republik* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018).

23

The categories "Nordic" and "Germanic" were identical in terms of general ideas and used interchangeably. Nicola Karcher, *Kampen om skolen: nazifisering og lærernes motstand i det okkuperte Norge* (Oslo: Dreyer, 2018), 24.

24

Kallis, *Genocide*, 61–62.

25

A brief overview of Nordicism is offered in Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo-Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 35–36; Arvidsson, *Ariska idoler*, 157–60. On Grant, see Forsell, "Blood," 277–78.

26

Turda and Quine, *Historicizing Race*, 94.

27

Birgitta Almgren, Jan Hecker-Stampehl and Ernst Piper, "Alfred Rosenberg und die Nordische Gesellschaft: Der 'nordische Gedanke' in Theorie und Praxis," *Nordeuropäforum* 18, no. 2 (December 2008): 9–10; Turda and Quine, *Historicizing Race*, 94.

28

After the Nordic Ring was incorporated into the Nordic Society (*Nordische Gesellschaft*) in 1936, it started to function as a vital platform for transnational national socialist networking, mostly between Germany and the Nordic countries. Nicola Karcher, "National Socialisms in Clinch: The Case of Norwegian National Socialists in Interwar Germany," in *Nordic Fascism: Fragments of an Entangled History*, ed. Nicola Karcher and Markus Lundström (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 53–54. On the Nordic Movement, see Breuer, *Die Nordische Bewegung*.

29

Hans-Jürgen Luthzöft, *Der Nordische Gedanke in Deutschland 1920–1940* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1971).

30

For a brief history of the institute, see Gunnar Broberg, *Statlig rasforskning: en historik över Rasbiologiska institutet*, 2nd ed. (Lund: Department of the History of Ideas, University of Lund, 2002).

31

Herman Lundborg, *Rasbiologi och rasbygien: nutida kultur- och rasfrågor i etiska befrysning*, 2nd ed. (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1922), 16, 152, 157–58.



Herman Lundborg. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

32

Kallis, *Genocide*, 59; Maja Hagerman, *Det rena landet: om konsten att uppfinna sina förfäder* (Stockholm: Prisma, 2006), 167–70, 334–60.

33

Lars M. Andersson, *En jude är en jude är en jude: representationer av "juden" i svensk skämtpress omkring 1900–1930* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2000); Henrik Bachner, *"Judefrågan": debatt om antisemitism i 1930-talets Sverige* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2009); Olle Larsson and Andreas Marklund, *Svensk historia* (Lund: Historiska Media, 2012), 293–319.

34

Andreas Åkerlund, "Mellan akademi och kulturpolitik: lektorat i svenska språket vid tyska universitet 1906–1945," (PhD diss., Uppsala University, 2010), 23–25.

35

*Stadgar för Svenska Nationalsocialistiska Bonde- och Arbetareföreningen* (Filipstad: Svenska Nationalsocialistiska Bonde- och Arbetareföreningen, 1929), 12–15. The phrase "the Golden International" (*Gyllene Internationalen*) is a metonymy for the alleged Jewish world domination.

36

*Stiftelseurkund för Manhem: opolitiskt samfund för svenskhetens bevarande i Sverige* (Stockholm: Svea Rike, 1934), 34–40.

37

Lena Berggren, *Blodets renhet: en historisk studie av svensk antisemitism* (Malmö: Arx, 2014), 180.

38

*Stiftelseurkund*, 18.

39

[Carl-Ernfrid Carlberg], *Mera ljus! Riktlinjer för Samfundet Manhem* (Stockholm: Svea Rike, 1934), 11.

*långskallar* (long skulls); a method that was pursued and developed by his son, who was one of Lundborg's teachers at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm.<sup>32</sup>

It would be anachronistic to consider race theories as a direct pathway to national socialism. Nevertheless, where the Swedish interwar context is concerned, they did play a role in the emergence of national socialist movements in interwar Sweden, along with other socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. In early twentieth century Sweden, democracy was an emerging but contested form of governance, and Jews and Communists were considered by many as threatening Swedish national identity.<sup>33</sup> These circumstances were substantiated by national romanticism and Sweden's general openness to German society, politics, and culture in the early twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> The anti-democratic and pro-German sentiments as well as widespread anti-Semitism and anti-Communism contributed to why some individuals considered national socialism as a new beginning and a path towards a utopian future, and thus as the solution to contemporary challenges. For instance, one of the first national socialist organisations in Sweden stated in its 1929 statutes that the "Golden International" was controlling "the democratic outer world with its organisations [ranging] from the Right to Communism" and that the organisation sought to "bring the sense of primordial Swedish-ness to life."<sup>35</sup> An aspect of this was, from a national socialist point of view, to construe ideas in relation to racial conceptions of the north. That was the case amongst members of the Manhem Society.

#### *Perceptions of a Nordic spirit in the Manhem Society*

The Manhem Society was established in Stockholm on September 17, 1934, when 184 men signed a founding document on the initiative of the engineer Carl-Ernfrid Carlberg.<sup>36</sup> A few years later, the society had approximately 300 to 400 members, and its activities lasted until 1944.<sup>37</sup> The primary objectives of the society were to foster a "Nordic sense of culture and public education" and to serve as a society for Swedes supporting the preservation of their forefathers' "cultural legacy." It was claimed in the founding document that this legacy was hidden but present in the Swedish people's "blood and soil."<sup>38</sup> According to the programme setting the groundwork for the society's operations, an outlined *upphysningsverksambet* (operation of enlightenment) was to be carried out by using "weapons of the spirit."<sup>39</sup>

The Manhem Society was established within a fragmented Swedish national socialist landscape, characterised throughout the interwar period by internal rivalries, conflicts, and temporary alliances.<sup>40</sup> The first national socialist organisation in Sweden, the Swedish National Socialist Freedom Association (*Svenska Nationalsocialistiska Frihetsförbundet*), was created in 1924 but never gained a numerable membership and lacked the finances to spread outside the region of Värmland. The first nationwide national socialist organisation was initiated in 1930 under the name New-Swedish National Socialist Party (*Nysvenska Nationalsocialistiska Partiet*), comprising factions inspired by German national socialism and Italian fascism.<sup>41</sup> The decision to combine national socialists and fascists was met with mixed internal responses. Sven Olov Lindholm, editor of the party magazine *Vår Kamp*, considered the unification "an awkward compromise."<sup>42</sup> Prominent members of the party's regional branches expressed similar ideas to the party leader Birger Furugård.<sup>43</sup> Ideological divergences soon became

untenable and the faction inspired by Italian fascism left the party. After the split, the party was renamed the Swedish National Socialist Party (*Svenska Nationalsocialistiska Partiet*, SNSP) with Furugård as “Reich leader.”<sup>44</sup>

The SNSP was the only national socialist party in Sweden in the early 1930s with approximately 3,000 members.<sup>45</sup> The situation changed in January 1933 when Lindholm attempted to stage a coup by deposing Furugård and appointing himself as “Reich leader.” The coup failed and the Lindholm faction was excluded from the party. They established the NSAP the next evening, and soon it outnumbered Furugård’s SNSP in terms of votes cast in elections as well as membership.<sup>46</sup> The reasons behind the schism between Furugård and Lindholm are complicated but can be summarised as being caused by the SNSP’s failed parliamentary election results as well as by personal conflicts and ideological differences between Furugård and Lindholm.<sup>47</sup>

The Manhem Society was part of this fragmented national socialist landscape in interwar Sweden. Carlberg emphasised in the membership magazine *Meddelanden från Samfundet Manhem* that it was both “completely Jew-free” and “altogether independent and neutral” in its relations to various “national party organisations,” such as the NSAP.<sup>48</sup>

The Manhem Society had many sources of inspiration from early modern and modern Swedish history. It was inspired by ideas professed by the Geatish Society (*Götiska Förbundet*), established in 1811 by distinguished Swedish poets and authors with the purpose of raising social morality by contemplating Scandinavian antiquity.<sup>49</sup> The main idea of the Geatish Society, later highlighted by members of the Manhem Society, was Gothicism, according to which Scandinavians were considered to be descendants of the Swedish Geats, who in turn were identified with the Goths. The tradition dates back to the fifteenth century at least, when the Swedish Bishop Nicolaus Ragvaldi emphasised at the Council of Basel in 1434 that the Swedish monarch was the successor to the Gothic rulers and that the Swedish delegation therefore merited a senior place. Gothicism reappeared in the seventeenth century with the rediscovery of the Prose Edda and the publication of the four-volume *Atlantica* (1679–1702) by the well-known Swedish scientist Olof Rudbeck the Elder. In this work, he compared Sweden to Atlantis and the royal mounds at Old Uppsala to Mount Olympus and claimed that the deities of ancient Greece must have resided in Sweden.<sup>50</sup> The Manhem Society stressed, in keeping with the tradition of Gothicism, that the Geatish Society was a historical and spiritual forerunner of “new Geatish societal thought” and a natural response to what was described in the founding document as the outside world’s “harsh materialism” and “blood-defiling politics.”<sup>51</sup> In light of this, the members of the Manhem Society considered themselves as carrying on the work of the Geatish Society.<sup>52</sup>

Three sub-goals pervaded the Manhem Society in addition to the fundamental principles established in the founding document and the impact of Gothicism. The first sub-goal was to mediate knowledge on cultural and social issues and to educate its members in a “personal Nordic-Aryan spirit.” The second was to permeate the society’s activities with an “Evangelic-Nordic ethics.” The third was that the society, in ethical and religious matters, should promote an Evangelical position faithful to the “All-Father” and liberated from so-called superstitions of the Old Testament.<sup>53</sup> These objectives, along with Nordicism ideas that the north was the ancestral homeland of the Nordic race, had an impact on



One of the most used symbols of the Manhem Society. *Manhems föreläsningar 1934–1941* (Stockholm: Svea Rike, 1942). Photograph © Gustaf Forsell.

40

For a brief overview, see Lööw, “Hakkorset,” 37–75.

41

Heléne Lööw, *Nazismen i Sverige 1924–1979: pionjärerna, partierna, propagandan* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2016), 14.

42

National Archives of Sweden, Sven Olov Lindholm’s Collection, vol. 1, Sven Olov Lindholm’s diary, October 19, 1930. Swedish original: “en otymplig kompromiss.”

43

See, e.g., Swedish Labour Movement’s Archives and Library, Birger Furugård’s Archive, 3:2, G. Ossian Tornberg to Birger Furugård, October 7, 1930.

44

Lööw, *Nazismen*, 14.

45

Lööw, “Hakkorset,” 41.

46

Anna-Lena Lodenius, *En värmländsk Hitler: Birger Furugård och de första svenska nazisterna* (Lund: Historiska Media, 2021), 145–53, 159–60, 226, 245; Lööw, “Hakkorset,” 43–44, 46–48, 271; Lööw, *Nazismen*, 15–16, 24–25.

47

Lööw, *Nazismen*, 15–16; Lodenius, *En värmländsk Hitler*, 145–93.

48

Carl-Ernfrid Carlberg, “Manhemare!” *Meddelanden från Samfundet Manhem* 2, no. 5 (1936): 4. Emphasis in original.

49

For an overview of the Geatish Society, see Torkel Molin, “Den rätta tidens mått: Göthiska förbundet, fornforskningen och det antikvariska landskapet,” (PhD diss., Umeå University, 2003).

50

Kristoffer Neville, “Gothicism and Early Modern Historical Ethnography,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70, no. 2 (April 2009): 216–20.



Ibid., 9. “Vi äro icke gudsförnekare. Vi tro på GUD ALLFADER, Valhalls, jordens och världsaltets Skapare, den vise och väldige Ledaren och Ljuskampen, som verkar med sina eviga idéer och heliga, orubbliga lagar, i naturen, i den livgivande solen, i den kulturbyggande ljus- och hjältedyrkande människoanden och icke minst i vårt eget sanningsälskande svensk-nordiska folk, på vars hederliga arbete och ärliga ljuskamp mänsklighetens sanna välfärd synes bero. Vi äro icke rashatare, men vi avsky och fördöma brott mot Guds heliga raslagar.”

[Carlberg], *Mera ljus*, 4. I have not capitalised the phrase “holy spirit” since Carlberg seems to have been playing with words here. There are two words for “spirit” in Swedish—*ande* and *anda*—where *ande* is the Swedish equivalent to the word “spirit” as understood in Christian doctrines on The Holy Spirit; hence The Holy Spirit in Swedish is *Den Helige Ande*. *Anda*, on the other hand, the word Carlberg uses, can mean spirit and refer to more loose aspects, such as a “mental state,” “way of thinking,” and “way of doing things.” Thus, Carlberg does not refer to The Holy Spirit as such, but rather to a holy spirit.

Uppsala University Library, Emanuel Linderholm’s Collection, vol. 5, Carl-Ernfrid Carlberg to Emanuel Linderholm, October 28, 1930. Underlining in original. Swedish original: “Detta behöver ju icke innebära ett återfall till hedendom. För mig personligen är Wodan i detta sammanhang identisk med den ende gode och sanne Guden, som fanns där från begynnelsen. Begreppet ‘gud’ är ju en direkt härledning av begreppet ‘god,’ och för mig framstår alltjämt begreppet Wodan såsom högsta potensen av god och

the worldview that was construed within the society. In *Mera ljus!* (1934), published by Carlberg—and, according to its subtitle, setting the guidelines of society—he set forth what can be described as the society’s creed:

“We are not deniers of God. We believe in GOD ALL-FATHER, the Creator of Valhall, earth, and universe, the wise and supreme Leader and Fighter of Light, who works with his eternal ideas and holy, unwavering laws, in nature, in the life-giving sun, in the culture-building light- and hero-worshipping human spirit and not the least in our own truth-loving Swedish-Nordic people, on whose honourable work and honest light struggle the true welfare of humanity seem to depend. We are not race haters, but we detest and condemn crimes against the holy racial laws of God.”<sup>54</sup>

This creed may be interpreted as a direct product of the society’s third sub-goal when seen in connection to Carlberg’s other Manhem texts. Carlberg claimed that Jesus was of Aryan race and not Jewish descent.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, he construed an alternative trinitarian belief centred on “God All-Father,” “the heroic Jesus,” and “holy spirit.”<sup>56</sup> Carlberg suggested that a *nordande* (Nordic spirit) contained this triad and that the Swedish people were able to access it by following what he called the “voice of the blood.”<sup>57</sup> According to the founding document of Manhem Society, it was possible to follow the “voice of the blood” by re-establishing contact with “the Atlantean-Geatish spirit” of Olof Rudbeck the Elder. Regarding the *nordande* and Rudbeck’s “Atlantean-Geatish spirit,” Carlberg claimed that racially pure Swedes were the heirs of the legendary Manhem, which he argued was “the holy land of the Hyperboreans.”<sup>58</sup>

Carlberg had maintained for several years ideas of a supreme Nordic race, and its seemingly intrinsic relationship with an intangible divine force, when he initiated the creation of the Manhem Society. In the magazine *Nationen*, described in previous research as the most vehement anti-Semitic magazine in interwar Sweden,<sup>59</sup> he suggested in 1931 that Sweden was “the primordial homeland of Nordic-Aryan race.”<sup>60</sup> A year earlier, he gave an explanation to the church historian Emanuel Linderholm—who would become part of the Manhem Society’s scientific board in 1934 with, amongst others, Herman Lundborg<sup>61</sup>—as to his decision to substitute “Wodan” for “Hitler” in a poem and as to why doing so did not constitute what he described as a return to paganism. The concept of God Carlberg set forth in this letter has many similarities with the Manhem Society’s creed he formulated four years later:

“This [to highlight Wodan] does not have to mean relapsing into paganism. For me, personally, Wodan is in this case identical with the only good and true God, who was there since the beginning. The concept of “god” is a direct derivation of the concept of “good,” and to me, the concept of Wodan still appears as the highest potency of good and powerful and honest Germanism, i.e., the ordinance of mind the world primarily needs in the struggle against the sly evil of Judaism.”<sup>62</sup>

Besides Carlberg, other members of the Manhem Society professed ideas relating to the Nordic race’s origins as imagined. It was suggested that World Ice Theory, described in *Meddelanden från Samfundet Manhem* as “a new revolutionary world explanation theory,”<sup>63</sup> could prove the existence of Atlantis

and thus explain similarities between civilisations on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>64</sup> In keeping with Nordicism and the members' references to the "Atlantean-Geatish spirit" of Olof Rudbeck the Elder, the society invited Herman Wirth, head of Heinrich Himmler's research institute SS-Ahnenerbe,<sup>65</sup> to give a lecture to the society on the subject of "Sweden and the Oldest History of Germanic Spirit." Wirth's lecture was based on his book *Der Aufgang der Menschheit* (1928), in which Wirth claimed that the Nordic race originated in an Arctic-Atlantean high civilisation.<sup>66</sup> In his lecture for the Manhem Society, held in Stockholm in September 1935, Wirth rejected the notion that "Germanic culture" originated in Asia, emphasised that the Nordic-Germanic race was a "culture-creating" race, and stressed that it "stands before a renaissance."<sup>67</sup>

The ideas of the north held by Manhem members were also related to attempts to "cleanse" Christianity from its alleged Jewish contamination. This related to the society's second and third sub-goals to promote an "Evangelic-Nordic ethics" liberated from "Old Testament superstitions." Ernst Bernhard Almquist, the director of the Manhem Society and a professor at the Karolinska Institute, incorporated ideas from the Ariosophist Frenzolf Schmid's *Urtexpte der ersten göttlichen Offenbarung* (1931), which maintained that the Old Testament was a "defiled revision" of the "Aryan-Atlantean primeval Bible." Such an argument proved, according to Almquist, that Aryans had been confessing an "original" Christianity for thousands of years prior to "Jewish perversion."<sup>68</sup> He expressed similar ideas, but without any Ariosophic content, in his texts published in the NSAP's theoretical magazine *Nationell Socialism*.<sup>69</sup> The pastor Nils Hannerz,<sup>70</sup> the Manhem Society's vice-chairman and *religionsvårdare* (keeper of religion), was in turn influenced by Herman Wirth and his translation of the forgery *Ura-Linda-Chronik* (1933). Hannerz stressed in one of his Manhem pamphlets, *Den levande gudens ord* (1934), positively reviewed in Swedish and German national socialist magazines,<sup>71</sup> that the deity Wralda created the world and then humanity by dividing it into different races: the people of "Frya" (the white race) as well as the peoples of "Finda" and "Lyda" (the yellow and black races). The main purpose of the people of Frya was, according to Hannerz, "to keep the race pure."<sup>72</sup> Hannerz also proclaimed that Wirth in many publications, such as *Der Aufgang der Menschheit*, had accomplished "extensive research into 'Atlantean-Nordic primordial faith' as the oldest religious conditions of humanity."<sup>73</sup> Partly based on these ideas, Hannerz claimed that Jesus' teachings had been falsified by Jews and considered it a necessity to follow up on previous attempts to "Germanise" Christianity, as he suggested had been done in the ninth-century *The Heliand*, by the thirteenth-century theologian Meister Eckhart, and by Martin Luther.<sup>74</sup>

Like the Manhem Society, the NSAP incorporated racial conceptions of the north. There were, however, apparent differences in how they perceived this racial imagery. The Manhem Society was, arguably, more "esoteric" in the sense that it depicted the "Nordic soul" as maintaining a seemingly intrinsic relationship with an intangible divine force, adapted elements from World Ice Theory and Ariosophy, and stressed that the "Nordic spirit" comprised an alternative trinitarian belief that was considered to be hidden but present in the Swedish people's "blood and soil." The NSAP, in turn, drew more heavily on race theories, more mainstream in the contested terrain of what was then modern race thinking, including perceptions of "race psychology" in order to elaborate on how the internal

kraftfull och renhårig germanism, d.v.s. den sinnesförfattning världen framför allt behöver i striden mot den baksluga judaismens ondska."

63

"Litteratur," *Meddelanden från Samfundet Manhem* 1, no. 6 (1935): 3. Original Swedish: "en ny revolutionär världsförklaringssteori."

64

Claes Lindsström, *Världsläran: en bro mellan vetenskap och myt* (Stockholm: Svea Rike, 1935), 5–8.

65

The SS-Ahnenerbe's formation, operations, and development as well as Wirth's activities within it are analysed in Michael H. Kater, *Das "Ahnenerbe" der SS 1935–1945: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturpolitik des Dritten Reiches*, 4th ed. (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2006).

66

Herman Wirth, *Der Aufgang der Menschheit: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Religion, Symbolik und Schrift der atlantisch-nordischen Rasse* (Jena: Eugen Diederich, 1928).

67

Gustaf Forsell, "Hidden Knowledge and Mythical Origins: Atlantis, Esoteric Fascism, and Nordic Racial Divinity," in *Nordic Fascism: Fragments of an Entangled History*, ed. Nicola Karcher and Markus Lundström (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 123–24.

68

Ernst Bernhard Almquist, *Budskapet från Norden* (Stockholm: Svea Rike, 1937), 5–6; Frenzolf Schmid, *Urtexpte der ersten göttlichen Offenbarung: Atalantische Ur-Bibel: Das goldene Buch der Menschheit* (Pforzheim: Herbert Reichstein, 1931).

69

Ernst Bernhard Almquist, "Om internationell opinionsbildning," *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 5 (May 1935): 148–51; Ernst Bernhard Almquist, "Huru folk och kultur utvecklas," *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 8 (August 1935): 238–41. See also Ernst Bernhard Almquist, *Lutherska reformationen kräver fortsättning* (Stockholm: Svea Rike, 1932).

70

Hannerz was ordained a priest in the Church of Sweden but did not practice the ecclesiastical profession, which is why he was referred to as a pastor and not as a priest.

71

Swedish Labour Movement's Archives and Library, Archive of Carl-Ernfrid Carlberg, vol. 3, file 1, press cuttings of SNSP's magazine *Klingan* 3 (1934), the National Socialist Block's magazine *Riksposten* 1 (September 1934), *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 2 (October 1934), and *Die Sonne* 5 (1935); Häwe, "Litteratur," *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 6, no. 36 (September 1938): 3.

72

Nils Hannerz, *Den levande gudens ord: grundlinjer för evangelisk nordisk tro* (Stockholm: Svea Rike, 1934), 5–6.

This became evident in late-1938 when the party as part of an attempt to differentiate itself from the NSDAP changed its name to the Swedish Socialist Assemblage (*Svensk Socialistisk Samling*), substituted the so-called Hitler salute with a small salute, and replaced the swastika with *vasakärven* (the Vasa sheaf), the coat of arms of the Vasa noble family. The political content remained unaltered. Given that I am focusing on the interwar period and that the NSAP underwent this transformation less than a year before the outbreak of the Second World War, I will not examine how notions of “race psychology” were construed in its post-transformation period, which lasted until the party was dissolved in 1950.

Per Dahlberg, “Svensk och tysk nationalsocialism,” *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 1, no. 5 (February 1933): 6; Md., “Svensk är vår idé!”, *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 2, no. 45 (October 1934): 5; Per Dahlberg, “Tysklands och vår nationalsocialism,” *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 3, no. 3 (January 1935): 5.

See, e.g., “Ledning och efterföljelse,” *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 1, no. 3 (January 1933): 1; “Rasen inför ödestimman,” *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 1, no. 4 (January 1933): 1–2; Dahlberg, “Svensk och tysk nationalsocialism,” 1; G. A. W-n, “Kampen för den nordiska rasen,” *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 4, no. 41 (November 1936): 5.

Per Dahlberg, “Nationell Socialism,” *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 1 (January 1935): 5. “För oss nationalsocialister är sålunda det väsentliga i nationalismen känslan av att vi alla, vare sig vi arbeta med handen eller hjärnan, äro förenade genom det starkaste av alla band, *blodet*, känslan av rasgemenskap och folksamhörighet. Men denna känsla uppställer också ett kategoriskt bud för vårt praktiska handlande, den bjuder oss att alltid sätta folkets, den gemensamma nationens intressen, framför våra egna privatfördelar. Vi äro blott celler i den stora folkorganismen, bladen på folkträdet, vågtopparna i folkhavet, vi leva som individer blott en kort tid, men besinna vi endast vår plikt mot framtiden och ej låta livsviljan tyna bort komma vi att fortleva genom årtusendena som släkte och ras. Så måste för individerna denna nationalism ta form i *tjänsten under folkgemenskapen*.” Italics in original.

(soul) related to the external (body).

### *Perceptions of race psychology in the NSAP*

After Sven Olov Lindholm and his faction had been excluded from the SNSP and, as a response, established the NSAP in January 1933, Lindholm’s party soon outnumbered Furugård’s SNSP in terms of votes cast in elections as well as membership. Due to the SNSP’s diminishing influence, Lindholm and Furugård co-wrote an article in the NSAP’s party magazine *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* in November 1936, stating that the SNSP had been dissolved and encouraging remaining party members to join the NSAP and its youth organisation Nordic Youth (*Nordisk Ungdom*).<sup>75</sup> The NSAP had at that point become the largest national socialist party in Sweden by far, having approximately 10,000 to 12,000 active members in 1935. In comparison, generic Swedish fascist movements had in total approximately 30,000 members and financiers in the mid-1930s.<sup>76</sup>

The NSAP declared that it represented a Swedish form of national socialism distinctly unrelated to the one practiced in Germany.<sup>77</sup> That was also the case in the party’s formative years.<sup>78</sup> Numerous articles in the party magazine *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* emphasised how national socialism was linked to the “best qualities” of the Swedish-Germanic being and how it was essential to maintain the Nordic spirit because it aimed to teach the Swedish people “how to get to know themselves.”<sup>79</sup>

NSAP members’ notions of how a “Nordic spirit” related to “Swedishness” were based on an aspired racial regeneration. This implied two things: first, that national socialists should always prioritise racial survival over self-preservation; and, second, by way of allusion, that an ancestral inheritance would connect biology and spirituality deep within every person. Per Dahlberg, a prominent party ideologue, phrased it as follows in the first article of the inaugural issue of *Nationell Socialism* in January 1935:

“To us national socialists, what is thus essential in nationalism is the sense that we all, regardless of whether we are working with our hand or mind, are united by the strongest of bonds, *the blood*, the sense of racial community and folk solidarity. But this sense also sets up a categorical message for our practical actions, it invites us to always put the people, the common nation’s interest, before our own private benefits. We are solely cells in the great folk organism, the leaves on the people’s tree, the waves in the people’s ocean, we live as individuals only for a short period of time, but if we only consider our duty towards the future and do not allow the will to live fade away we can survive for thousands of years as tribe and race. In that way must this nationalism for the individuals take the shape of *service under the people’s community*.”<sup>80</sup>

Given that the ideas outlined by Dahlberg were formulated by a prominent party ideologue, they can be interpreted as guidelines for the NSAP as a whole. The words *blod* (blood) and *folkgemenskap* (people’s community)—the latter being the Swedish equivalent to the German *Volksgemeinschaft*—were written in italics, which implies that they were considered interrelated and essential to the NSAP’s self-declared mission to accomplish a national socialist society through racial regeneration. In addition, Dahlberg’s ideas highlighted that the NSAP considered national socialism to be a holistic worldview and not merely a political ideology. This idea was also recurrent in *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten*,

in which it was repeatedly emphasised that national socialism was an “eternal worldview,” the core of which was identified as the “Nordic racial idea.”<sup>81</sup> National socialism was also depicted as a “principle” for the Nordic tribe’s survival and Sweden’s freedom from alleged “Jewish” influences and “international” chains.<sup>82</sup> Dahlberg himself claimed that national socialism would be realised when the Swedish people were able to perceive it as an internal necessity.<sup>83</sup>

The NSAP’s published material frequently included elaborations on a unique Nordic racial soul as imagined. In the mid-1930s, Bengt Olov Henning, who concentrated on what he called *raspsykologi* (race psychology), was one of the party’s most important theorists on these topics. He defined *raspsykologi* as a method that contributed to understanding what an individual’s “spiritual nature” had in common with other people of the same race.<sup>84</sup> The core of *raspsykologi* was, according to Henning, that the most important differences between the races were to be found in the spiritual realm. Acknowledging this aspect enabled one, in Henning’s view, to confirm that the degeneration of the Nordic racial soul was caused by “alien racial souls.”<sup>85</sup> Based on notions of *raspsykologi*, Henning argued that the Nordic people would become a “living unit” and be given a “higher purpose” by adapting to a Nordic worldview, which he claimed was represented by national socialism. Additionally, he emphasised that finding an expression for the Nordic racial soul was the primary goal of the Swedish people, given that he considered them as “the purest carriers of the Nordic blood.”<sup>86</sup> Besides his activities in the NSAP, he lectured twice about the Nordic racial soul for members of the Manhem Society in which he seems to have been fairly active in the mid-1930s.<sup>87</sup>

Henning was influenced by Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss, to whom he frequently referred.<sup>88</sup> Clauss was a prominent race scientist in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s and is believed to have been the second most popular German author on race in the 1920s and 1930s after Hans F. K. Günther.<sup>89</sup> Henning put a particular emphasis on Clauss’ main work, *Die nordische Seele* (1923), which was published in eighteen editions between 1926 and 1943.<sup>90</sup> He was particularly interested in Clauss’ *Rassenseelenkunde* (theory of racial soul), the basis of which is a strict rejection of anthropological definitions of race in favour of internal, psychological traits to construe racial differences. By doing so, Clauss proposed that race was something invisible and not subordinated to the body. It has been suggested that this separated Clauss from other race scientists and *völkisch* ideologues.<sup>91</sup>

Besides attempting to render *völkisch* race ideology into the language and terminology of philosophy and contemporary humanities—he had an academic background in philosophy and philology—Clauss adapted aesthetic terms like *Stil* (style), *Ausdruck* (expression), and, arguably the most important, *Gestalt*.<sup>92</sup> While *Gestalt* was seldom defined in the German intellectual landscape of the 1920s, the concept signified in Clauss’ writings an internal structure or constitutive idea connecting the external body and the internal soul. By claiming that a soul of a special style can only express itself adequately in a corresponding body, Clauss defined race as hereditary *Gestalt* and stressed that *Rassenseelenkunde* could contribute to accomplishing harmony between the “external” and “internal” spheres.<sup>93</sup>

Henning incorporated Clauss’ *Rassenseelenkunde* into his race psychological approach as the foundation of racial regeneration and related it to the school of gestalt psychology. The basic idea of gestalt psychology, represented by Max Wertheimer, amongst others, is that organisms

81

See, e.g., “Germansk världsåskådning,” *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 1, no. 16 (April 1933): 2; Ebbe Ragnarsson Mark, “Svenskt och germanskt,” *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 1, no. 21 (June 1933): 7; Esse, “Nationalsocialismen,” *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 4, no. 8 (February 1936): 4.

82

“Nationalsocialismen en bekännelse till folket,” *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 3, no. 2 (January 1935): 6.

83

Per Dahlberg, “I kamp för en världsåskådning,” *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 3, no. 25 (July 1935): 5.

84

Bengt Olov Henning, “Den nordiska rassjälen,” *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 7 (July 1935): 196–97. The vast majority of the articles written by Henning which are cited hereafter had the same title: “Den nordiska rassjälen” (The Nordic racial soul). They will therefore not be abbreviated in the following citations so the reader can get a sense of which article(s) I am referring to.

85

Bengt Olov Henning, “Den nordiska rassjälen,” *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 7 (July 1935): 196–98.

86

Bengt Olov Henning, “Nationalstat och världsstat,” *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 2 (February 1935): 55–56.

87

*Manhems föreläsningar 1934–1941* (Stockholm: Svea Rike, 1942), 3.

88

Bengt Olov Henning, “Den nordiska rassjälen,” *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 7 (July 1935): 198; Bengt Olov Henning, “Den nordiska rassjälen,” *Meddelanden från Samfundet Manhem* 1, no. 14 (1935): 2.

89

Felix Wiedemann, “The North, the Desert, and the Near East: Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss and the Racial Cartography of the Near East,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 12, no. 2 (October 2012): 328.

90

Wiedemann, “The North,” 329.

91

Wiedemann, “The North,” 329; The standard work on different political and ideological aspects of the *Völkisch* Movement is still Uwe Puschner, Walter Schmitz and Justus H. Ulbricht, eds., *Handbuch zur “Völkischen Bewegung” 1871–1918* (Munich: De Gruyter, 1999).

92

Wiedemann, “The North,” 329.

93

Wiedemann, “The North,” 329–30.

George W. Hartmann, *Gestalt Psychology: A Survey of Facts and Principles* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1935), 33; Max Wertheimer, "Gestalt Theory," in *A Source Book of Gestalt Psychology*, ed. Willis D. Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Company, 1938), 2–3.

Riccardo Luccio, "On Prägnanz," in *Shapes of Forms: From Gestalt Psychology and Phenomenology to Ontology and Mathematics*, ed. Liliana Albertazzi (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 123–48.

Luccio, "On Prägnanz," 129.

Bengt Olov Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 7 (July 1935): 198.

Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," 198.

Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," 199–200.

Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," 200, 202.

Bengt Olov Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," *Meddelanden från Samfundet Manbem* 1, no. 5 (1935): 5.

Bengt Olov Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 7 (July 1935): 201.

Bengt Olov Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," *Meddelanden från Samfundet Manbem* 1, no. 14 (1935): 2.

Bengt Olov Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," *Meddelanden från Samfundet Manbem* 1, no. 5 (1935): 6.

Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," 2.

perceive entire patterns or configurations and not merely separate components; in other words, that the mind understands external stimuli as wholes rather than as the sums of their parts.<sup>94</sup> Based on this psychological approach, different laws of *Prägnanz*, describing how individuals perceive an assortment of objects, are believed to be inherent in different human cultures and animals.<sup>95</sup> By drawing on these laws of *Prägnanz*, Henning put a particular emphasis on "the law of past experience," according to which visual stimuli under certain circumstances are categorised according to past experiences.<sup>96</sup> Henning himself stated that every soul was characterised by psychological experiences in the past, such as grief, and that the soul's "destiny" was based on these past experiences.<sup>97</sup>

Henning claimed that gestalt psychology determined three things: first, whether a phenomenon in the soul should be suppressed or developed; second, whether the soul was active or passive; and third, it determined the experience's *vågrörelse* (wave movement).<sup>98</sup> He applied this model to different races and declared that the Nordic, Mediterranean, and Oriental racial souls were active whereas the Alpine and Mongolian racial souls were passive. He also stated that the Nordic soul's wave movement tended upwards into "the infinite" and that church towers represented this movement. The indication, according to Henning, was that Christian faith and Nordic being were compatible.<sup>99</sup>

Through this model, Henning claimed that the racial soul was the deepest aspect of human life and that the Nordic race had perfected the idea of nationality.<sup>100</sup> This drew him to the conclusion that Clauss' theories of a racial soul differed from Günther's. While summarising Günther's theories in terms of a racial soul combining different characteristics, Henning preferred Clauss' theories by claiming that Clauss considered the racial soul as a spiritual capacity.<sup>101</sup> Based on this standpoint and in relation to gestalt psychology, Henning described race mixing as the most damaging element to racial purity because different forces in that case would "meet" in the same soul fighting for internal, spiritual power.<sup>102</sup>

Even though Henning tended to be critical of how Günther described the characteristics of the Nordic racial soul, he was nevertheless influenced by his theories. He especially engaged with how Günther demarcated the alleged superiority of the Nordic race by subordinating the Dinaric, East Baltic, Eastern, and Western races.<sup>103</sup> This implicated that he combined Clauss' *Rassenseelenkunde* with notions of *Blut und Boden* that were vivid in, but not restricted to, Günther's race theories. In a lecture for members of the Manhem Society, Henning noted that the Nordic race must have had certain characteristics to prosper in its primordial homeland. He thus considered the Nordic race as the most supreme race given that it had evolved in harsh environmental conditions.<sup>104</sup> In addition, Henning included mythological elements to strengthen his ideas of a superior Nordic racial soul. He suggested, by referring to Clauss, that Nordic man is characterised by a longing for eternal life and a sense of individual loneliness. He claimed that the first characteristic was expressed in the Old Norse poem *Völuspá* describing a new world after Ragnarök, whereas the second characteristic was illustrated by Meister Eckhart and what Henning described as his "Germanic sense of God," according to which Henning suggested that Eckhart highlighted remoteness as a "synthesis of loneliness and closeness to God."<sup>105</sup>

Far from every NSAP member considered themselves influenced by Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss' *Rassenseelenkunde*, but ideas similar to those

construed by Bengt Olov Henning were expressed by other party ideologues. Per Dahlberg, for instance, considered race as a “physical-psychological totality.”<sup>106</sup> NSAP elaborations on the racial soul, which resembled those construed in the Manhem Society, implicated how to interpret faith-related issues. Dahlberg stated that persons criticising “the race idea” from a Christian point of view were also criticising the omnipotent power which, in his view, originally created the races as distinctly unrelated to each other in body and soul.<sup>107</sup> Gerhard Ossian Tornberg, a priest in Överkalix in northern Sweden who represented the NSAP’s standpoint on theological issues, claimed that racial preservation meant fulfilling a divine message.<sup>108</sup> In several articles in *Nationen*, one of which was published as a pamphlet and advertised as recommended reading in *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten*,<sup>109</sup> the pseudonym Ansgar stated that Jesus and Adolf Hitler represented an “eternal Aryan religion” and that national socialism was an expression of “eternal Christianity.” This implied, according to Ansgar, that Hitler was to be considered as “the Luther of the new Aryan Reformation.”<sup>110</sup> Other party members drew more heavily on Norse mythology by affirming that depictions of the gods’ struggles against the giants in the Edda represented a fight between the forces of light and darkness and that an element hidden in the Nordic racial soul was that Nordic man was inherently a “hero of the race.”<sup>111</sup> In other cases, when confessional and mythological aspects were omitted, some party members stressed that the racial soul was the primary reason why the Nordic people was racially superior.<sup>112</sup>

This indicates that the NSAP considered national socialism as a holistic worldview that consummated a supreme Nordic way of being as imagined. Instances of this worldview were claimed to have appeared throughout history, whether fictionally or otherwise, in Norse mythology, in Meister Eckhart’s “Germanic” Christianity, and in Luther’s teachings. Accordingly, the party stressed that national socialism had perfected this worldview and that it was possible to complete racial regeneration only if the Nordic race—and hence, the Swedish people—was able to reconnect with its alleged internal and superior racial soul. Of course, the idea of racial regeneration as a means to accomplish a national socialist order did not differ from other interwar national socialist movements inside and outside Europe.<sup>113</sup> The NSAP did, however, include their racial conceptions of the north into a specific national project: regenerating the Nordic race was believed to be the overall venue through which Swedish society would turn into a national socialist state.

### *Concluding reflections*

In this article, I have analysed how national socialists in interwar Sweden construed and utilised ideas of a “Nordic spirit” and “race psychology” in relation to their racial conceptions of the north. I have outlined these ideas in three parts: first, by briefly depicting the emergence of different race theories with an emphasis on Nordicism; second, by highlighting how the Manhem Society construed ideas of a “Nordic spirit”; and, third, by displaying how the NSAP elaborated on issues relating to “race psychology.”

Even though I have focused solely on two organisations—which leaves out the remaining two major interwar Swedish national socialist political parties, the SNSP and the National Socialist Bloc (*Nationalsocialistiska Blocket*)—I suggest that this analysis has two interrelated outcomes.

106

Per Dahlberg, “Angreppen mot rastanken,” *Nationell Socialism* 4, no. 3 (March 1938): 75–76.

107

Dahlberg, “Angreppen mot rastanken,” 76.

108

G. Ossian Tornberg, “Kristendomen och rasfrågan,” *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 5 (May 1935): 134–39.

109

Ad in *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 1, no. 10 (March 1933): 2.

110

Ansgar, “Kristus var ej jude,” *Nationen* 9, no. 2 (February 1933): 4–5. See also Ansgar, “Judendomens kamp mot kristendomen,” *Nationen* 9, no. 4 (April 1933): 4; Ansgar, “Nordisk-kristen religion,” *Nationen* 10, no. 3 (March 1934): 4–6. Similar ideas were proclaimed by the pseudonym Arman, according to whom Christianity is a primordial Aryan religion that emerged in the Nordics in the soul of Nordic-Aryan man. Arman, *Kristendomen: den eviga urariska religionen* (Stockholm: Nationen, 1934), 4.

111

Bertil Brisman, “Dagens fråga,” *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 11 (November 1935): 321–23; Torkel Leifsson, “Nordiska gestalter i hjältesång och ättesaga,” *Nationell Socialism* 3, no. 5 (May 1937): 146–52.

112

See, e.g., “Rasen inför ödestimman,” 1–2.

113

This literature is impossible to list in its entirety. For brief discussions on the relationship between fascism/national socialism, racial regeneration, and national revival, see, e.g., Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), 32–43, 48; Kevin Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 111–20; Nathaniel Kunkeler, “The Evolution of Swedish Fascism: Self-Identification and Ideology in Interwar Sweden,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 50, no. 4–5 (November 2016): 378–97.

Justine Bakker, "Race and (the Study of) Esotericism," in *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*, ed. Egil Asprem and Julian Strube (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 147–67.

Cf. K. E. Shropshire, "The Radical Right in the Cultic Milieu," *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*, accessed August 21, 2020, <https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2020/08/21/the-radical-right-in-the-cultic-milieu/>.

Cf. Strube, "Nazism," 344–45.

First, that national socialists in interwar Sweden perceived the racialised imagery of "the north" rather differently, even though both the Manhem Society and the NSAP drew on the Nordacist tradition to stress that the Nordic race, and thereby the Swedish people, were supreme in relation to other imagined races. Whereas the Manhem Society's racial conceptions of the north were largely based on ideas of a "Nordic spirit" comprising an alternative trinitarian belief that was believed to be hidden but present in the Swedish people's blood and soil, the NSAP elaborated on how the internal (soul) related to the external (body) by incorporating ideas which Bengt Olov Henning referred to as "race psychology." This helped pave the way for the NSAP to consider national socialism as an "eternal world-view" allegedly based on a Nordic racial idea as a "physical-psychological totality." In light of this, it is insufficient to suggest that national socialists have subscribed wholeheartedly to ideas of race biology. Maintaining the internal racial soul was, in a national socialist view, at least equally important as the physical body in the pursuit of racial regeneration.

The second outcome of this analysis relates to the issue of the alleged esoteric underpinnings of national socialism and, by extension, the potential confluences of nationalism and esotericism. As stressed by Justine Bakker, race matters in and for esotericism and its study.<sup>114</sup> This is an obvious but important insight to be able to contextualise the origins of national socialism—inside and outside Germany—and to give sense to esoteric (radical) nationalist thought in the interwar period, without repeating sensationalist post-1945 narratives on the "Nazi Occult."<sup>115</sup> Accordingly, by building on Bakker's argument, nationalism also matters in and for esotericism and its study. This implies that in order to grasp relations between nationalist and esoteric thought in the interwar period, scholars should also take the contested terrain of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century race thinking into consideration. Thus, I would not propose that the Manhem Society and the NSAP construed occult racial doctrines to stake out a specifically esoteric position within Swedish society, nor that their ideas of racial regeneration represented a case of "esoteric fascism" in the Nordic countries. Rather, their racial conceptions of the north were part of navigating the contested terrain of what was then modern race thinking in order to determine alleged racial foundations of a Nordic sense of being. While these conceptions at times included instances of (racialised) esoteric thought, such as the Manhem Society's references to Ariosophists and World Ice Theory, they should not be overemphasised as forms of esoteric fascism.

However, studying relations between esoteric and fascist/national socialist thought in an interwar Scandinavian context is not a dead end and deserves more scholarly attention. A premise for undertaking such an endeavour is to take various national and transnational circumstances into consideration—e.g., debates on race—by focusing on careful historical contextualisation and by avoiding popular oversimplification.<sup>116</sup> By doing so, it is possible to understand both the complex yet somewhat marginal interwar confluences of esoteric and national socialist thought and that national socialists who tended to be drawn to esoteric thought were so as an attempt, amongst other possible venues, to make sense of the world.

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